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Manipulation Of Self-image: A Case Study Of Amrita Pritam's

Rasidi Ticket

Manmeet Singh, PhD scholar, Centre for French and Francophone Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

Abstract : This study focusses on manipulation of self-image in an autobiography as it undergoes the process of translation. It aims to study how the translator's perspective has a bearing upon the narration of the autobiographer's life.

Index terms : Autobiography, translation, manipulation, self-image.

The autobiographical enterprise leads to great inaccuracies since one often sins by omission, voluntarily or not.¹

-Patrick Modiano

According to this quote, any autobiographical creation is hardly free of inaccuracies. These inaccuracies are largely attributable to reasons such as memory, the author's view of himself and his surroundings. Even if an autobiographical work claims to be the most objective and accurate, the reader may find inaccuracies or omissions made consciously or unconsciously by the author. This issue becomes even more significant when dealing with the question of translating an autobiography, as the accuracy of the translation will always depend on the translator's interpretation. The translator's intervention can easily lead to certain changes that an uninformed reader would not notice. Thus, the question of the translation of autobiographies is one that intrigues researchers as well as theorists.

As far as the translation of Amrita Pritam's autobiography is concerned, it is essential to point out that she was one of the first writers to bring the female voice into literary and social circles. She was also one of the first to raise her voice against the patriarchal domination imposed on women in society. It was to combat this obscuration that she made the deliberate choice to emphasise the 'I' in her writings, especially in her autobiography.

¹ Interview Gallimard - October 2014

However, when this "I" undergoes the translation process, it is subject to the translator's gaze, who may not be able to grasp the value of this "I" in the text to be translated. This risk for the translator of not being able to project himself into the author's intimacy becomes even more likely when it comes to texts from the South translated by translators from the North. This is the case of the translation of Amrita Pritam's autobiography in which the self-image embodied by the "I" is diluted or even manipulated due to the translator's choices..

Analysis of the self-image

In the same way, our reading of *Rasidi ticket* in Punjabi allowed us to pick out certain personality traits scattered throughout the story. At the end of our reading, we could notice that the author is inclined to evoke an image that is marked by the emotions she has gone through. So the author presents herself as a person:

- i. Alone
- ii. Doubtful
- iii. Afraid
- iv. Frankness or disinvolution

Our analysis will therefore consist of a precise survey of the sentences depicting the main character, putting them into context and then studying the translation of these sentences to get a closer look at the representation of the main character in the original and in the translation.

i. Solitude

The following sentences illustrate moments of loneliness experienced by the main character.

Example 1 : ਆਲੇ ਦੁਆਲੇ ਦੇ ਚੰਗੇ ਮਾੜੇ ਅਸਰਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਬਚਾਣ ਲਈ ਬਾਪ ਨੂੰ ਇਸੇ ਵਿਚ ਹਿਫਾਜ਼ਤ ਜਾਪੀ ਸੀ, ਕਿ ਮੇਰਾ ਕੋਈ ਵਾਕਫ਼ ਨਾ ਹੋਵੇ | ਨਾ ਸਕੂਲ ਦੀ ਕੋਈ ਕੜੀ, ਨਾ ਗਵਾਂਢ ਦਾ ਕੋਈ ਲੜਕਾ | ਸੋਲ੍ਹਵਾਂ ਵਰ੍ਹਾ ਵੀ ਇਸੇ ਗਿਣਤੀ ਵਿਚ ਸ਼ਾਮਿਲ ਸੀ (...)²

Literal translation: To protect me from any bad influence my father decided that I should not have any familiarity with anyone. Not a friend at school, not a friend in the neighbourhood. My sixteenth year fell into the same category.

Traduction by Gill : Père voulait me protéger des influences extérieures. Je ne devais avoir de familiarité avec personne³. (Gill's translation: Father wanted to protect me from outside influences. I was not to have familiarity with anyone.)

² Amrita PRITAM. *Rasidi Ticket*, New Delhi, Kitab Ghar, 1976, p. 17, l. 4-6.

In these sentences quoted above, the author emphasises the fact that her childhood as well as her adolescence were devoid of friends. While in the original sentence the author makes it clear that she had no friends either as a child or later in her teenage life, the translated sentence hardly reflects this precision. This detail is removed in the translated text.

Example 2 : ਕਲਪਨਾ ਦੀ ਇਹ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਸਿਰਫ ਉਹਦੀ ਹੁੰਦੀ ਹੈ ਜੋ ਇਹਨੂੰ ਸਿਰਜਦਾ ਤੇ ਜਿਥੇ ਇਹਨੂੰ ਸਿਰਜਨ ਵਾਲਾ ਰੱਬ ਵੀ ਇੱਕਲਾ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ।⁴

Literal translation: his world of the imagination belongs only to those who create it, and it is where even God, the creator of this world, is alone.

