

SANSKRIT IN TRANSLATION

Course Code: M23SN06DE

Discipline Specific Elective Course
Postgraduate Programme in
Sanskrit Language and Literature
Self Learning Material



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Sanskrit in Translation

Course Code: M23SN06DE

Semester- IV

Discipline Specific Elective Courses
Postgraduate Programme in Sanskrit
Self Learning Material
(Model Question Paper Sets)



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Sanskrit in Translation

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Postgraduate Programme in

Sanskrit

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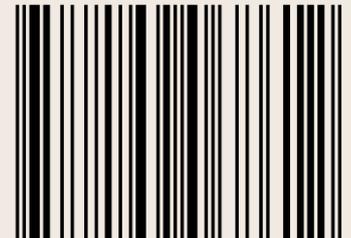


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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have

firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed "blended format," a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The postgraduate programme in Sanskrit offers a special mix of language and literature studies. While the programme covers various aspects of Sanskrit literature and provides the necessary credits, its main goal is to help learners better understand how different types of literature connect with society. We have also made sure to introduce learners to the newest developments in Sanskrit literature. This programme operates on this premise, and the Self Learning Material is designed to reflect this balanced approach.

Rest assured, the university's student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-10-2025

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BLOCK-01

Translation - general perspective

Block Content

Unit 1: A brief history of translation

Unit 2: Types of translation - word for word translation - literal translation - free translation - elaborate translation - abridged translation - machine translation

Unit 3: Translation studies as an emerging discipline Problems of equivalence and translatability- source language and target language

Unit 4: Problems of equivalence and translatability - source language and target language





A brief history of translation

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ❖ Understand the evolution of translation from ancient to modern times.
- ❖ Analyse the Indian translation tradition, highlighting its pluralistic and organic nature.
- ❖ Explain key theoretical debates, such as literal vs. free translation, equivalence, and the translator's competence.
- ❖ Assess the contemporary relevance of translation in globalization, media, technology, and intercultural communication.
- ❖ Critically evaluate definitions and terminologies used in translation studies from both Western and Indian perspectives.

Background

The Biblical account of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) serves as a compelling narrative for the origin of linguistic diversity in human history.

“Now the whole earth had one language and the same words... and they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.’ And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the LORD said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they all have one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.’ So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore, its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth.”

The core implication of this myth is the perceived danger that linguistic unity and technological prowess could enable humanity to rival the divine. While legendary, this narrative of linguistic fragmentation provides the conceptual basis for the emergence of the need for translation. As long as one language prevailed, seamless communication existed. The moment linguistic diversity began, translation became the essential medium for understanding other cultures and facilitating communication, thereby establishing its enduring significance and relevance.



Keywords

Translation Studies, Historiography of Translation, Equivalence, Translator's Competence, House of Wisdom, Abbasid Translation Movement, Comparative Philology, Septuagint, Vulgate, Vernacular Renaissance, Inters miotic Translation

Discussion

A Brief History of Translation

1. The Historiographical Imperative and Scope

- ◆ Translation history is deeply linked with the evolution of language, culture, and society

History is not a simple chronicle of the past but an exploration of inter-related and inclusive phenomena that shape the present. A historical study is intrinsically composite, meaning the history of translation is inseparable from the history of languages, cultures, and the societies that engage in it. The primary function of translation history is to document what is translated, how it is translated, and the subsequent contribution to linguistic and literary development. This area of research is dynamically emerging within Translation Studies, focusing on the diverse traditions, such as those in India, that have profoundly influenced modern linguistic and literary landscapes.

2. The Ancient Origins and Conceptual Foundations

- ◆ Translation began with early human communication needs, evolving from trade and diplomacy

Translation and interpretation are not modern inventions; they have existed for a very long time, possibly coeval with human language itself. These communicative pursuits have flourished across diverse cultures, demonstrating the human need to build a “bridge of mutual cooperation” - a concept often framed against the mythological fragmentation of the Tower of Babel. As humanity dispersed and languages evolved, the necessity for communication arose, initially driven by commercial and political interactions. It is plausible that translation first developed in border regions, with merchants being the earliest practitioners. This necessity rapidly expanded beyond trade to encompass the exchange of ideas concerning politics, culture, and the arts, establishing translation as an indispensable tool for mutual understanding across both geographical and temporal divides.

- ◆ The history of translation is as ancient and continuous as language itself

A Timeline of Translation History

The history of translation is a profound and enduring subject, as long as the history of language itself. While the functional need for translation emerged with linguistic diversity, some scholars, like Theodore Savory, believe that the history of translation is as extensive as the history of the original text.



1. Early Evidence and Ancient Systems (c. 3000 BCE – 100 BCE)

- ◆ Ancient multilingual records reveal translation's early role in administration, diplomacy, and cultural exchange

The earliest verifiable evidence underscores the necessity of translation in administration and diplomacy. The oldest confirmed multilingual text is not the Rosetta Stone, but the Ebla Tablets (c. 2500 BCE) discovered in Syria, which included Sumerian- Elbaite word lists, demonstrating early bilingual efforts. There are accounts, often unverified but suggestive, of Assyrian and Babylonian emperors (c. 3000 BCE) issuing translated decrees for non-Assyrian-speaking subjects, highlighting the political necessity of interpreting cuneiform. A more concrete example comes from ancient literature: the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh (c. 2100 BCE) was demonstrably translated and adapted into several ancient Near Eastern languages, including Akkadian and Hittite, indicating early, fluid literary transfer. The Rosetta Stone (196 BCE) remains a powerful symbol of translation, featuring the same decree inscribed in three scripts (Hieroglyphic, Demotic, and Greek), directly enabling the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs in 1822 by Jean-François Champollion.

2. The Bible and the Rise of Western Theory (c. 3rd Century BCE – 1500 CE)

- ◆ The translation of the Bible established religious translation practices and profoundly shaped Western languages and culture.

The systematic history of translation arguably formalises with the Bible, the world's most translated book. The earliest significant translation project was the Septuagint (LXX), initiated in the 3rd century BCE in Alexandria, where the original Old Testament (written primarily in Hebrew) was translated into Koine Greek because Hebrew had become largely inaccessible to the Jewish population of the Diaspora. This project set the precedent for religious translation. Later, St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate (completed c. 405 CE) became the standard for the Catholic Church for over a millennium. During the Reformation, translators like John Wycliffe (English, late 14th century) and William Tyndale (English, early 16th century) translated the Bible into the vernacular, accelerating its spread and dramatically impacting the standardisation of national languages. Tyndale's New Testament (1525) alone is estimated to have contributed over 80% of the vocabulary found in the later King James Bible.

- ◆ Romans embraced translation, converting Greek literature into Latin, establishing Cicero's sense-for-sense method versus literal translation.

Classical and Literary Transfer

While the ancient Greeks initially viewed translation unfavourably, seeing it as a sign of creative poverty, the Romans actively engaged in it. Livy and Plautus translated Greek comedies, and Homer's epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey, were actively translated from Greek to Latin, notably by Livius Andronicus (c. 284–204 BCE). This period firmly established the sense-for-sense (or free) methodology cham-



pioneered by Cicero (1st century BCE), contrasting with the rigid word-for-word (or literal) approach, a dichotomy that remains central to translation theory today.

1. The Arab Contribution and the Golden Age (8th – 10th Centuries CE)

The Arabs were perhaps the most significant early proponents of comprehensive, state-sponsored translation. This period, known as the Abbasid Translation Movement (or the Golden Age of Islam), saw the systematic dissemination of classical knowledge. The intellectual hub was the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah) in Baghdad (established 9th century). Under the patronage of Caliph Al-Ma'mūn, scholars rapidly translated philosophical and scientific works of Greek and Indian cultures into Arabic. Key Greek works by Plato, Aristotle, Euclid's Elements, and Galen were preserved. From India, vital texts on arithmetic (facilitating the transfer of the Hindu-Arabic numeral system), medicine (like the Sushruta Samhita and Charaka Samhita), and logic/fables (like the Pañcatantra translated as Kalīlah wa Dimnah by Ibn al-Muqaffa' in the 8th century) were introduced. These Arabic translations were crucial; they later served as the primary source material when European scholars began their own translation efforts during the late Middle Ages.

- ◆ Abbasid scholars translated Greek and Indian texts into Arabic at the House of Wisdom

2. The European Renaissance and Modern Thought (15th – 18th Centuries)

The European Renaissance provided the next major impetus, catalysing a cultural revival and the definitive rise of national languages. Driven by the desire to absorb classical and new knowledge in their own tongues, universities like Paris and Oxford initiated major efforts to translate global knowledge. This mass wave of translation was not just academic; it was a social force, helping to shape linguistic identities. A pivotal moment for global intellectual discourse came with Sir William Jones (1786), whose observations on the structural similarities between Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin fundamentally established the discipline of comparative philology. Jones's insights not only invigorated European thought but transformed the understanding of Indo-European linguistic history, underscoring how translation in its broadest sense continually reshapes both material life and intellectual discourse.

- ◆ Translation fueled cultural revival, shaped national languages, and advanced comparative philology

The entirety of humanity's material and spiritual achievements is inextricably linked to the influence of translation. It is the exchange of languages and their products that has continually reshaped the global order, culminating in the vision of a 'World Literature' (Goethe's concept, coined in 1827). Despite its profound challenges, translation remains one of the most vital and universally esteemed human activities.



3. Defining Translation: Etymology and Conceptual Complexity

Attempts to define translation often struggle with being either too broad or too narrow, reflecting the fact that it is primarily a practical activity that spans numerous disciplines from linguistics and literature to law and science. The English term ‘translation’ is etymologically derived from the Latin *trānslātum* (from *trāns-* ‘across’ + *lātum* ‘to bear’), literally meaning “to carry across ideas.” This core concept implies three processes: linguistic transference (*Bhāṣāntaraṇam*), paraphrasing (*Parāvartanam*), and interpretation (*Vyākhyānam*). Early scholars, such as Samuel Johnson, captured this essential act as “To change into another language, retaining the sense.” However, acknowledging the impossibility of perfect equivalence, A.H. Smith modified this to “retaining the sense as far as possible,” a practical qualification that underpins most modern theoretical approaches. The diverse characterisations of translation as an Art (Theodore Savory), a Craft (Eric Jacobsen), or a Science (Eugene Nida) reflect its multifaceted nature.

- ◆ Translation is a practical, multifaceted activity involving linguistic transfer, paraphrasing, and interpretation

4. The Western Tradition: From Cicero to the Enlightenment

The Western history of translation begins with the translation of religious and philosophical texts, establishing the enduring debate between literalism and free rendering. Cicero (1st century BCE) is famously cited for establishing the distinction between word-for-word (literal) and sense-for-sense (free) translation when translating Greek orations into Latin, declaring that he rendered not as a *verbātīm interpres* (word-for-word translator) but as an orator. The pivotal moment arrived with St. Jerome (4th century CE), whose Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible set the standard for centuries. Jerome adopted Cicero’s distinction, applying the sense-for-sense approach to all texts except for the Holy Scriptures, where he cautioned against altering the mystery of the text. The Renaissance and the Reformation saw a renewed focus on translation, driven by nationalism and the rise of vernacular languages. Figures like Martin Luther (16th century), who translated the Bible into German, asserted the need to translate in a way that spoke to the common people, prioritising clarity and natural flow over strict fidelity to the source syntax.

- ◆ Translation in the West evolved from religious and philosophical texts

5. The Eastern Tradition: China, the Arab World, and India

In the East, major translation efforts were driven by religious and scientific exchange. In China, the translation of Buddhist sutras from Sanskrit and other Indic languages into Chinese, led by figures like Kumārajīva (4th century CE), created a vast body of translation the-



- ◆ Translation in the East focused on religious and scientific texts

ory focused on semantic and cultural adaptation. Simultaneously, the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad (8th-10th centuries) initiated the monumental “Translation Movement.” Here, the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Ḥikmah) served as a central institution where Greek philosophical (e.g., Aristotle, Plato) and scientific texts were translated into Arabic. This movement was crucial for preserving classical knowledge and was instrumental in shaping the European Renaissance, as these Arabic translations later filtered into Latin.

6. The Indian Translation Tradition: Plurality and Unconscious Activity

The history of translation in India is especially complex due to its undebatable linguistic diversity and literary richness. Translation has been pivotal in sustaining this richness, yet the documentation of its critical history is sparse. This is partly because translation often functioned as an “almost unconscious activity,” happening effortlessly and without the theoretical fuss seen in the West. Consequently, key concepts like the finality of the ‘original text’ or the role of ‘cultural transference’ were not rigidly problematised.

- ◆ Translation in India was diverse and largely unconscious

Religious texts translated into Sanskrit and regional vernaculars.

7. Early and Medieval Indian Activity

- ◆ Sanskrit and Indic Languages: The earliest translations involved the movement of religious texts. The efforts of Chinese pilgrims to translate Indian Buddhist texts is one marker. More importantly, Pāli and Prākṛit Buddhist texts were often Sanskritised.
- ◆ The Vernacular Renaissance: The Medieval Period saw an explosion of translation into regional vernaculars. Popular Sanskrit works, including the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, and the Purāṇas, were rendered, often as free adaptations or bhāvānuvādas (sense-for-sense translations), giving rise to foundational works of regional literature. This internal translation created a profound cultural synthesis.

8. Indigenous Insights for Contemporary Theory

Despite the lack of explicit, formal treatises, India offers potent indigenous insights for modern translation studies. This requires looking beyond conventional critical texts to philosophical and aesthetic traditions:

- ◆ Indian philosophical and aesthetic traditions offer guidance for translation; multiple interpretations are valid

- ◆ Mîmāṃsā: This interpretive tradition, primarily focussed on Vedic exegesis, offers systematic rules for interpretation (vyākhyā) that can inform the standards of critical translation.
- ◆ Jaina Anekāntavāda: This concept of “non-one-sidedness” asserts that reality can never be grasped in its totality. Applying this to translation suggests that any single translation is merely



one of many possible true renderings of an elusive original, philosophically legitimising the existence of multiple versions of a single text.

- ◆ Aesthetic Adaptation: Examining how the same myths and legends were ‘translated’ into different art forms (literature, Kathakali, temple sculpture) reveals the shared principles of intersemiotic transfer within the culture.

- ◆ Today, translation is crucial for global communication, knowledge exchange, and technological imperatives.

The present-day relevance of translation is unparalleled, driven by global connectivity. The material conditions for global cooperation are highly developed, making the rapid and indiscriminate dissemination of knowledge a cultural reality. Translation is now not just an academic discipline but a critical, urgent, and technological imperative.

The Translator’s Competence

- ◆ Beyond language skills, a translator needs cultural, emotional, and contextual understanding

An effective translator requires more than mere linguistic proficiency in the SL and TL. They must also possess the sensibility (bhāvukatvam) to grasp the intrinsic essence of the source text, including its culture, context, and core sentiment. A translator must, therefore, be a discerning reader (sahṛdayan). A translation executed with this cultural and emotional depth is more likely to be faithful to the original and may even be received as an original work in the TL. This fidelity is the essence of excellent translation.

The Challenge of Equivalence

- ◆ Translation struggles with finding exact equivalents due to linguistic and cultural differences

Every language possesses a unique style, and the people who speak it share a distinct cultural background. Finding equivalent words and idioms in the TL for those in the SL can be challenging, often requiring extensive searching, and sometimes resulting in only an approximation.

For example, a regional agricultural term like ‘Thiruvathira Njārruvēla’ (a specific period for paddy cultivation in Kerala) may not have an exact equivalent in the language or culture of a non-agricultural society. The translator is forced to select the closest approximate term. This illustrates the persistent problem in translation concerning SL and TL cultural specificity.

- ◆ Semantic and stylistic fidelity requires approximations while preserving the target language idiomatic integrity.

Similarly, stylistic elements pose challenges. The English proverb “Unity is strength” is commonly translated into Sanskritised Malayalam as “Aikyamatyam mahābalaṃ” (Unity is great strength). However, a more idiomatically appropriate translation in colloquial Malayalam would be the phrase “Orumayunḍenkil ulakkamelum kiḍakkām” (If there is unity, one can sleep even on a pestle).



Language is constrained by its own characteristic style and conceptual structure. Therefore, the search for semantic equivalence during the SL study must operate within the idiomatic integrity of the TL. In this context, J.C. Catford defined translation as: “The replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL).”

The core problem of the translation process, therefore, is finding the equivalent in the target text. As the esteemed Malayalam scholar N. V. Krishna Warriar explained, translation is the endeavour to express ideas articulated in the SL in the TL, with the least possible deviation and in a manner congruent with the expressiveness of the TL style. The aspiration is for the meaning and the respective language styles to achieve the greatest possible similarity.

Historical Development of Translation

- ◆ Translation likely began in border regions for practical communication and has expanded over time

It is plausible that translation first developed in border regions inhabited by communities speaking different languages, where bilateral linguistic competence would have been a requisite. Historically, merchants were likely the earliest practitioners of translation. As trade expanded, so did the need to exchange ideas on broader humanistic concerns, including politics, culture, and the arts. The scope of translation widened to transcend the limitations of diverse languages and scripts, serving as an indispensable tool for mutual understanding across both time and space.

In the contemporary era, with the world having effectively ‘shrunk’ into a global village, the field of translation has undergone revolutionary changes. While translation has been practised across various languages since ancient times, and its key elements have been discussed incidentally, its development as an independent academic discipline is a relatively modern phenomenon.

Contemporary Relevance

- ◆ Translation is crucial for global communication, knowledge dissemination, and technology-driven

Modern society has bestowed an unprecedented level of importance upon translation. The material conditions for global cooperation are highly developed, making geographical distance a negligible barrier to communication. Knowledge and information dissemination across the globe is now rapid and indiscriminate, rendering distinctions such as ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ increasingly irrelevant. Major global languages, notably English, play a crucial role as media for the distribution of knowledge. For speakers of other languages, translating foreign ideas not just from English but from any source into their mother tongues has become a cultural imperative.



Translation is now not merely necessary, but it often demands immediate availability due to its critical role in:

- ◆ Communication between heads of state.
- ◆ International conferences.
- ◆ Parliamentary proceedings in multilingual countries.
- ◆ Interactions within information technology and new media.
- ◆ Rapid dissemination of information through mass media, where the obligation to instantly translate and convey facts is paramount.

This urgency underscores the indispensable significance of modern translation technologies, such as computer-assisted translation.

- ◆ Translation is hard to define precisely due to its practical multifaceted nature

Defining Translation: Concepts and Terminology

Attempts to define translation have historically proven difficult, often resulting in definitions that are either too broad (over-extension) or too narrow (under-extension). This inadequacy stems from translation being more a practical activity than a purely theoretical construct.

Terminology

The dictionary definition of translation typically refers to the act of expressing the meaning of what has been said or written in one language in another. In the Indian context, synonyms include:

- ◆ Translation means expressing meaning from one language to another in India

- ◆ Tārjuma/Tarjuma (from Arabic)
- ◆ Paribhāṣa, Vivartanam, Bhāṣāntaraṇam (from Sanskrit)
- ◆ Moḷimāṛram (considered a pure Dravidian term)

In modern usage, Vivartanam and the English term Translation are the most common. Etymologically, ‘translation’ is derived from the French word translation and ultimately from the Latin trānslātum (from trāns- ‘across’ + lātum ‘to bear’), meaning “to carry across ideas.”

- ◆ Translation involves expressing meaning in another language, form, or special sense

The Oxford Dictionary defines Translation as “the process or result of changing from one language to another; a text that has been changed from one language to another.” The core concepts embedded in the term Translation are:

- ◆ Expression in another language (Language Change/Interlingual)
- ◆ Expression in another form (Transformation/Paraphrase)
- ◆ Expression of a special meaning (Interpretation/Exegesis)



This implies that translation involves three processes: linguistic transference (Bhāṣāntaraṇam), paraphrasing (Parāvartanam), and interpretation (Vyākhyānam).

Notable Definitions

Samuel Johnson defined the verb “to translate” as: “to change into another language, retaining the sense.”

Since retaining the sense completely is often impossible, the scholar A.H. Smith proposed a modification: “The change from one language into another, retaining the sense as far as possible.”

Despite numerous attempts, no single universally accepted definition exists, given that translation spans diverse fields such as linguistics, literature, technology, religion, law, and music.

Some notable characterisations of translation include:

Author	Characterisation
Theodore Savory	An Art
Eric Jacobsen	A Craft
Eugene Nida	A Science
Horst Prünster	Neither a creative art nor a reproductive art, but between the two.
Robert Frost	What is lost in translation is poetry.
Dr. Ayyappa Paniker	What is not lost in translation is poetry.
Harivansh Rai Bachchan	A cultural activity that builds a bridge of friendship between different languages.
Smith	A tasteless dish, like stewed strawberries.
Kratch	The rough surface of a smooth carpet.
Samuel Johnson	A translator is to be like his author; it is not his business to excel him.

The variety in definitions naturally reflects the diverse nature of the translation process itself.

♦ Translation aims to retain the sense when changing languages; complete equivalence is often impossible

♦ Translation is viewed variably as an art, a craft, a science, or a middle ground



Summarised Overview

Translation is both an ancient human necessity and a dynamic modern discipline. From early administrative tablets and sacred scriptures to modern digital tools, it has bridged linguistic, cultural, and intellectual divides. The Western tradition formalized theories of fidelity and freedom, while the Eastern and Indian traditions emphasized adaptation, plurality, and cultural continuity.

Indian translation history, though less theorized, reflects deep philosophical roots in *Mīmāṃsā* and *Anekāntavāda*, legitimizing multiple interpretations. Across time, translation has sustained the flow of knowledge, fostered national literatures, and unified diverse linguistic communities.

In the globalized era, translation is indispensable — not just for literature but for governance, science, and technology. It remains a creative, ethical, and cultural act of carrying meaning “across languages,” preserving humanity’s shared heritage while renewing it in every translation.

Assignment

Short Questions

1. Define translation and explain its etymological origin.
2. What is meant by “sense-for-sense” and “word-for-word” translation?
3. Mention two major contributions of the Abbasid Translation Movement.
4. What does *Anekāntavāda* contribute to modern translation theory?
5. Who was St. Jerome, and why is his work important in translation history?
6. Briefly describe the “Vernacular Renaissance” in medieval India.

Essay Questions

1. Trace the evolution of translation from ancient civilizations to the modern era.
2. Discuss the influence of the Bible on the development of Western translation theory.
3. Evaluate the Indian translation tradition and its contribution to multilingual literary culture.
4. Discuss the philosophical and linguistic challenges of achieving equivalence in translation.
5. Analyze the impact of globalization and digital technology on contemporary translation practices.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Types of translation - word for word translation - literal translation - free translation - elaborate translation - abridged translation - machine translation

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ Understand the historical evolution of translation theory
- ◆ Identify and explain the major translation methods
- ◆ Analyse the linguistic and cultural challenges in translating from Sanskrit and other inflected languages into English.
- ◆ Evaluate the creative and aesthetic dimensions of literary and poetic translation.
- ◆ Recognise the impact of machine translation (MT) and the role of human translators in ensuring contextual accuracy.

Background

Translation is a complex intellectual process that goes far beyond word substitution. It involves strategic decision-making to bridge the gap between linguistic form and cultural meaning. Since ancient times, scholars have debated whether translation should focus on literal accuracy (word-for-word) or convey the sense and spirit of the original (sense-for-sense). Various translation strategies lie along this spectrum from Word-for-Word and Literal Translation, which prioritize form but risk awkwardness, to Free Translation, which emphasizes naturalness and dynamic equivalence. Modern practices also include Elaborate Translation (expanding for clarity), Abridged Translation (condensing for brevity), and Machine Translation, which, despite its speed, still requires human refinement for nuance and accuracy. Ultimately, every translation is a purposeful act shaped by the text's function and communicative intent.

Keywords

Fidelity, Accuracy, Source Language (SL), Target Language (TL), Intralingual, Interlingual, Intersmiotic, Word-for-Word Translation, Literal, Elaborate Translation (Expansion), Abridged Translation (Compression), Machine Translation (MT), Dynamic Equivalence, Explication, Skopos Theory, Sahṛdaya, Comparative Literature.



Discussion

Fundamental to the study of translation are the concepts of fidelity, freedom, and accuracy. Greek literary critic Horace favoured a translation that was free rather than word-for-word (*verbum pro verbo*). Conversely, the scholar T. M. Warren prioritised faithfulness over mere accuracy, suggesting that “a good Translation should be rather faithful than exact.” William Cowper, in his introduction to the *Iliad*, argued that fidelity is the very essence of translation, and the form itself implies it. These views consistently suggest that translation should be subservient to the source text.

- ◆ Translation involves balancing fidelity, freedom, and accuracy, depending on the text’s purpose, nature, and audience.

Translation, at its core, is the transfer of meaning across linguistic boundaries. However, this transfer is never a uniform process. The type of translation employed depends critically on the purpose of the target text (TT), the nature of the source text (ST), and the intended audience. Historically and academically, translation methods have been classified along a spectrum, ranging from extreme adherence to the source text’s form to complete freedom in capturing its spirit. Understanding these typologies is essential for both practitioners and scholars of translation studies.

- ◆ Roman Jakobson viewed translation as a branch of applied linguistics and identified three types

Linguistic Perspective (Roman Jakobson)

Translation is a domain heavily influenced by linguistic interpretation, aiming to overcome the limitations of language as a barrier to communication. It is considered a sub-branch of Applied Linguistics.

The celebrated linguist Roman Jakobson, in his essay ‘On Linguistic Aspects of Translation’, proposed three types of translation/interpretation:

Roman Jakobson’s Tripartite Classification of Translation

1. Intralingual Translation (Rewording)

This involves the interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language. It is not merely a linguistic exercise but often a hermeneutic act, where the source message is clarified or simplified for the contemporary reader within the same linguistic system.

- ◆ It involves interpreting and rephrasing text within the same language to clarify meaning & modernize usage

- ◆ **Mechanism:** It operates through the substitution of one word or phrase with a synonym or a paraphrased expression to make the original meaning more accessible or precise for a specific audience.
- ◆ **Academic Relevance:** This type of translation is crucial for the study of diachronic linguistics (language change over time).



Examples:

Modernisation of Texts: Rewriting archaic language (e.g., Early Modern English of Shakespeare) into contemporary usage (e.g., standard modern English for a school text).

Lexical Clarification: Replacing a complex or ambiguous technical term with a clearer, more common word or a definitional phrase.

Paraphrasing: Summarising a lengthy legal document into plain language for a client.

2. Interlingual Translation (Translation Proper)

This is the interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. It is translation in the conventional sense and represents the core focus of applied translation studies.

- ♦ **Mechanism:** It requires a translator to find a near-equivalent code and message unit in the Target Language (TL) for the Source Language (SL) message. Jakobson argued that full equivalence is impossible; translation is a form of creative transposition between two different linguistic systems.
- ♦ **Academic Relevance:** This form is central to discussions on equivalence, fidelity, loss and gain, and the practical application of translation theories (e.g., Skopos Theory, Dynamic Equivalence).

Examples:

Translating a German novel into French.

Translating a business contract from Hindi into English.

The practice of Simultaneous or Consecutive Interpretation in international conferences.

3. Intersemiotic Translation (Transmutation)

This is the interpretation of verbal signs by means of non-verbal sign systems. It involves shifting the message from a linguistic code to a non-linguistic, symbolic, or visual code.

- ♦ It involves converting verbal texts into non-verbal forms such as film, music, or visual art

- ♦ **Mechanism:** The process requires the translator to abstract the meaning or essence of the verbal source text and encode it into a totally different medium that relies on semiotic systems (signs, images, sounds, actions).
- ♦ **Academic Relevance:** This is a vital concept in adaptation studies, film studies, and the study of culture and media, as it highlights how narratives are perpetually transformed across different media platforms.



Examples:

Literary Adaptation: Adapting a play or novel (a verbal text) into a film (a visual/semiotic system relying on images, music, and performance).

Musical Adaptation: Setting a poem to music, where the lyrics remain but the rhythm, tone, and feeling are conveyed through the musical score (a non-verbal sign system).

Visual Art: Creating a painting or sculpture that interprets a historical or mythological text.

The Role of Comparative Literature

- ◆ Comparative Literature, deeply connected to translation explores relationships between works across languages and cultures

Comparative Literature is a vital field closely linked to translation, functioning as the cornerstone of the World Literature concept, which facilitates the journey toward a unified global perspective. Comparative literature, which studies the reciprocal relationship between literary works in different languages, promotes trans-national cultural unity. Linguistic diversity remains the sole impediment, and translation is the only viable solution.

A person familiar only with their mother tongue relies on translation to engage with world culture, underscoring the necessity of either foreign language proficiency or dependence on a skilled translator.

The Source Language and Target Language

- ◆ Source Language (SL) is the original language of the text, while the Target Language (TL) is the language into which it is translated

The terms Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL) are the fundamental concepts in translation. A translator must be multilingual, proficient in at least two languages.