Gill's translation : Le monde de l'imaginaire n'appartient qu'à ceux qui le créent⁵. (The world of the imagination belongs only to those who create it.)

These sentences are from the excerpt entitled ਕਲਪਨਾ ਦਾ ਜਾਦੂ (kəlpəna dā jāḍū) translated as The Magic of Imagination which is about Amrita Pritam's experiences that she lived in her imagination. She says: I lived mostly in imagination . Thus, it was through this imagination that she created a world of her own where she felt alone. The underlined phrases in the original and in the literal translation attest to our interpretation. This 'creator God' that she evokes is none other than herself. We can therefore notice again that the sentence showing the loneliness of the character has been deleted in the translation.

ii. Doubt

The following example is taken from the part of the text dealing with the childhood of Amrita Pritam. It demonstrates the author's relationship with her father following the death of her mother.

Example 1 : ਮੇਹ ਤੇ ਵੈਰਾਗ ਦੇਵੇਂ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਇਕ ਦੂਜੀ ਤੋਂ ਮੁਖਾਲਫ਼ ਦਿਸ਼ਾ ਵਲ ਖਿੱਚਦੇ | ਕਈ ਪਲ ਅਜਿਹੇ ਵੀ ਆਉਂਦੇ - ਮੈਂ ਵਿਲਕ ਪੈਂਦੀ | ਪਤਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ ਲਗਦਾ ਮੈਂ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਮਨਜ਼ੂਰ ਸਾਂ ਕਿ ਨਾ ਮਨਜ਼ੂਰ | ਆਪਣੀ ਹੋਂਦ-ਇਕੋ ਸਮੇਂ ਚਾਹੀ ਤੇ ਅਣ ਚਾਹੀ ਲਗਦੀ⁶ |

Literal translation: Love (for me) and renunciation were pulling him in opposite directions. There were certain moments when I was not comfortable. I didn't know if my father accepted me or not. My existence felt both wanted and unwanted

Gill's translation : Il était déchiré entre son amour pour moi et son désir de retraite complète. Je me sentais tour à tour aimée et rejetée⁷. (He was torn between his love for me and his desire for complete retirement. I felt alternately loved and rejected.)

³ Amrita PRITAM (1976), *Le timbre fiscal* (Translated by Danielle Gill), Paris, Des Femmes, 1989, p. 26, l. 4-6.

⁴ Amrita PRITAM, op. cit., p. 27, l. 30-31.

⁵ Amrita PRITAM (1976), *Le timbre fiscal* (Translated by Danielle Gill), Paris, Des Femmes, 1989, p. 194, l. 16-17.

⁶ Amrita PRITAM, op. cit., p. 11, l. 23-26.

We can notice that the underlined sentence allows to insist on the nature of the relationship that the author had with her father. This sentence, which reveals confusion about her relationship with her father, is absent from the translation. In doing so, the translator consciously or unconsciously modifies the reader's image of the author.

iii. Fear

In the given context, fear refers in particular to the fear of society, the fear of being judged by it when one tries to transgress its established values. The following sentence illustrates this, Amrita Pritam feels a certain fear when, during her pregnancy, she wants to think of Sahir so that her child looks like her. Since Sahir was not her husband, the nature of her relationship with him may be the cause of this feeling of fear.

Example 1 : ... ਤੇ ਮੇਰੀ ਕਲਪਨਾ ਨੇ ਜਿਵੇਂ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਤੋਂ ਉਹਲੇ ਹੋ ਕੇ ਹੌਲੀ ਜਹੀ ਮੇਰੇ ਕੰਨਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਆਖਿਆ - ਜੇ ਮੈਂ ਸਾਹਿਰ ਦਾ ਮੂੰਹ ਹਰ ਵੇਲੇ ਚਿਤਵਾਂ, ਤਾਂ ਮੇਰੇ ਬੱਚੇ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਕਲ ਉਹਦੇ ਨਾਲ ਮਿਲ ਜਾਏਗੀ ...⁸

Literal translation: ...and as if my imagination, away from the world's gaze, said softly in my ear - if I think of Sahir all the time, my son will look like him.