- ◆ The Source Language is the language from which the text is being translated (the original or 'source' text).
- ◆ The Target Language is the language into which the text is being translated (the final or 'target' text).

For instance, if Chandu Menon's Malayalam novel *Indulekha* is translated into English, Malayalam is the SL and English is the TL.

The Foundational Spectrum: Form vs. Meaning

The history of translation theory is dominated by the debate between literal and free translation. These terms define the two poles of a continuous spectrum upon which all translation methods can be plotted.



1. Word-for-Word Translation (Interlinear Translation)

Word-for-Word Translation stands at the extreme literal end of the translation spectrum, representing the most basic and arguably the most flawed method of linguistic transfer. The defining characteristic of this approach is the direct transposition of individual words from the Source Language (SL) into the Target Language (TL), critically maintaining the strict word order and often the morphological structure of the SL. This method is not concerned with transferring meaning or spirit, but solely with the superficial transfer of lexical tokens.

- ◆ Word-for-Word translation is an extremely literal method that transfers individual words from the source to the target language

This approach is necessarily primitive because it operates under the false premise of one-to-one equivalence between languages. Since languages operate on fundamentally different syntactic, grammatical, and semantic principles, this method inevitably results in a Target Text (TT) that is grammatically incoherent, syntactically dislocated, or outright nonsensical in the TL. The translator focuses exclusively on the isolated lexical unit without any regard for context, grammar, collocations, or the idiomatic constraints of the TL. The semantic field of a word, which often shifts dramatically based on its context within a sentence, is completely ignored, leading to severe communication failure.

In academic and pedagogical contexts, this method is often synonymous with interlinear translation, where the TT words are meticulously written directly beneath the corresponding ST words. While functionally useless for communication, this interlinear format serves a specific purpose in language learning and textual analysis: it illuminates the morphology, syntax, and case endings of a foreign language. For a student of Sanskrit, for example, an interlinear translation of a Vedic mantra helps dissect the compound words and identify the relationship between the kāraka (case roles) and the verbal root, making the structure transparent. However, this analytical utility should never be mistaken for a viable translation strategy for published or communicative works.

- ◆ It is useful for linguistic analysis and learning, but it fails as a communicative strategy

Historically, the preference for this method was observed among early, unskilled translators or those attempting the initial decipherment of a foreign tongue, particularly when dealing with revered religious or diplomatic texts. A strict adherence to the word order and form was often mistakenly equated with fidelity and reverence for the source text. However, true fidelity lies in conveying the author's intended meaning and rhetorical force, a task that Word-for-Word translation actively subverts.



- ◆ It fails with languages like Sanskrit, where flexible syntax and case-based grammar led to idiomatic and confusing English renderings.

Illustrative Failures: Sanskrit to English

The limitations of Word-for-Word translation are starkly visible when applied to languages with deeply synthetic and flexible syntax, such as Sanskrit. Unlike the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure often found in English, Sanskrit frequently uses a more flexible word order, typically leaning toward Subject-Object-Verb (SOV), and relies heavily on case endings to denote grammatical relationships.

Consider the following simple Sanskrit sentence: रामः वनं गच्छति । A Word-for-Word translation would mechanically render this as:

Sanskrit (ST)	रामः (<i>Rāmaḥ</i>)	वनं(<i>vanam</i>)	गच्छति (<i>gacchati</i>)
English (TT)	Rāma (Nominative)	forest (Accusative)	goes (Present Tense)

This TT is utterly ungrammatical in English. The correct, idiomatic translation must reorder the words and supply necessary prepositions: “Rāma goes to the forest.”

A more complex example involving an inflected adjective further highlights the failure: महान् राजा अश्वेभ्यः जलं ददाति ।

Sanskrit (ST)	महान् (<i>mahān</i>)	राजा (<i>rājā</i>)	अश्वेभ्यः (<i>aśvebhyaḥ</i>)	जलं (<i>jalam</i>)	ददाति (<i>dadāti</i>)
Word-for-Word	great	king	horses-to	water	gives
TT Result	Great	king	horses-to	water	gives

The Word-for-Word rendering fails to place the adjective correctly before the noun in English and maintains the unidiomatic SOV structure, rendering the entire phrase incomprehensible. The correct idiomatic translation is: “The great king gives water to the horses.”

While Word-for-Word translation, or interlinear translation, may serve a limited function as a linguistic tool for structural deconstruction, it must be unequivocally dismissed as an acceptable method for producing a functional, communicative text. Its insistence on rigidly preserving the form of the source text form at the expense of the target language’s grammatical and idiomatic constraints causes a breakdown of communication, confirming its status as a primitive, non-communicative translation method.

- ◆ It is largely ineffective for communication, as its strict adherence to source text form often produces ungrammatical and unintelligible target texts.



2. Literal Translation

Literal Translation occupies a challenging position on the translation spectrum, positioned between the rigid failure of Word-for-Word rendering and the fluidity of Free Translation. It is a slightly more refined method, yet it remains highly constrained by the form and structural patterns of the Source Text (ST). The method involves the grammatical construction of the SL being meticulously converted into the nearest possible Target Language (TL) equivalents, but crucial to its definition is the fact that the lexical words are still translated singly and largely out of context.

- ♦ Literal Translation produces grammatically correct target texts

The primary distinction of Literal Translation is that it respects the TL's basic grammatical rules. Unlike the chaotic output of a Word-for-Word approach, a literal translation will result in a syntactically correct sequence of TL words. It sacrifices structural fidelity only when absolutely required by TL grammar (for instance, adjusting for different verb placements or adjective-noun order). However, this respect for TL syntax is insufficient, as the method critically fails to account for differences in idiom, register, and cultural connotation.

- ♦ Literal translation often produces awkward, unnatural texts and risks semantic distortion

Consequently, the output of Literal Translation is often a stilted, awkward, and unnatural-sounding text. It is a Target Text (TT) that is formally correct the words are in the right grammatical sequence but functionally flawed, failing to resonate naturally with the target reader. It feels unmistakably like a translation, rather than a text originally composed in the TL. The classic example is translating the French phrase *Il fait froid* literally as 'It makes cold' instead of the idiomatic 'It is cold.' While grammatically coherent, 'It makes cold' is not how an English speaker expresses the weather.

The famous dictum that "literal translation is dangerous" highlights its inherent risk of semantic distortion. By prioritising dictionary equivalence over contextual or cultural meaning, the translator may unintentionally communicate something entirely different from the author's intent. This method can sometimes be acceptable for very simple, denotative phrases or in technical and administrative texts where strict conceptual correspondence and consistency of terminology are paramount. However, it is generally avoided in literary, poetic, and creative contexts where nuance and aesthetic flow are essential.

- ♦ Literal translation is especially problematic for culturally rich and highly inflected languages like Sanskrit

Literal Translation from Sanskrit

The dangers of literal translation become particularly acute when dealing with highly inflected and culturally rich languages like Sanskrit, where single words often carry a dense array of religious, philosophical, or mythological baggage.



Example 1: Failure to Capture Idiomatic Expression

Consider the common Sanskrit expression used to denote anger or resentment: मुखे अग्निः प्रज्वलितः ।

Sanskrit (ST)	मुखे (mukhe)	अग्निः(agniḥ)	प्रज्वलितः (prajvalitaḥ)
Literal Translation	In the mouth	fire	is kindled/ burning
Literal TT Result	Fire is kindled in the mouth.		

- ♦ Literal translation often preserves grammatical correctness but fails to convey idiomatic meaning or cultural connotations

While grammatically sound, the literal English translation, “Fire is kindled in the mouth,” sounds medically impossible or highly bizarre. The phrase is an idiom meaning “anger has flared up” or “he is burning with resentment.” The functional, idiomatic translation would be: “his face (or expression) was alight with anger” or simply “he was furious.” The literal approach preserves the image of fire but loses the idiomatic meaning, demonstrating functional flaw.

Example 2: Ignoring Cultural Connotation (Figurative Language)

In Sanskrit poetry, or Kāvyaṃ, compound words (samāsa) are frequently used to evoke specific moods or philosophical concepts

Consider a description of a scholar: मुखे अग्निः प्रज्वलितः ।

Sanskrit (ST)	विद्याधनविहीनः (vidyā-dhana-vihīnaḥ)	न (na)	शोभते (śobhate)
Literal Translation	knowledge-wealth-without	not	is beautiful/ shines
Literal TT Result	Without the wealth of knowledge, he does not shine.		

- ♦ It often produces semantically weak, stylistically poor, and culturally insensitive texts

The literal translation “without the wealth of knowledge, he does not shine” is correct but weak. The term dhana (wealth) is used figuratively to equate knowledge with the most valuable of possessions. The TT sounds pedestrian and fails to capture the authoritative register of the statement. A better, non-literal rendering would be: “One devoid of the treasure of learning does not flourish,” or “he who lacks the capital of wisdom is not esteemed.” the literal approach fails to find a natural TL equivalent for the poetic conceit.

In conclusion, Literal Translation, despite its partial adherence to TL grammar, is a deceptive method. It creates the illusion of accura-



cy while often delivering a text that is contextually dead, stylistically poor, and semantically distorted. For texts steeped in cultural and linguistic individuality, such as Sanskrit literature, relying on literal translation is a high-risk strategy that ultimately diminishes the quality and authenticity of the translation.

3. Free Translation

- ◆ Free translation prioritizes conveying the meaning, spirit, and effect of the source text over literal form

Free Translation stands near the opposite pole of the literal methods, representing a philosophical shift where the meaning, spirit, and overall message of the Source Text (ST) are rigorously prioritised over its structural form. In this approach, the translator is granted maximum latitude to recreate the text in the Target Language (TL), allowing significant and intentional deviations in syntax, lexis, and even cultural framing to achieve a natural and idiomatic fluent flow.

The core objective of Free Translation is to produce a Target Text (TT) that evokes the same functional or emotional response in the target reader as the ST did in the source reader. This perspective aligns closely with the dynamic equivalence theory, championed by the translator of the Bible, Eugene Nida. Dynamic equivalence focuses on the equivalence of effect, meaning the focus shifts from matching linguistic units (formal correspondence) to achieving comparable comprehension and impact across cultures. Historically, influential figures like Cicero (who translated not as a verbātim interpres but as an orator) and St. Jerome advocated for this ‘sense-for-sense’ method (Latin: *sensum de sensu*), arguing that it prevents the TT from sounding like a translation at all. This highly readable approach is favoured for literary works, advertisements, and popular texts where stylistic excellence, communicative impact, and cultural resonance are paramount.

- ◆ It can compromise formal fidelity by introducing the translator’s biases, omissions, or excessive interpretive liberties

However, the strength of Free Translation is also its chief weakness. While highly readable, the inherent danger is that the translator may introduce subjective interpretations, reflect their own biases, or omit material deemed culturally irrelevant by their judgment, thereby sacrificing formal fidelity to the original. Critics often accuse free translators of taking too many liberties, resulting in a text that is an adaptation or paraphrase rather than a true translation.

Free Translation in Sanskrit Kāvya

Free translation becomes a necessity when translating Sanskrit literature (Kāvya) into English, particularly when dealing with idioms, poetic conceits, and dense compound words (*samāsa*). A literal or word-for-word rendering would destroy the aesthetic pleasure and spiritual depth of the text.



Example 1: Capturing Poetic Imagery and Idiom

Consider a line from a famous Sanskrit Subhāṣita (wise saying):
काव्यशास्त्रविनोदेन कालो गच्छति धीमताम् ।

- ◆ Free translation allows Sanskrit compounds and poetic expressions to be rendered idiomatically in English

Literal Translation	Poetry-science-amusement-by time goes wise-ones-of. (Grammatically coherent but awkward)
Free Translation	The wise spend their time pleasantly in the pursuit of poetry and scholarship. (Focus on natural English flow and meaning)

The literal version, “time goes by amusement of poetry and science for the wise ones,” is grammatically permissible but sounds foreign and awkward. The Free Translation sacrifices the exact word order and the instrumental case ending on vinodena (“by amusement”) to find a natural English idiom, “spend their time pleasantly in the pursuit of,” thus achieving equivalence of effect and stylistic fluency.

Example 2: Handling Compound Words (Samāsa)

Sanskrit frequently uses long, evocative compound words, which are highly condensed in meaning. A literal translation would either be incomprehensible or lose all aesthetic force.

Consider the compound describing a beautiful woman’s face:
शरत्चन्द्रानना ।

Word-for-Word	Autumn-moon-face. (Nonsensical in English)
Literal Translation	The one whose face is like the autumn moon. (Pedestrian, lacks poetic ring)
Free Translation	The moon-faced beauty of the autumn night. (Fluid, conveys poetic rhythm and imagery)

The Free Translation reinterprets the visual image to create a phrase that is both aesthetically pleasing and instantly evocative in English poetry, satisfying the rasa (aesthetic emotion) intended by the Sanskrit poet. The translator, by employing a descriptive phrase rather than a literal comparison, successfully executes the sense-for-sense principle.

- ◆ Elaborate (expansive) and abridged (compressed) translations extend free translation principles

Expansive and Contractive Methods

Beyond the fundamental literal/free dichotomy, other typologies focus on the volume or scope of the resulting target text relative to the source text. These are not mutually exclusive from the free/literal methods but describe the extent of textual manipulation. Elaborate



Translation (Expansion) and Abridged Translation (Compression) are pragmatic strategies that necessitate a free approach to be successful, as they require the translator to exercise editorial judgment regarding the information required by the target audience. The shift from form to function is complete here, ensuring the final text is fit for its purpose, even if it means altering the text's overall length.

4. Elaborate Translation (Expansion)

- ◆ Elaborate translation (expansion) lengthens the target text to make implicit cultural and contextual meanings

Elaborate Translation, also known as Expansion, is a deliberate and sophisticated method where the translator increases the length and detail of the target text (TT) relative to the source text (ST) to ensure complete comprehension by the target audience. This methodology arises from the fundamental recognition that language is inherently culture-bound, and literal transfer often leaves crucial information implicit, ambiguous, or entirely lost. Expansion becomes necessary precisely when the ST contains dense cultural references, implicit meanings, or compressed syntax that would be incomprehensible or misleading if rendered literally.

The central technique involved in elaborate translation is explication, a concept fundamental to translation theory. Explication is the process where information that is implicit or context-bound in the ST is made explicit and overt in the TT. This is not simply padding the text; it is a strategic act of cultural and linguistic mediation to ensure functional equivalence. For instance, the technique often involves adding explanatory clauses for cultural terms. Translating a term like Dhoti merely as 'cloth' is inadequate; a literal translation sacrifices understanding. Instead, an elaborate translation might render it as: 'a traditional Indian garment worn wrapped around the waist and legs'. This expansion transforms an opaque cultural marker into an understandable concept for a non-Indian reader.

- ◆ Expansion in translation strategically increases text length to capture semantic depth, clarify complex ideas, and unpack dense syntactic structures for the target audience.

Strategic Uses of Expansion

Elaborate translation is a versatile tool used across various domains:

1. **Semantic Range Capture:** It involves using several TL words to capture the full semantic range of a single, dense SL word. Many words in inflected languages carry layers of meaning that cannot be captured by a single dictionary equivalent.
2. **Clarifying Complex Ideas (Redundancy):** Adding necessary redundancy is often required to clarify complex ideas or to match the stylistic requirements of the TL culture. For example, some Asian languages demand the use of multiple honorifics or politeness markers absent in the SL, necessitating expansion to maintain the correct social register.



3. **Syntactic Decompression:** Expansion is vital for dealing with syntactically dense structures, particularly the compound words (samāsa) prevalent in Sanskrit, which compress entire phrases or clauses into a single noun.

Illustrative Examples: Sanskrit to English Explicitation

The challenges of translating Sanskrit make Elaborate Translation an indispensable method, particularly in conveying religious, philosophical, or poetic concepts:

- ◆ Elaborate translation is crucial in conveying Sanskrit terms like Dharma.

Example 1: Explicating Cultural and Religious Concepts

Consider the Sanskrit term Dharma. A literal translation of Dharma as simply 'religion' or 'duty' is severely reductive and misleading. For a reader unfamiliar with Indian philosophy, an elaborate translation is essential: स्वधर्मं चर ।

Literal Translation	(You) practice your religion/duty. (Insufficient)
Elaborate Translation	Practice your own inherent, righteous duty or moral conduct, which is appropriate to your station and nature. (Explicitly the layered meaning)

- ◆ Elaborate translation helps unpack dense Sanskrit compounds like karmaphalābhi sandhi

The translator expands the single term svadharma into a multi-word phrase and clause to explicitly convey its context-specific meaning as inherent nature, moral obligation, and cosmic law, ensuring the integrity of the philosophical concept.

Example 2: Decompressing Sanskrit Compounds (Samāsa)

Sanskrit poetry, or Kāvya, relies on samāsa to create rhythmic and conceptual density. A literal translation destroys this effect. Consider a compound from the Bhagavad Gītā: कर्मफलाभिसन्धि ।

Literal Translation	Action-fruit-intention. (Incomprehensible)
Elaborate Translation	Intention or desire focused specifically on the results or fruits of one's actions. (Decompresses the three-part compound into a coherent phrase)

The translator is forced to expand the three elements of the compound word (karma, phala, abhisandhi) into a descriptive English phrase, making the philosophical concept of non-attachment to results understandable. This ensures that the target text conveys the intended intellectual nuance, even if it comes at the cost of the ST's lexical economy.



- ◆ Elaborate translation expands complex terms to preserve intellectual and cultural nuances

- ◆ Abridged translation condenses the source text to its essential meaning and purpose

- ◆ Abridged translation serves practical and literary needs by condensing texts across genres such as novels, reports, or speeches

Elaborate Translation is not an admission of linguistic weakness but a demonstration of translational responsibility. It is frequently used in legal, medical, and technical documentation to ensure absolute clarity, and critically, in poetry and religious texts where every nuance and implicit cultural layer must be conveyed. By employing explicitation, the translator sacrifices brevity for the paramount goal of full, unambiguous comprehension.

5. Abridged Translation (Compression)

Abridged Translation, often termed Compression, is a deliberate and sophisticated practice that involves reducing the length and detail of the Source Text (ST) while meticulously preserving its essential meaning and intended function. The resulting Target Text (TT) is, therefore, significantly shorter than the original. This is a purely functional form of translation, driven not by the inherent linguistic qualities of the ST, but by the practical needs and constraints imposed by the target audience or the medium of publication. Unlike other free translation methods, abridgement's primary goal is achieving the economy of information and functional utility.

Executing an abridged translation requires a remarkably high degree of skill, compelling the translator to operate simultaneously as an editor and a content curator. The translator must make critical, informed judgements regarding the hierarchy of information within the ST. They must systematically selectively omit information considered non-essential, overly repetitive, or strategically irrelevant to the TT's redefined purpose. This means differentiating between core arguments, crucial narrative points, and merely illustrative details or rhetorical flourishes designed for the original readership. The inherent danger in this process is distorting the core message or tone of the original author. An inexperienced abridger might inadvertently excise a necessary qualification, misrepresent the author's original intent, or remove the stylistic texture that makes the source text compelling, leaving the remaining text misleading or functionally inert. Therefore, the abridger must possess deep domain expertise and an intuitive grasp of the ST author's primary goal.

The utility of Abridged Translation is manifold across diverse genres. In a literary context, compression may involve summarising a full-length novel for a children's edition, focusing exclusively on the main plot and character arcs, or condensing it for a rapid reading assignment. In professional contexts, abridgement is essential for extracting key policy points from a lengthy governmental or technical report to create a concise executive summary or press release. Similarly, in mass media, translators are often required to condense a long speech or official transcript for a news article or broadcast, focusing



only on the most newsworthy content and crucial quotations while judiciously removing procedural or redundant rhetoric.

Abridgement in Sanskrit Scholarship

When translating vast and often structurally verbose Sanskrit texts into English for modern academic or general audiences, Abridged Translation becomes an indispensable scholarly tool, primarily to overcome repetition and the cultural differences in textual scope. Example 1: Narrative Compression in the Purāṇas

Consider the translation of a Purāṇa or an Itihāsa (epic history). These texts, such as the Mahābhārata, are structured for oral recitation and contain extensive sections that are highly repetitive, including lengthy, formulaic genealogies (vaṁśa), intricate descriptions of minor rituals, or protracted battlefield descriptions. A full, literal English translation of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa or Skanda Purāṇa often spans multiple, dense volumes. An abridged translation intended for a modern university course on Indian mythology would be compelled to selectively omit these redundant details to maintain narrative pace. For instance, instead of translating fifty consecutive verses detailing the lineage of a minor dynasty, the abridged TT would synthesize this information into a single, functional sentence: “The Paurava dynasty continued for several generations, primarily focused on maintaining Vedic rituals, before the ascension of King X.” This method preserves the purpose of the section (the continuation of the historical timeline) while eliminating the tedious detail, making the text functionally accessible.

- ◆ Abridged translation in Sanskrit scholarship condenses lengthy

- ◆ Abridged translation in philosophical commentaries condenses complex dialectical debates into clear summaries of core ideas

Example 2: Intellectual Compression in Commentaries (Bhāṣya)

Abridgement is equally vital in translating complex Sanskrit philosophical commentaries (Bhāṣya), such as those by Śāṅkarācārya on the Upaniṣads. A Bhāṣya typically comprises the core sūtra (aphorism), followed by intricate dialectical layers including the pūrvapakṣa (opponent’s view), the uttarapakṣa (the author’s rebuttal), and various minor objections addressed meticulously. Much of these dialectic addresses concerns that are historically specific and often irrelevant to a modern reader. For a contemporary philosophical textbook, the translator must employ compression to strip away the rhetorical scaffolding and numerous counterarguments. They focus only on the core sūtra and the final, definitive siddhānta (established conclusion) of the Bhāṣya. Pages of detailed debate on the precise definition of mokṣa (liberation) might be reduced to a single, synthesized paragraph stating the definitive Vedāntic position. This act ensures that the text’s central philosophical function is preserved, while its original rhetorical density is judiciously removed for the sake of clarity and conciseness.



The move from the ST to the compressed TT is thus a demonstration of dynamic equivalence at a macro-level, trusting that the essential functional utility of the original can be maintained even when its physical form is significantly reduced. This strategic manipulation of text volume contrasts sharply with methods defined purely by linguistic constraints. The rise of new paradigms, however, introduces agents other than the human translator, a development that brings us to the distinct category of translation defined by the agent performing the task, namely Technological Methods.

6. Machine Translation (MT)

- ♦ Machine Translation (MT) uses computer algorithms to automatically translate text, with early Rule-Based

Machine Translation (MT) constitutes a distinct, technological category of translation defined by the use of computer software to convert text or speech from one language to another, ideally without human intervention during the core conversion process. The advent of MT fundamentally changed the translation landscape, transitioning the practice from a purely human endeavour to a hybrid field leveraging computational power for speed and volume. MT systems have evolved through several discernible and increasingly sophisticated stages.

- ♦ Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) introduced data-driven probability models, later surpassed by Neural Machine Translation

The earliest paradigm was Rule-Based Machine Translation (RBMT). This approach relied on vast programmed dictionaries and intricate grammatical rules manually coded for both the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL). RBMT systems attempted to meticulously replicate the human process of syntactic and morphological analysis. While precise in structured domains, their output was brittle; any sentence violating a programmed rule resulted in failure or highly unnatural output.

RBMT was succeeded by Statistical Machine Translation (SMT), which marked a major shift towards data-driven methods. SMT used statistical models derived from analysing massive corpora of existing human-translated texts (known as parallel texts). Instead of hard-coded rules, SMT predicted the most likely word or phrase in the TL based on probability, effectively translating “what is most likely said” rather than “what should be said.” This improved fluency but still struggled with long-range dependencies and sentence coherence.

The current dominant paradigm is Neural Machine Translation (NMT). NMT employs deep learning (neural networks) to model the entire translation process as a sequence-to-sequence problem. NMT models learn to map the meaning of the source sentence to the target sentence, producing output that is significantly more fluent, cohesive, and contextually aware than earlier systems. By processing the entire sentence (and often surrounding sentences) simultaneously, NMT addresses many of the local coherence issues inherent in SMT.



- ♦ Machine translation struggles with Sanskrit due to its complex syntax, rich compounding, and context-dependent meanings

Challenges of MT: The Sanskrit-English Divide

While NMT provides highly fluent results for high-resource, typologically similar language pairs (e.g., Spanish English), it still struggles significantly with idiom, cultural nuance, and highly inflected, low-resource languages like Sanskrit. The core challenge is that Sanskrit's flexible syntax, complex compounding (samāsa), and reliance on context for case interpretation defeat NMT's reliance on fixed sequences.

Consider a classical Sanskrit verse: अयं निजः परो वेति गणना लघुचेतसाम् ।

NMT Output (Contemporary)	"This is mine, or it is another's, the thought of small minds."
Human Free Translation	"Whether this belongs to us or to others is the consideration of small-minded people."

While the NMT output is intelligible, the phrase "small minds" is literal and lacks the cultural weight and formality of the philosophical term *laghucetasām* ('of those with limited consciousness'). Furthermore, the structure "This is mine, or it is another's" is syntactically stiff. For philosophical texts, NMT frequently fails to select the precise English philosophical term that captures the dharma or artha of the Sanskrit root.

A more complex failure occurs with compounds: NMT might struggle to correctly break down and contextually translate a term like *duḥkhabhūyiṣṭha* (predominantly sorrowful/full of pain), often defaulting to a simplified, inaccurate English noun phrase.

Integration and Purpose

As MT struggles with linguistic ambiguity and cultural depth, its output often requires post-editing by a human translator to ensure accuracy, context, and appropriate register, a process known as Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT). This hybrid approach maximises efficiency. MT is indispensable in high-volume, real-time environments, such as internet content, rapid corporate communication, and instantaneous interpretation where speed outweighs absolute literary perfection.

These seven methods from the strictly Word-for-Word to technologically driven Machine Translation illustrate the diverse approaches available to the translator. The choice of method is never absolute but is invariably functional and contextual. A religious scholar translating a sacred text, like the Upaniṣads, might lean towards a literal/

- ♦ NMT often produces literal or syntactically rigid translations for Sanskrit

- ♦ translators choose methods ranging from literal to creative based on functional, contextual, and communicative goals.



elaborate approach to maintain the integrity of the original phrasing and ritual detail, while a marketer translating an advertisement will invariably adopt a free, elaborate approach to ensure persuasive cultural resonance. The ultimate goal, regardless of the method chosen, remains consistent: to bridge the gap between languages effectively, ensuring that the target text fully achieves its communicative purpose.

Creative Literary Translation

Creative translation refers to the translation of creative literature, encompassing all literary forms. Since each form (poetry, novel, drama) has unique characteristics, only general principles can be outlined for the field.

Principles of Literary Translation

Audience Focus: The translator must target the general aesthetic sensibility of the readership, not just a specialised circle of scholars. Translation of literary works must therefore maintain a degree of simplicity.

- ♦ Literary translation requires balancing audience accessibility, fidelity to the original's aesthetic, careful interpretation, appropriate methodology, and often a single translator's vision

♦ **Aesthetic and Conceptual Fidelity:** The translated work must retain the ability to resonate with the reader. The translator must possess the genius to connect with the original author's heart and vision ("samānahṛdayam ēva: sahṛdayah"). This requires the translator to command the TL's expressive variety to parallel the SL's ideas and structures.

♦ **Avoiding Over-Interpretation:** The translator must not exaggerate or inflate concepts or meanings do not present in the original text. While summary or imitation can be useful adjuncts, they do not constitute true translation.

♦ **Methodological Choice:** For texts from different language families, free translation, which captures the spirit and form without strict literalism, is preferable to word-for-word rendering.

♦ **Collaboration:** While scientific works might be successfully translated by a team, creative works are best handled by a single individual whose unified artistic vision can maintain cohesion.

Ultimately, creative translation is essential for cultural synthesis. It is the only enduring path towards a sense of shared humanity, transcending linguistic and regional boundaries, regardless of advancements in science or technology.

The Specifics of Poetry Translation

Poetry poses the most acute challenge, summarised by the conflicting, yet harmonious, views of poets:



- ◆ Poetry translation demands preserving the essence of the original, allowing the translator creative freedom to recreate the poetic experience

- ◆ Poetic translation faces the challenge of balancing fidelity and aesthetic beauty

- ◆ A poetic translator merges their own sensibility with the source

- ◆ Methods like metrical duplication, metre substitution, free verse, or literal verse to recreate the original essence in the target language.

- ◆ Robert Frost: “Poetry is what gets lost in translation.”
- ◆ Ayyappa Paniker: “Poetry is what is not lost in translation.”

Both statements imply that the poetic essence must be preserved. Sri Aurobindo further noted that a translator is not bound to the original; they can create their own poem, which often occurs in great translations.