Gill's translation : Mon imagination m'emportait hors du monde qui m'entourait et je me disais : « Si tu gardes présent à ton esprit le visage de Sahir, ton enfant aura les traits de Sahir. »⁹ (My imagination took me out of the world around me and I said to myself, "If you keep Sahir's face in your mind, your child will have Sahir's features.)

It is interesting to note that the translation of the underlined sentence is a misunderstanding. The literal translation allows us to see that in this excerpt it is not a question of the imagination taking over the author but of the one who, as if afraid of the world around her, quietly whispers to the author and asks her to keep the face of her beloved Sahir in mind.

iv. Disinvolence

In this part of the analysis, we will be interested in findings or statements of the author that may seem too direct. The idea will be to take into account sentences that show a casual and unrestrained character of the author. The first example is this:

Example 1 : ਮੇਰੀ ਮਾਂ ਮਰ ਗਈ ਸੀ (...)¹⁰

Literal translation: My mother was dead.

⁷ Amrita PRITAM (1976), *Le timbre fiscal* (Translated by Danielle Gill), Des Femmes, Paris, 1989, p.15, l. 18-20.

⁸ Amrita PRITAM, op. cit., p. 25, l. 25-27.

⁹ Amrita PRITAM (1976), *Le timbre fiscal* (Translated by Danielle Gill), Des Femmes, Paris, 1989, p.191, l. 14-16.

¹⁰ Amrita PRITAM, op. cit., p. 14, ligne 16.

Gill's translation : Elle était étendue en toute sérénité. Soudain je sus que c'était la fin.¹¹ (She was lying in peace. Suddenly I knew that this was the end.)

We can easily observe that the evocation of the disappearance of the main character's mother is done in completely opposite ways in the original and in the translation. Where in the original text, we see that the author allows herself to speak about a reality as delicate and sensitive as the death of her mother in a direct, raw, and harsh way, we see in the translation an effort of euphemism trying to attenuate the shock caused by this reality. Another example to validate this is when she talks about Sahir and her regret that he was less beautiful than Amrita.

Example 2 : ਸਾਹਿਰ ਨੂੰ ਜ਼ਿੰਦਗੀ ਦਾ ਸਭ ਤੋਂ ਵੱਡਾ ਇਕ ਰੋਸ ਹੈ, ਕਿ ਉਹ ਮੋਹਣਾ ਨਹੀਂ (...)

Literal translation : Sahir's greatest sadness is the fact that he is not beautiful.

Gill's translation : Absent

This is another example of the author saying out loud what she thinks in all its crudeness without any restraint and in a casual manner. This interpretation is further reinforced when we note that this sentence is not even followed by another sentence that could possibly mitigate the author's outspokenness. Since the translator chooses to remove this part, we can deduce that the translator has made an effort to tone things down by removing anything that might seem too shocking or even direct to the reader.

From the examples given above, we can establish that the translator often resorts to the process of deletion when translating. This deletion of elements may be a conscious or unconscious choice, but whatever the case, it results in a manipulation of the image of the author conveyed in the original text, i.e., the portrait of the author in the original text, of a lonely, powerless, victimized and flippant woman, is not manifested in the translation. It is therefore not wrong to say that the translator's choice does not coincide with the author's intentions.

Having analysed the examples of self-representation, let us move on to the analysis of cultural elements which are very often perceived as more or less untranslatable. It will be interesting to note whether their translation has an impact on the meaning transferred to the target text.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that in Rasidi ticket the author does not only narrate experiences from her life but also tries to focus on herself.

We can see that the author places herself at the centre of her autobiographical universe, onto which the most significant moments of the narrative are projected, with an effort to dramatise the narrative in

¹¹ Amrita PRITAM (1976), *Le timbre fiscal* (Translated by Danielle Gill), Des Femmes, Paris, 1989, p. 23, l. 2-3.

order to give a complex picture of the author's life; a dramatising effect to highlight the smallest details of the text, which in a way seeks to amplify and accentuate the emotions she has experienced and her response to them.

As for the translation of this autobiographical work, the author remains the central point in the autobiographical universe but takes on less value in comparison with the original. She thus gives way to other elements of the story, which allows the reader to distribute his attention more or less evenly.

At this point, the question arises: "What is the reason for these differences? One plausible answer may be the cultural gap between the North and the South, which makes it difficult to understand the identity issues. In addition, the hierarchical relationship between the two poles influences the perception of subjects from the South, which results in a less accurate performance of the latter in translation.

References

Amrita PRITAM. *Rasidi Ticket*, New Delhi, Kitab Ghar, 1976

Amrita PRITAM (1976), *Le timbre fiscal* (Translated by Danielle Gill), Des Femmes, Paris, 1989