The Nature of Poetic Loss

Poetry is abstract, condensed, and intensely subjective, conveying a world of feeling through evocative language. Its construction relies on the precise arrangement of words, supported by metre, rhythm, and rhyme. While the core narrative or concept may survive translation (e.g., the Krishna-Kuchela story in Kucēlavṛttam Vañcippāṭṭu), the formal elements such as the native Malayalam Natoonnata metre are often lost or fractured, as the cultural frame of reference for elements like the 'Van̄cippāṭṭu' is uniquely Keralite.

Translation historians often point to a dilemma: fidelity (to the source) versus beauty (in the TL). A literal translation preserves denotation but destroys aesthetic integrity. Conversely, a successful translation might surpass the original, as Edward Fitzgerald’s English rendition of Omar Khayyam’s Rubáiyát is said to have done.

The Poetic Translator

When a poet translates, a third product emerges a fusion of the two original poetic sensibilities. The translator-poet becomes a sahr̄daya (sympathetic reader) of the source work. Thirunalloor Karunakaran’s translation of Kālidāsa’s Meghadūta is often cited as a superb example, transcending other versions due to his profound identification with Kālidāsa’s spirit.

Poetry can be translated as verse or prose (e.g., Vidwan R. Prakasam’s ten-volume prose Mahābhārata). Translation methods for verse include:

- ◆ **Metrical Duplication:** Attempting to render the SL metre into an equivalent TL metre (e.g., Nalappatt Narayana Menon’s Light of Asia).
- ◆ **Target Language Metre Substitution:** Translating the SL metre into various, distinct TL metres (e.g., the work of Ezhuthachan and Vennikulam Gopala Kurup).
- ◆ **Free Verse/Prose-Poem:** Translating the original into unrhymed or free verse forms, common in Malayalam translations of Western poetry.



- ♦ **Literal Verse Translation:** A word-for-word rendering in verse (e.g., Kunjikuttan Thampuran's Mahâbhârata).

Summarised Overview

Translation is not a mechanical act but a profound intellectual and creative process that mediates between languages, cultures, and worldviews. From ancient debates on fidelity and freedom to modern computational translation, the translator remains a cultural bridge-builder.

Roman Jakobson's tripartite model underscores the multidimensional nature of translation - linguistic, interlinguistic, and semiotic. Across the form-meaning spectrum, various strategies such as Word-for-Word, Literal, Free, Elaborate, and Abridged translation reveal how purpose and audience determine approach.

Machine Translation marks a technological revolution but lacks cultural intuition, reaffirming the irreplaceable value of human insight. In creative and poetic translation, fidelity transcends literal accuracy, aiming instead for aesthetic and emotional equivalence. Ultimately, translation is a dialogue between civilizations - the art of making meaning travel across boundaries while preserving the soul of the original.

Assignment

Short Questions:

1. Define *fidelity* in the context of translation studies.
2. What are Roman Jakobson's three types of translation?
3. Distinguish between *Source Language (SL)* and *Target Language (TL)*.
4. What is meant by *Dynamic Equivalence*?
5. Define *Elaborate Translation*.
6. What is the main aim of Abridged Translation?

Essay Questions:

7. Discuss the historical debate between fidelity and freedom in translation with reference to Horace, Cowper, and Warren.
8. Explain Roman Jakobson's classification of translation with suitable examples.
9. Compare and contrast Word-for-Word, Literal, and Free Translation methods.



10. Evaluate the contributions and limitations of Machine Translation (MT) in the modern era.
11. Examine the principles of creative translation and its importance in world literature. Discuss how technological methods are reshaping the future of translation studies.

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Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU





Translation studies as an emerging discipline

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ❖ explain the emergence and disciplinary scope of Translation Studies (TS) as an autonomous academic field
- ❖ understand translation as a mechanism of cultural mediation, social change, and literary modernization
- ❖ analyse the challenges of translating philosophical, literary, and poetic texts, particularly from Sanskrit and other Indian languages
- ❖ evaluate the role of translation in media, globalization, and cross-cultural communication
- ❖ Recognize translation's historical impact on global knowledge exchange and regional literary evolution, especially in Malayalam literature.

Background

For centuries, translation was considered a subsidiary skill, a practical tool used within linguistics, comparative literature, or theology, rather than an autonomous field of study. Translators were often overlooked, their contributions absorbed into the history of the works they transferred rather than recognized in their own right. This perception began to shift in the mid-20th century with the emergence of Translation Studies (TS), which transformed translation from a mere craft into a sophisticated interdisciplinary discipline. TS bridges linguistics, culture, history, politics, and aesthetics, offering a framework not only for understanding how texts move across languages but also for exploring why they move and the social, political, and cultural consequences of such movements. Its formalisation marked a philosophical shift from prescriptive, rule-based guidance such as “literal” or “sense-for-sense” translation to descriptive, analytical approaches that study translation as a dynamic cultural phenomenon.

Modern Translation Studies emphasizes the role of translation as a mechanism of cultural mediation and social change. Scholars investigate the power dynamics, ideological motivations, and socio-political contexts that shape translational acts, such as the translation of sacred texts into vernacular languages in medieval India, which democratized access to knowledge and challenged hierarchical structures. TS also promotes a global,



spatial understanding of literature, recognizing that no literary tradition exists in isolation and that translation is central to the circulation and longevity of human thought. By integrating empirical data and multidisciplinary theories, Translation Studies provides tools to analyze the complex interplay between languages, societies, and cultures, highlighting translation's indispensable role in preserving, renewing, and connecting literary and philosophical traditions across the world.

Keywords

Translation Studies (TS), Cultural Mediation, Pinchuk's Five Pillars, Literary Translation, Poetic Translation, Dynamic and Formal Equivalence, Abridged, Elaborate, Media Translation, Modernization of Literature

Discussion

- ◆ Translation Studies is a new academic field that studies how translation and interpretation work and how they influence language, culture, and literature.

- ◆ Translation Studies is an independent field that builds its own theories

Translation Studies (TS) is a relatively young academic discipline that has experienced phenomenal growth since the latter half of the 20th century. Having moved decisively beyond the prescriptive “how-to” guides of the past, it has established itself as an autonomous interdisciplinary field that investigates the theory, description, and application of translation, interpretation, and cultural transfer. Its emergence signals a formal recognition of the profound impact of translation on culture, history, and the formation of national literatures.

Defining the Disciplinary Space

From a disciplinary perspective, several key considerations highlight the unique intellectual contribution of Translation Studies. TS is not merely a subsidiary branch of comparative literature or linguistics; rather, it is a meta-discipline that draws on and informs both.

Firstly, the formalisation of TS allows scholars to systematically record and analyse the intellectual experiences of earlier thinkers on translation. In contexts such as India, where translation has been an almost continuous, unconscious cultural activity, strengthening the discipline requires scholars to build upon what has happened so far. This involves moving beyond anecdotal observations to creating a robust indigenous translation theory rooted in native interpretive traditions (vyākhyā or mīmāṃsā) rather than simply importing Western models.



- ◆ Translation Studies shows that translation connects literatures, preserves knowledge across time and cultures

- ◆ Translation Studies plays a key role in the growth and renewal of languages and civilizations

- ◆ Translation Studies encourages studying literature across regions as well as time, showing how translations create mutual cultural exchange instead of one-sided influence.

Secondly, TS firmly establishes that no literature can truly thrive in isolation. The vitality of the literature of any language; is inextricably linked to its relationship with others, both by exporting its own works and by receiving translations from other linguistic traditions. Consequently, the history of translation in any language presents an informal, yet essential, history of the literature of that language. Translation acts as the primary mechanism for literary renewal, genre innovation, and thematic enrichment. Historically, it is undeniable that translation activities in some languages received higher patronage, often religious or political, than others, directly influencing the growth and dissemination of written materials in those languages.

Thirdly, TS acknowledges that translation has served as the custodian of civilization and literacy, preserving and transferring vast intellectual resources across generations and geographical divides, thereby facilitating their immortality. The continuous re-translation of foundational texts ensures their sustained relevance. The discipline, therefore, positions the history of translation as more than a mere account of linguistic conversion. Rather, it is a detailed description of what, how, and most critically, why something is translated, weaving together linguistic analysis with socio-political motivation.

Overcoming the Spatial and Social Narrowness

A critical problem that Translation Studies scholars are tasked with addressing is the prevalent tendency toward language-culture overlap or the equating of class, caste, and language, particularly when studying literary history. Traditional literary histories tend to look chronologically at a single language/literature as a self-contained unit, grudgingly acknowledging links with others. This narrow approach overlooks the spatial spread (topos) of literature, where texts constantly moved and mutated across regions.

To overcome this, TS insists on a Background: examining the spatial spread of literature that maps cultural phenomena not only chronologically but also geographically. If scholars neglect this spatial dimension and fail to base their analysis on empirical data regarding who translated what, when, and for whom, they risk applying monolithic, often imported, theories. For example, without a spatial analysis, one might erroneously conclude that translations from Sanskrit were uniformly imposed from an “alien” high culture and that vernacular literatures developed solely through subversion. This oversimplification ignores the complex, organic, and mutual influence that characterised classical and medieval Indian literary production.



Translation as a Tool for Social and Political Change

- ◆ Translation Studies shows how translation can promote social change by making knowledge accessible to all and challenging traditional power and authority.

- ◆ Translation Studies highlights how translation challenges social inequality, spreads knowledge to all people, and shapes cultural and literary history

- ◆ Translation is a key tool that connects different languages and cultures, promoting global communication and mutual understanding.

Translation Studies provides the framework to analyse translation as a powerful agent of social change, demonstrating how linguistic transfers directly impact social power-equations. In medieval India, the attempts at translating deva bhāṣa (Sanskrit) texts into vernacular languages served to counter the divine origin theory of texthood. By placing texts in a more public domain and by problematising the notion of authorship since translators often adapted and reinterpreted these activities democratised access to knowledge.

This mediation between languages ultimately meant a shifting in social power-equations because such transfers dealt a powerful blow to the linkage of language with knowledge, which was previously monopolised by certain social groups. Historically, marginalized groups, particularly non-Brahmins, revolted against Brahmin hegemony by subverting texts written in Sanskrit. Translation activity, therefore, became a powerful expression of the desire on the part of the hitherto excluded social groups to appropriate a cultural space which had been denied them. By making the content of non-available religious and philosophical texts accessible in the common vernacular, translation actively contributed to the democratisation of knowledge and fostered the growth of regional cultural identity.

Translation Studies, as an emerging discipline, thus offers more than just theoretical insights into linguistics; it offers a crucial methodology for rewriting cultural and literary history. By insisting on an interdisciplinary, empirical, and spatially aware approach, TS foregrounds translators the role of translation as the chief custodian of civilization and the resources of civilization and the historical mechanism for negotiating social power. The field remains vital for understanding how languages interact, how cultural hegemony is challenged, and how national and regional literatures achieve their modern form and eventual immortality.

Translation: A Cultural and Historical Imperative

Global communication and cooperation, essential for the modern world, are primarily facilitated by language. This mutual engagement drives both the evolution of individual languages and the necessary processes of cross-cultural exchange. The growth of most world languages is a testament to the influence of interlingual exchange. Translation, in this context, becomes a powerful tool for uniting diverse linguistic communities and facilitating cultural transfer.

Translation and Cultural Mediation

For a country like India, the translation of Sanskrit's immense literary wealth played a crucial role in forming the very concept of



- ♦ Translation plays a vital role in uniting India's diverse cultures and connecting them with the world

Indian culture as a unified entity. Similarly, the inter-translation of regional Indian languages promoted a profound cultural synthesis within the country. Furthermore, translation between Indian and foreign languages acted as a bridge, connecting India to the global sphere and helping to dissolve both geographical borders and linguistic parochialism.

The skilled translator acts as an interpreter, conveying the cultural form (art, science, etc.) of the Source Language (SL) with seriousness and fidelity through the Target Language (TL). It is acknowledged, however, that the intrinsic subtleties of one culture can never be perfectly rendered into another. Translation, therefore, functions as an essential bridge linking disparate cultures.

Isadore Pinchuk's Framework: The Five Pillars of Cultural Translation

The act of translation is fundamentally an act of cultural transfer, transcending mere linguistic conversion. To understand the deep complexities involved in moving a text from one civilization to another, scholars have developed frameworks to systematise the cultural knowledge a translator must possess. One of the most insightful and practical models was proposed by the scholar Isadore Pinchuk, who extensively analysed the symbiotic role of culture within the translation process. Pinchuk effectively compartmentalised the entirety of human culture into five fundamental pillars, arguing that the proficiency of a translation is directly determined by how effectively the translator can render core terms and concepts related to these specific cultural domains. .

- ♦ Isadore Pinchuk's framework explains that good translation depends on a translator's ability

1. Ecology: Knowledge of the Local Environment

The first pillar, Ecology, refers to the knowledge of the local physical environment, including climate, geography, flora, and fauna. Every language is deeply embedded in the specific environment where its speakers live. A term describing a geographical feature or a type of plant often has no single, direct equivalent in a vastly different ecological zone. The translator must understand the environmental context to select the appropriate functional equivalent or provide necessary explicitation. For instance, the richness of vocabulary in Arctic languages for different types of snow finds little lexical correspondence in tropical languages, requiring the translator to resort to descriptive phrases. The cultural value of a text is often tied to its sense of place; misinterpreting an ecological term can lead to absurdities, such as translating a reference to a Himalayan peak using terminology appropriate for a gentle European hill.

- ♦ The first pillar, Ecology, means a translator must understand the local environment

2. Social Relationships: Patterns of Social Interaction

The second pillar, Social Relationships, encompasses the formal and informal patterns of interaction, hierarchies, kinship, and institutions that structure a society. This includes systems of address (honorifics), familial roles, legal and political structures, and class systems. In translation, this domain is crucial because social roles dictated by the Source Culture (SC) rarely map neatly onto the Target Culture (TC). For example, translating titles in historical texts, such as those from Sanskrit (e.g., Rājā, Mahārāja, Paṇḍita), requires not just a lexical transfer (King, Great King, Scholar) but an understanding of the specific power dynamics and institutional contexts they represent. If a translator uses 'Sir' for a term of address that signifies a deep, lifelong bond of service, the social relationship is diluted. Effective translation here demands knowledge of the register and the social distance implied by the original interaction.

- ◆ The second pillar, Social Relationships, means a translator must understand social roles, hierarchies, and interactions

3. Material Culture/Technology: Tools, Methods, and Products of Labour

The third pillar, Material Culture/Technology, relates to the tangible aspects of a society: the tools, methods, products of labour, clothing, architecture, and foodstuffs. These items are often unique to a culture and present some of the most visible challenges to the translator. When a term denotes a material object that simply does not exist in the Target Culture (TC), the translator must choose between transliteration (keeping the foreign name, e.g., Samosa), substitution (using a TC item that performs a similar function, e.g., substituting 'bread' for a type of staple grain), or description (elaborate translation). The choice must be guided by the text's purpose. For technical manuals, accuracy is paramount, necessitating careful description. For literary works, maintaining cultural flavour might favour transliteration. The translator's skill lies in conveying the function and significance of the object without overburdening the reader with detail.

- ◆ The third pillar, Material Culture/Technology, means a translator must convey objects, tools, and practices

4. Beliefs and Values: Ideological and Ethical Systems

Perhaps the most challenging domain is the fourth pillar: Beliefs and Values, which includes the ideological, ethical, religious, and philosophical systems that govern a culture; the world view of a culture. This pillar dictates concepts of morality, justice, spirituality, and social goals. Translating religious or philosophical texts is notoriously difficult because core terms often resist equivalence. For example, concepts such as the Sanskrit Karma, Mokṣa, or Dharma cannot be captured by single English equivalents like 'action,' 'salvation,' or 'duty.' These terms are complex semantic networks rooted in millennia of philosophical debate. A translator must provide an

- ◆ The fourth pillar, means a translator must carefully explain a culture's religious, ethical, and philosophical ideas



elaborate, context-sensitive rendering and often append explanatory notes to ensure the TT reader grasps the full weight of the term. Misinterpretation in this domain leads not merely to awkward phrasing, but to fundamental distortion of the ethical or spiritual message of the source text.

5. Language and Art: Aesthetic and Linguistic Forms

The final pillar, Language and Art, concerns the aesthetic and linguistic forms themselves, including literature, music, poetry, rhetoric, and idiomatic expression. This addresses how meaning is conveyed stylistically—the use of metaphor, meter, rhythm, and genre conventions. When translating poetry, for instance, the translator must decide which aspect of the ST to preserve: the meaning, the rhythm/meter, or the rhyme scheme. Preserving one often means sacrificing the others. A translator working on Sanskrit Kāvya must understand the conventions of *rasa* (aesthetic emotion) and *dhvani* (suggestion) to recreate the poetic effect rather than just the literal words. This domain directly relates to the debate between formal and dynamic equivalence, as achieving a comparable aesthetic experience often necessitates significant structural divergence from the original linguistic form.

- ◆ The fifth pillar, means a translator must capture a text's style, literary forms, and aesthetic effects

Pinchuk's framework provides a comprehensive checklist for the translator, underscoring that the cultural value of a translation is determined by its success across all five pillars. A text may be linguistically flawless (Pillar 5) but fail if it misrepresents the social hierarchy (Pillar 2) or the environment (Pillar 1). The translator is thus positioned as a cultural mediator, whose success relies not just on bilingual competence, but on deep bicultural understanding and the judicious application of translational strategies be they free, elaborate, or abridged to carry the holistic meaning of the ST across the chasm of linguistic and cultural difference.

- ◆ Translating Indian languages is challenging because each has unique cultural terms, especially for local geography and climate

The Challenge of Cultural Specificity

While Indian languages share an underlying cultural affinity, stemming from Vedic, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, each regional language maintains its unique cultural markers. This explains why certain elements resist translation. The Central Sahitya Akademi's motto, "Indian literature is one, though written in many languages," confirms this interconnectedness.

The most basic pillar, Ecology, presents a prime challenge. Geographical features and climate phenomena specific to a region (e.g., 'kāyals' (backwaters), 'puñcapādam' (paddy fields), 'ñārruvēla' (specific planting seasons), 'īdavappāti' (monsoon season)) often lack exact functional equivalents in other cultures. Dealing with these



culturally specific words necessitates that translators often resort to approximate equivalence to overcome the cultural hurdle.

Translation, Globalisation, and Historical Development

- ◆ Translation has played a vital role in global cultural exchange, carrying Indian knowledge to the world and fostering movements like the Renaissance

Translation has dramatically reshaped the world's cultural landscape. Historically, Arabs are credited with first introducing Indian heritage texts to the world through translation. Along with spices, they carried the 'fragrance' of Indian epics, mythology, and scientific works to the West. Within India, internal translation was also robust; for example, Dara Shikoh, brother of Aurangzeb, translated Indian Upanishads into Persian.

The European translations of works like the Bhagavad Gita and Abhijñānaśākuntalam significantly powered the cultural exchange between East and West. It is argued that the translations of Greek and Indian texts were instrumental in pulling Europe out of the Dark Ages and ushering in the Age of Reason and the Renaissance.

- ◆ Modern translation studies emphasize that translation is a cultural, not merely linguistic

While early translators focused on linguistic approaches, modern scholarship increasingly foregrounds socio-cultural concepts. Contemporary thought insists that translation is not merely a linguistic act but requires considering the socio-cultural background of every translated work.

Anthropologists view translation as a strategic mediator for cross-cultural engagement. Since language is a product of culture, and the two are inseparable, translation is fundamentally a cultural act. As J.B. Casagrande stated, "The translator translates cultures, not languages." The possibility of translation rests on the universality of culture, the commonality of human experience, and the inherent nature of language and communication.

Translation in Media and Communication: Demands for Speed and Accuracy

- ◆ In the globalised media landscape, translation ensures fast, accurate, and ethical communication across languages

Language is the primary medium for communication, but in the modern context, the term "media" encompasses the broad landscape of print, visual, and digital platforms. The media sector is now a critical area for translation, largely driven by the globalisation facilitated by the World Wide Web. In an era where audiences demand the instantaneous delivery of global news and information, translation is essential for overcoming the fundamental barrier of linguistic diversity.

The media's task is to transmit information to billions simultaneously. This necessitates that translations serving the public's thirst for



knowledge be accurate, reliable, powerful, and ethically sound. The language used in media must serve the universal and social betterment of its audience.

Challenges and Principles of Media Translation

- ◆ Media translation demands real-time precision and linguistic skill

The fundamental challenge in media translation, especially in print journalism, is the requirement for real-time accuracy and resourcefulness. A journalist cannot afford a discretionary approach to translation. The translator must swiftly and deftly handle grammar, word structure, and semantic scope.

Accuracy and General Knowledge

- ◆ Media translators must combine linguistic accuracy with broad general knowledge

The history of media translation contains numerous instances of humorous and critical errors. One oft-cited, though anecdotal, example involves a foreign news report stating, “2000 sleepers lost in the flood” being translated into Malayalam as “2000 sleeping people were washed away in the flood.” A more recent, verified error occurred when a music director, after receiving an Oscar, mentioned that “The Carpenters” inspired him. Some Malayalam media outlets mistakenly translated this to mean he was inspired by the sound of carpenters’ work, revealing a lack of general knowledge about the famous music group. These mistakes highlight the necessity for media translators to possess broad general knowledge across multiple subjects.

Style and Economy of Language

- ◆ Media translation requires brevity, clarity, and creativity

Media translation demands concise, energetic, and vigorous language. While brevity is essential, the translator must ensure that the reduction in words does not lead to a loss of conceptual richness. Furthermore, new words and concepts enter the discourse daily, requiring translators to possess the presence of mind to find suitable, immediate equivalents, whether borrowed (tatsama) or adapted (tadbhava).

The Visual Medium and Foreign Influence

- ◆ In visual media, translators must ensure clarity and natural expression, avoiding unnecessary foreign terms

The visual media landscape, which prioritises sight and immediate comprehension over reading, also requires clear and accurate translation standards. While clarity is paramount, the Malayalam visual media often fails to meet this standard, frequently inserting awkward, artificial language structures by neglecting native equivalents for foreign terms. A media translator must aim for simplicity and moderation in word choice to convey information clearly.

Synthesis of Translation Theory in Practice: Cultural Mediation and Literary Modernisation

The practice of translation, particularly within the dynamic and high-stakes environment of media and literary production, demands a profound understanding of underlying theoretical principles. Translation is far more than a linguistic exercise; it is a critical process of cultural mediation that determines how one society perceives the thought, art, and scientific advancements of another. The necessity for accurate, context-aware translation in all forms of media is profoundly reinforced by the broader, established theoretical frameworks that define the role of translation in global cultural synthesis.

- ◆ Translation serves as a vital act of cultural mediation, bridging societies by accurately conveying ideas and values

1. Cultural Mediation: Dissolving Boundaries

At its most fundamental, translation is critical for dissolving geographical boundaries and transcending linguistic narrowness. The translator acts as a cultural mediator, a crucial intermediary whose task is to faithfully render the cultural form be it art, science, philosophy, or social thought of the Source Language (SL) into the Target Language (TL). This concept moves beyond mere semantic equivalence; it suggests that the translator is responsible for conveying the socio-cultural context and rhetorical force of the original. When a scientific paper is translated, the mediator ensures not only that the technical terms are correct but also that the methodologies and ethical standards are understood within the new linguistic and institutional framework. Similarly, translating a poem requires the mediator to reconstruct the aesthetic experience, making the foreign form accessible without domesticating its essence. The success of global knowledge exchange is therefore contingent upon the translator's ability to faithfully perform this act of mediation.

- ◆ Translation functions as cultural mediation, enabling cross-boundary exchange

2. Cultural Pillars: Pinchuk's Framework in Action

The complexity of cultural transfer is best articulated by frameworks like that of Isadore Pinchuk, who systematically divides culture into five pillars all of which a competent translator must navigate. These pillars are Ecology (knowledge of the local environment), Social Relationships (patterns of social interaction), Material Culture/Technology (tools and products of labour), Beliefs and Values (ideological and ethical systems), and Language and Art (aesthetic and linguistic forms). In practical translation, these pillars intersect constantly. For example, translating an Indian political essay requires navigating the Social Relationships pillar (understanding caste or bureaucratic hierarchies) and the Beliefs and Values pillar (interpreting concepts like Ahimsā or secularism). A failure in any one pillar can result in a functionally flawed text. If a translator misidentifies a common Indian food item (Material Culture) as a rare luxury, the

- ◆ Pinchuk's five cultural pillars guide translators to capture the full cultural context of a source text accurately.



entire social context of a narrative is skewed. Pinchuk's model serves as a vital checklist, ensuring that the translator's focus extends far beyond the dictionary definition to encompass the whole cultural ecosystem represented in the Source Text.

3. Historical Context: Translation as the Engine of Human Achievement

The enduring relevance of translation is rooted in its ancient history, which predates even the systematic translation of foundational religious texts like the Bible. Translation's influence is palpably evident in nearly every major human achievement, both material and spiritual. The flowering of science and philosophy in the Arab world during the Middle Ages, for example, was a direct result of the Translation Movement, where Greek and Indian texts were translated into Arabic at institutions like the House of Wisdom. This act preserved and propelled knowledge that later fuelled the European Renaissance. The historical study of translation confirms its role not as a secondary activity, but as a primary engine of intellectual growth. This principle holds true even at the regional level of literary history. The history of Malayalam literature itself is fundamentally tied to translation. The early poetic compositions, which form the bedrock of the language's literary identity, were rarely wholly original creations; they were largely adaptations, paraphrases, or literal renderings of Sanskrit epics and Purāṇas. This constant process of borrowing, indigenising, and localising grand narratives provided the necessary formal and thematic scaffolding upon which modern Malayalam literature was built.

- ◆ Translation has historically driven human intellectual and cultural progress

4. Modernisation and Literary Genres: The Transformative Power

The process of modernisation in literary and intellectual thought has historically relied heavily on translation. In the European context, the Renaissance laid the foundation for modern translation practice by shifting the focus from religious literalism to vernacular fluency and the humanistic spirit of classical texts. This spirit of innovation through translation was later mirrored in regional Indian literature during the colonial and post-colonial periods. In Malayalam, the late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed an extensive translation movement of Western literature. Translation brought the works of seminal English poets such as Tennyson, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats into the Malayalam literary sphere, profoundly influencing the romantic and modern schools of poetry. More crucially, modern literary genres that were largely absent in traditional Indian aesthetics, notably the novel and the short story, were introduced and popularised through translation from English and other European languages. Early Malayalam novels were often direct translations or adaptations

- ◆ Translation has been pivotal in literary modernisation, introducing new genres and styles



of English models, providing the structural templates and narrative techniques necessary for native writers to eventually develop their own unique modern voice. This translational momentum thus acted as a catalyst for literary transformation, providing the tools necessary for Malayalam to evolve into a fully modern, genre-diverse literature. The synthesis of theory and practice confirms that translation is not just about conveying words, but about driving historical, cultural, and aesthetic evolution.

Poetry and Literary Translation

- ◆ Translating poetry requires preserving meter, symbolism, and aesthetic impact

Poetry presents unique challenges, often summarised by Robert Frost's statement: "Poetry is what gets lost in translation." The translator must account for metrical structure, the evocative power of words (dhvani), figurative language, and symbolism. While a group of writers can tackle a translation, this method is generally unsuitable for highly individualistic creative works.

Summarised Overview

Translation is far more than a linguistic activity, it is a crucial tool for cultural mediation, intellectual exchange, and literary modernisation. Historically, translation has preserved and transmitted knowledge across civilizations, from the Arab translations of Indian and Greek texts to the Renaissance in Europe, and within India, from Sanskrit to regional languages like Malayalam.

Modern Translation Studies views translation as an interdisciplinary field that bridges languages, cultures, and societies, emphasising socio-cultural context, accuracy, and ethical responsibility. Translators serve as cultural mediators, navigating ecological, social, technological, ideological, and aesthetic domains (Pinchuk's five pillars) to faithfully convey meaning. In media and literature, translation ensures rapid, accurate communication, introduces new literary genres, and enriches cultural identity. Literary translation, especially poetry, poses unique challenges requiring careful attention to form, symbolism, and aesthetic effect. Overall, translation sustains human knowledge, fosters cross-cultural understanding, and acts as a historical and social agent of change.



Assignment

Short Questions:

1. Define translation and explain its etymological origin.
2. What is meant by “sense-for-sense” and “word-for-word” translation?
3. Mention two major contributions of the Abbasid Translation Movement.
4. What does *Anekāntavāda* contribute to modern translation theory?
5. Who was St. Jerome, and why is his work important in translation history?
6. Briefly describe the “Vernacular Renaissance” in medieval India.

Essay Questions:

1. Trace the evolution of translation from ancient civilizations to the modern era.
2. Discuss the influence of the Bible on the development of Western translation theory.
3. Evaluate the Indian translation tradition and its contribution to multilingual literary culture.
4. Discuss the philosophical and linguistic challenges of achieving equivalence in translation.
5. Analyze the impact of globalization and digital technology on contemporary translation practices.

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Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Problems of equivalence and translability- source language and target language

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ❖ understand the inherent challenges of translating across linguistically and culturally different languages
- ❖ explain the concept of translatability and its limitations in literary and technical texts
- ❖ identify the essential qualities and skills required for an effective translator
- ❖ understand the principles of Target Language-focused translation and functional equivalence.
- ❖ recognize the role and limitations of machine translation in contemporary translation practice.

Background

Translation is not merely the conversion of words from one language to another. It is a complex intellectual activity where the translator navigates differences in linguistic structure, culture, and worldview between the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL). No two languages are identical, making word-for-word translation often impossible. Translators must achieve equivalence and functional communication while negotiating cultural, philosophical, and technical differences. This unit examines translation theories, equivalence, translatability, and the attributes of an excellent translator, including practical approaches for literary, scientific, and technical translation.

Some words, especially those tied to culture or philosophy like the Sanskrit term *Dharma*, cannot be fully captured by a single word in another language. Translators must decide what is most important to convey and sometimes change the form of the text to make it clear and meaningful in the TL. This approach, called a TL-focused or functional translation, prioritises the reader's understanding over strictly copying the original form, allowing the translator to deliver the intended meaning accurately while adapting to cultural and linguistic differences



Keywords

Source Language (SL), Target Language (TL), Equivalence (Formal & Dynamic), Translatability, Sense-for-sense translation, Functional translation, Conceptual priority, Cultural adaptation, Pragmatic choice, Fidelity, Accuracy, Simplicity

Discussion

Attributes of the Excellent Translator

- ◆ Translation, once considered an exclusive art requiring rare talent, is now recognized as a skill

Translation is often considered an art, implying that only those with exceptional innate talent can be truly successful. The Sanskrit adage, 'Dvitrāyeva kavayaḥ: Dvitrāṇyevya kāvyāni' (meaning that since there are only two or three excellent poets, there are only two or three excellent poems), is often invoked to suggest the rarity of both great artists and great translations.

However, while this principle may apply most directly to literary translation, translation is now a pervasive process across all spheres of knowledge and intellectual discourse. In the current era, where translation is a curriculum subject and an applied discipline in most universities and cultural/political sectors, it is widely accepted as a skill that can be cultivated through diligent effort in addition to natural aptitude.

Essential Qualities of a Competent Translator

- ◆ A competent translator must have strong proficiency in both the source and target languages, with mastery

The single most crucial attribute of an excellent translator is proficiency in both the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL). While translating from a foreign language into one's mother tongue is the most natural and common tendency, the translator's command over the target language is arguably more important than their knowledge of the SL.

Subject Expertise

- ◆ A translator must have specialized subject knowledge to accurately convey complex scientific, technical, or socio-cultural content.

A general academic background is insufficient for a translator. Language is used to articulate a vast array of specialised subjects, particularly in science and technology, which utilise highly specific terminology and phrases. A translator with only general scientific knowledge would find it extremely difficult to competently translate a text in a highly specialised sub-discipline (e.g., Astrophysics). Similarly, in contemporary literature, a person interested only in general fiction might struggle to penetrate the deeper socio-cultural nuances of texts related to environmentalism, Dalit studies, or feminism.



Mental Agility and Resourcefulness

A quality essential for a superior translator is presence of mind or resourcefulness (Pratyutpannamatitvam). This involves the ability to swiftly grasp context and adapt the translation style accordingly. This skill is typically acquired through long practice, extensive experience, and profound, wide-ranging reading, which builds the necessary vocabulary. An open mind and a commitment to continuous learning are vital for acquiring new knowledge.

- ◆ A superior translator requires mental agility, resourcefulness, and diligent effort content.

Ultimately, diligence is key. The greater the effort invested, the greater the elegance and precision achieved in the translation. Success in translation often demands a willingness to labour, with the search for the appropriate equivalent term sometimes requiring days of dedicated investigation and reflection.

Clarity of Purpose and Meticulousness

Another crucial objective for the translator is to understand the purpose of the source text. This can be discerned by analysing the subject matter and the author's approach.

- ◆ A competent translator must clearly understand the source text's purpose and exercise

Furthermore, a translator must exercise utmost caution and meticulousness. Once a translation is published, errors are often impossible to correct. The translator must ensure that all 'finishing touches' are complete before releasing the work.

The Translation Process and Contextual Requirements

The methodology of translation must evolve with the times. While past translations should not be automatically invalidated, their appropriateness can be scrutinised.

- ◆ Translation methodology must adapt to context and subject, ensuring accuracy and objectivity

In fields such as governance, economics, law, and science, translations must be objective and accurate. The information conveyed must not contain any exaggeration or hyperbole. The standards applicable to government or informational advertising where exaggeration is unacceptable, unlike in the marketing of consumer goods should be applied here. In these contexts, word-for-word translation is not the goal; rather, the translation must be rational and logical. The general principles of translation, which involve dividing the process into levels of sense, script, word, and meaning, must be carefully considered by the translator.

In technical fields like Physics, Chemistry, and Engineering, texts must be translated factually and faithfully to the source text to ensure they maintain their status as authoritative scientific works.

Translation is an intellectual pursuit where the subtle workings of human intellect are reflected in the translator's choices. Scholars like



J.C. Catford and Eugene Nida have significantly explored the nature of the translation process. Catford argues that the translator decodes the ideas of the original work and subsequently re-encodes them into the target language, which is then verbally or textually reproduced.

Technical Terminology and Diachronic Change

In the realm of technical terminology, a fixed form of translation is often mandatory. For example, the technical term ‘acid’ is usually translated as ‘Amlam’. However, translating ‘switch’ as ‘Vaidyutāgamaninigamananiyantranayantram’ (a literal, cumbersome phrase for an “instrument for the control of coming and going of electricity”) is impractical. Moreover, some translated technical terms may become obsolete over time; for instance, the term ‘Thachushāsthri’ was once used to translate ‘engineer’ but has fallen out of contemporary usage. A translator must be aware of these diachronic shifts.

- ◆ Translators must use fixed, practical equivalents for technical terms/content.

Translation Theories: Foundational Principles

The first formal theory of translation was presented by the French scholar Étienne Dolet in the sixteenth century (c. AD 1540). He proposed the famous Five Principles of Translation:

- ◆ Understand the content of the source text.
- ◆ Be proficient in both the source and target languages.
- ◆ Avoid translating ‘word-for-word’.
- ◆ Use common, everyday language.
- ◆ Produce the target text in an eloquent and harmonious style.

Dolet’s principles were primarily Target Language-oriented, emphasising the need for the translation to align with the original’s intent, the translator’s linguistic mastery, the avoidance of literalism, and the use of contemporary language.

Following Dolet, Alexander Fraser Tytler, in his Essay on the Principles of Translation (1791), argued that translation must accurately follow the original work, striving to retain the style and ideas of the source text. His theory prioritised Fidelity, Clarity, and Elegance.

Major Western Translation Theories

Further significant translation theories developed in the West include:

Theory	Proponent	Core Principle	Limitation
The Theory of Scholar's Satisfaction	Matthew Arnold	A translation's function is to reproduce the effect of the original work. It is deemed successful only if it satisfies scholars who are proficient in Greek and have literary taste, as they alone are qualified to judge the quality of the translation (expressed in <i>On Translating Homer</i>).	The consensus of scholars is not guaranteed, leaving open the question of whose opinion should prevail.
Touchstone Theory	Matthew Arnold	The translation must be compared directly against the original form of a classic work to assess its quality.	This approach inevitably favours the Source Language and its inherent norms.
Archaising/ Alienating Translation	F. W. Newman	The translator must retain every peculiarity of the source text (the original), believing that the more 'foreign' the translation appears, the more desirable it is. This was a common Victorian-era theory.	The rigid insistence on retaining the SL's context and epoch (e.g., using 16th-century Malayalam for a Shakespeare translation) is impractical and limits accessibility.

- ◆ Western translation theories emphasize reproducing the original's effect or form but often face practical limitations in accessibility and audience relevance.

- ◆ Translation equivalence seeks to create a corresponding target text for the source text

Translation Equivalence

Given that a perfect, precise correspondence between any two languages is impossible, particularly at the lexical level, the con-



cept of translation equivalence becomes central. The primary goal of translation is to establish this equivalence, which involves creating a corresponding target text for the source text. Techniques like the substitution test (replacing an SL word or phrase with its closest TL equivalent) are helpful in this search.

Translation Equivalence: Formal Fidelity vs. Functional Effect

The concept of translation equivalence addresses the crucial question of what is preserved, and what is necessarily lost, when transferring a message from a Source Language (SL) to a Target Language (TL). This concept is broadly categorised into two main viewpoints, defined by their allegiance either to the form of the original text or to the effect it produces on the new audience.

1. Formal Equivalence (Focus on Form and Structure)

Formal Equivalence is the primary, though often primitive, tendency in translation, where the translator seeks a TL segment that corresponds as closely as possible to the form and structure of the SL segment. This approach aims for the highest degree of structural fidelity. It involves conscientious attempts to preserve the SL's original word choice, sentence structure, metre, and figures and figures of speech of the SL, frequently resulting in literal, word-for-word, or sentence-by-sentence translation. The underlying assumption is that the meaning is inextricably bound to the form.

A major pitfall of this approach is that the SL's culture is often directly transplanted into the TL, which can lead to confusion, unnaturalness, or outright incomprehension for the target audience. The formality of the original may be preserved, but its function is lost. For example, translating the biblical greeting "Greet one another with a holy kiss" literally into Malayalam might confuse a contemporary reader unless accompanied by a footnote explaining the historical and cultural context of the greeting. Similarly, in Malayalam serials based on the Rāmāyaṇa or Mahābhārata, the use of hyper-formal address terms like Kaniṣṭha Sahodarā (younger brother) often feels culturally alien and archaic to the modern vernacular ear, even though it strictly mirrors the Sanskrit register.

1.1. Formal Equivalence in Sanskrit

Formal equivalence, when applied to Sanskrit, often results in texts that are grammatically correct in English but syntactically stilted and aesthetically poor.

Syntax Preservation: Sanskrit often employs the Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order, a literal translation might preserve this, making the English awkward. The phrase पुस्तकेन ज्ञानम् अधिगम्यते (pustak-

- ♦ Formal equivalence focuses on preserving the original text's form and structure

- ♦ Formal equivalence in Sanskrit often produces grammatically correct but awkward English translations that fail to capture idiomatic meaning and cultural nuances.



ena jñānam adhigamyate - knowledge is obtained by book) would be rendered formally as: “By-book knowledge is-obtained,” preserving the instrumental case and verb placement but violating natural English word order.

Compound Words (Samāsa): Formal translation attempts to retain the unity of Sanskrit compounds. For example, गजानना (Gajānana, an epithet for Ganesha) is literally “Elephant-Face.” A formal translation might use “Elephant-faced one” but still fails to convey the idiomatic reverence and cultural fluidity of the single, unified term.

2. Dynamic Equivalence (Focus on Effect and Naturalness)

- ◆ Dynamic equivalence focuses on conveying the original text’s meaning naturally

Dynamic Equivalence (or Functional Equivalence), a concept championed by Eugene Nida, prioritises the message and the naturalness of the TL. Its central goal is to achieve an effect on the TL reader that is essentially the same as the effect the original text had on the SL reader, often at the expense of adhering to the SL’s original grammatical or lexical structure. This approach is favoured for ensuring the translation is accessible, readable, and culturally relevant to the target audience. It is, therefore, a sense-for-sense translation that strives for maximum communicative success.

2.1. Dynamic Equivalence in Sanskrit

- ◆ Dynamic equivalence in Sanskrit translation prioritizes conveying meaning and cultural nuance naturally in the target language

Applying dynamic equivalence involves substituting SL forms and idioms with functionally equivalent TL forms and idioms, ensuring that the reader focuses on the meaning rather than the linguistic form.

Idiomatic Equivalence: The Sanskrit idiom मुखे अग्निः प्रज्वलितः (mukhe agniḥ prajvalitaḥ - literally: fire is kindled in the mouth) means the person is intensely angry. A dynamic translation would use the functionally equivalent English idiom: “He was burning with fury” or “His anger flared up,” completely abandoning the literal image of fire in the mouth to convey the intended emotion naturally.

Cultural Equivalence: When translating the term पितृलोक (pitṛloka - the realm of the ancestors), a formal equivalent would be “ancestral world.” A dynamic equivalent, especially in a narrative context, might be rendered as “Heaven” or “the celestial abode,” as these terms better convey the spiritual and functional reverence for the afterlife realm to a contemporary, non-specialist audience.

Syntactic Restructuring: The formally translated “By-book knowledge is-obtained” is dynamically rendered as: “Knowledge is gained through books,” which naturally adjusts the Sanskrit syntax to the active, readable structures of English, making the text functionally seamless.



In essence, while formal equivalence seeks fidelity to the word, dynamic equivalence seeks fidelity to the reader's experience. The choice between the two fundamentally defines the translator's ethical position: to serve the source text or the target audience.

Potential Pitfalls and Essential Qualities in Translation

- ◆ Translation is a demanding task requiring the translator to convey the source text's conceptual universe

The act of translation carries a unique burden, likened by Vedic poets to naming creations: the translator must retrieve and re-express an existing conceptual universe without diminishing its gravity or essence. Unlike the creative freedom of an original author, the translator must constrain their own ingenuity within the conceptual boundaries set by the source text, making the endeavour inherently challenging.

Hazards of Inadequate Translation

- ◆ Scientific and technical translation demands high precision.

While it is often assumed that technical or scientific translation is less challenging than literary translation since it lacks emotional or subjective elements this is a misconception. Scientific translation requires unwavering conceptual precision; a lack of care can render the translated text more complex and obscure than the original.

Criteria for Model Translation

- ◆ A model translation must be simple, accurate, and idiomatically natural

A model translation, regardless of its type, must adhere to three fundamental qualities:

- ◆ **Simplicity (Sâralyam):** The language must be as plain as possible, avoiding grandiloquent sentences, compound words (samasta padams), and excessive punctuation. Complex concepts should be conveyed through simple sentences to ensure the language does not impede understanding.
- ◆ **Accuracy (Exactness):** This demands the use of authorised or established terminology and strict fidelity to the source's meaning.
- ◆ **Idiomatic Compatibility (Bhâṣayude Genius):** The translation must possess the flavour and character of the Target Language (TL), ensuring the reader receives the work as if it were originally composed in that language.

The Risk of Affectation

- ◆ Translators must avoid over-stylizing or inflating the text, ensuring clarity and faithful transfer

Translators often err by attempting to compensate for a perceived lack of literary standing (or, conversely, overestimating their own literary skill) by translating scientific works in an overly stylistic or 'literary' language. This results in an affected, opaque style. For example, rendering "Why are you worried, Hanuman?" as the overly ornate "What are the lines of thought upon your blessed face, mighty



Hanuman?” is risible. As M.P. Paul observed, ostentation in language, like ostentation in dress, is often a sign of hollowness. The duty of an effective translator is to control expressive nuances and transfer the author’s intent without inflation or diminution.

The Translator’s Essential Scholarship

A successful translator must possess extensive scholarship across four critical areas:

- ♦ A competent translator must combine deep subject knowledge, thorough understanding of both source and target languages.

- ♦ **Subject Knowledge (Viṣayabôdham):** A fundamental understanding of the subject matter is crucial. This knowledge safeguards the translator from introducing semantic changes or losses and ensures that the source author’s intent is not inverted. Failures in this area, such as the widely ridiculed errors in Nalappattu Narayana Menon’s translation of Edwin Arnold’s *Light of Asia*, highlight the dangers of inadequate subject expertise.
- ♦ **Knowledge of the Vocabulary of TL (Svabhâṣâpadabôdham):** The translator must understand not only the dictionary definition of a word but also its broader literary and contextual connotations in the TL. For instance, in Kumāran Āśān’s *Cintāviṣṭayāya Sīta*, the word *muḍi* literally means ‘hair’ but contextually functions as ‘authority’ or ‘power’, a nuance the translator must grasp.
- ♦ **SL Familiarity (Mûlabhâṣâparicayam):** Expertise in the source language is foundational.
- ♦ **TL Idiomatic Familiarity (Svabhâṣâûailîparicayam):** Mastery of TL idioms and style is paramount. Without a firm grip on the TL’s syntax and idioms, the translation will be counterproductive. Appropriateness (*aucityam*) must guide the translator’s choices at all times.

- ♦ Dynamic equivalence emphasizes creating in the target reader, prioritizing naturalness and cultural appropriateness over literal form.

Dynamic Equivalence and the Principles of Good Translation

The discussion now shifts to dynamic equivalence, a translation concept that prioritises the reader’s response over the linguistic form and concludes with a set of universally accepted principles for effective translation.

Dynamic Equivalence (or Principle of Equivalent Effect)

Dynamic equivalence posits that a successful translation should aim to produce a response or effect in the contemporary target reader that is substantially the same as the one the original text produced in its contemporary readers. The proponent of this view, Professor E.V. Rieu argues that this method, executed with complete naturalness and fitting the cultural context of the Target Language (TL), represents the highest possible form of translation



Cultural Adaptation

Dynamic equivalence allows significant cultural adaptation. For example, the Biblical phrase ‘Greet one another with a holy kiss’ has been translated not just literally (formal equivalence) but also dynamically in various cultural contexts, such as ‘shake hands warmly with each other’ or ‘give one another a hearty handshake all around’. This demonstrates the dynamic shift in the form of the text to align with prevailing cultural norms of greeting. Scholar William A. Cooper describes dynamic equivalence as “translation from one culture into another culture.”

Limitations

- ◆ Dynamic equivalence is limited by the impossibility of precisely measuring the original audience’s response and the variability of literary reception across time.

However, dynamic equivalence has inherent limitations:

- ◆ **Impossibility of Exact Measurement:** It is impossible to definitively know or measure the precise effect that ancient epics (e.g., Rāmāyaṇa or Mahābhārata) had on their original audiences. Any claim of equivalent effect is therefore based on conjecture.
- ◆ **Variability of Literary Reception:** Literary works are interpreted and appreciated differently across different historical periods. The desired “equivalent effect” itself is thus a fluid and speculative concept.

Formal vs. Dynamic Equivalence: A Continuum

Formal and dynamic equivalence represent two distinct, often conflicting, tendencies in translation.

Formal Equivalence (or ‘Sūkshma Vivartanam’ as termed by Kesarī Krishnapillai) adheres to a word-for-word or sentence-for-sentence structure, prioritising the form of the Source Language (SL) text. This approach is most appropriate for objective texts like government circulars, scientific papers, technical specifications, and legal agreements, and it is the domain where machine translation is most effective.

Dynamic Equivalence prioritises the content and a recreation of the idea/culture, free from the formal constraints of the source text.

The Problem of Literalism

Strict formal equivalence often results in translations that are inaccessible or even counterproductive. For instance, Nalappattu Narayana Menon’s translation of Les Misérables was criticised for faithfully reproducing the foreign French culture, thus alienating the Malayalam reader. This literalist approach, historically linked to religious translations (due to the superstition that altering the structure of sacred texts was sacrilegious), often fails when translating idioms.

- ◆ Formal equivalence focuses on preserving the source text’s form and structure

- ◆ Strict literalism can make translations awkward or misleading, failing to convey idiomatic meaning or cultural context to the target audience.



A word-for-word translation cannot convey idiomatic sense: ‘Touch me not’ does not mean literally ‘do not touch me’ but refers to a sensitive plant (toṭṭāvāṭi). A translator must recognise the nuances of phrases like ‘daughter-in-law’ or the verb ‘call’ (which means more than just a literal summons).

Subcategories of Dynamic Equivalence

Kesari further divided dynamic equivalence into ‘free’ (svatantram) and ‘essential conformity’ (tatvānuṛūpam). Professor S. Gupthan Nair referred to these as ‘free translation’ and ‘recreation’, respectively, a distinction particularly relevant to the translation of poetry.

In conceptual translation, the translator enjoys greater freedom to interpret and adapt the ideas, often according to their own style, to merely express the general concept. Scholar N. V. Krishna Warriar suggested a pragmatic, context-dependent approach:

- ◆ For emotional works, where form is as important as content, a sense-for-sense or paragraph-by-paragraph translation is often preferable to word-for-word fidelity.
- ◆ The language of the translation should be adjusted to suit the nature of the original (e.g., for sublime, archaic, or colloquial works).
- ◆ For thought-oriented works, a word-for-word translation (formal equivalence) might be more appropriate.

N. E. Viswanatha Iyer summarised the ideal: translation should achieve a complete re-rendering of the source text’s ideas, with the style and method of the translation being equivalent to the original, and the fluidity of the SL fully captured.

General Principles of Effective Translation

Based on the preceding theories, a set of general, commonly accepted principles of good translation emerge:

- ◆ Preserve the fundamental structure of the source text.
- ◆ Avoid distorting the philosophy or intent of the source text.
- ◆ Translate all relevant segments of the source text comprehensively.
- ◆ Fully grasp the meaning and idea of the source text but express it in the native style of the Target Language.
- ◆ In inter-language exchanges of the same family, retain SL word-bonds where possible.

- ◆ Dynamic equivalence can be “free” or “essentially conforming,” with the choice of approach

- ◆ Effective translation requires faithfully conveying the source text’s meaning, intent, and structure



Maintaining Form and Structure

- ◆ A translation should preserve the original text's form and structure, though modern adaptations

The structure of the source text should not be radically altered. For example, a novel should be translated as a novel, a play as a play, and a poem as a poem. Early Malayalam translations sometimes violated this; for instance, Kallur Umman Philippos's *Almarattam* (a translation of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*) was widely criticised for acquiring the character of a novel. Modern practice, however, employs adaptation to intentionally change the form of a work (e.g., turning a novel into a film).

Fidelity to the Source's Vision

- ◆ A translator must faithfully convey the original work's philosophy or vision

The philosophy or vision of the original work must not be overturned. This occurs when the translator fails to grasp the author's true intent. For example, O. N. V. Kurup's poem *Bhumikkoru Charamageetham* (A Requiem for Earth) begins: '\$\text{{Iniyum marikkātta bhūmi, ninnāsanna mṛtiyil ninakkātma śānti}}\$' (Earth, which has not yet died, peace be to your soul in your impending death...). The poem's ecological distress suggests the poet's sadness that no one will be left to write a requiem once the Earth has died. A dangerous misinterpretation occurs if this environmental philosophy is missed, and the line is translated to suggest, "Hasn't the Earth died yet?"

Completeness and Ideational Integrity

- ◆ A translator must ensure completeness and preserve the original text's ideational integrity

No relevant parts of the original text should be omitted. The translator must avoid ideational theft. While some dispensable elements may be omitted to maintain the work's organic structure (e.g., Ezhuthachan omitting *Silāvati Charitam* and *Hariśchandra Charitam* from his *Mahābhārata* due to the Bhakti tenets of the movement, without reducing the work's overall excellence), nothing that compromises the integrity of the work should be altered.

Embracing Target Language Style

- ◆ A translator must convey the source text's meaning while fully adapting to the target language style and idiomatic norms

Fully grasping the meaning and idea necessarily involves considering the SL's style and linguistic peculiarities, but the TL expression must adhere to its own style and grammar. Translating the word 'vaḷḷam' (a small boat) from Chemmeen as 'boat' in English is necessary, even though in the TL, a 'boat' might imply a motor-assisted vessel. However, a literal phrase like 'Oh! my gold pot' for 'enre ponnunkudame' (my darling) becomes ridiculous. Similarly, an early translation mistook the idiom 'rain cats and dogs' for a literal image of "rain falling as cats and dogs," instead of the correct stylistic equivalent, "korichoriyunna mazha" (it is raining heavily).

Same-Language Group Translation

When translating between languages of the same family (e.g., Dravidian languages), the translator should, where possible, retain



- ◆ When translating within the same language family, original words may be retained if their meanings align

original words that are common to the language group and have not undergone significant semantic change (e.g., *pon*, *nāle*, *uḍal*). However, caution is required, as some common words have diverged in meaning:

- ◆ The Dravidian word *samsâram* means wife in Tamil but conversation/matter in Malayalam.
- ◆ The verb *kazhikkuka* means to eat or marry (*kalyanam kazhiku-ka*) in Malayalam but means to excrete in Tamil. Consequently, *kaḷippiḍam* is a toilet, not a restaurant, in Tamil.

- ◆ Translation has enabled Malayalam literature to reach a global audience, highlighting its cultural significance and creative richness.

Media Translation and the Rise of Machine Translation

This section explores the translation of Malayalam literature and the growing significance of machine translation in contemporary communication, particularly in rapid-response environments.

Translation of Malayalam Literature

Malayalam literature has achieved significant recognition through translation, making its creative output accessible to a global audience.

- ◆ Institutions have facilitated the global reach of Malayalam literature through key translations of plays and poetry.

Key Literary Translations

Several institutions and individuals have played a crucial role in this cultural transfer:

- ◆ The Kerala Sahitya Akademi has published compilations such as *Selected One-Act Plays* and *Malayalam Poetry Today*, introducing readers to Malayalam theatre and verse.
- ◆ Thunchath Ezhuthachan Malayalam University has also contributed by translating key creative works into English.

- ◆ Major Malayalam literary works have been widely translated by various scholars extending the reach of regional literature globally.

Notable Works and Translators

Several masterpieces of Malayalam fiction have been translated into numerous languages, most notably Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Chemmeen*, which holds the distinction of being the most translated Malayalam work. Other significant translations include:

- ◆ O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha* (translated by W. Dumergue, R. Leeladevi, and Anita Devasia).
- ◆ Thakazhi's *Kayar* (N. Sreekantan Nair).
- ◆ Kesavadev's *Odayil Ninnu* (E.M.J. Venniyoor).
- ◆ P. Kesavadev's *Ayalkkar* (P.K. Raveendranath).
- ◆ Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's works, including *Ntuppuppakko-ranendarnnu*, *Balyakalasakhi*, and *Pathumma's Goat* (translated



by R. E. Asher), and Mântrikkappûcca (N. Kunchu).

- ♦ S. K. Pottekatt's Vishakanyaka (V. Abdulla).
- ♦ Kovilan's A Minus B (N. Kunchu).
- ♦ Uroob's Ammini (Susheela Misra).
- ♦ V. K. N. 's Aarohanam (self-translated).
- ♦ M. T. Vasudevan Nair's Manju and Asuravithu (V. Abdulla).
- ♦ P. K. Balakrishnan's Ini Njan Urangatte (K. C. Sarasamma).
- ♦ Lalithambika Antharjanam's Agnisakshi (Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan).
- ♦ Madampu Kunjukuttan's Aswathamavu (Prema Menon).
- ♦ O. V. Vijayan's Khasakkinte Ithihasam and Dharmapuranam (self-translated).

♦ Machine Translation, driven by computer programs, has become essential in media and time-sensitive fields

♦ Machine Translation, pioneered by Smirnov-Troyanski in 1933 evolved to become a vital tool in media, conferences, and multilingual administration.

Machine Translation and the New Media Culture

The core objective of communication is the accurate and rapid transfer of information. In the media sector and other time-sensitive domains, delayed information loses its value. This urgent demand for speed highlights the importance of Machine Translation (MT). MT, or Computer Translation, is a process driven by computer programs.

History and Development of MT

The concept of MT was first championed by the Russian inventor Smirnov-Troyanski, who sought a patent for such a machine in 1933. The first successful MT demonstration took place in 1954, when linguists at Georgetown University (USA), with the assistance of IBM, translated 250 Russian words. This initial effort was motivated by the desire to decode Russian secrets during the Cold War. By the 1970s, MT became prevalent in Europe, facilitating translations of various subjects between French, English, and other European languages. Today, MT is indispensable in media, international conferences, and multilingual government administration.

The MT Process

Machine translation relies on pre-programmed linguistic data. The process involves:

- ♦ Software Development: Creating the necessary MT software (historically using programming languages like COBOL and Pascal).
- ♦ Input: Feeding the SL text into the computer's input unit.



♦ Machine Translation operates by processing source text through software that applies bilingual dictionaries, grammatical rules, and syntactic structures

♦ Machine Translation excels in precise, formulaic texts but struggles with literary nuance, aim to bridge the inherent gaps between source and target languages.

- ♦ Processing: The system processes the text based on its stored linguistic knowledge.
- ♦ Output: The translated text is delivered as output in the TL.

The software must incorporate bilingual dictionaries, grammatical rules, syntactic structures, and idiomatic expressions. The system works by analysing each sentence, dissecting words, identifying their root forms (by separating prefixes and suffixes), and then using the programmed structure of these root forms to construct the corresponding TL sentence.

Limitations and Future Direction

MT is highly effective for translating sentences with precise, unambiguous vocabulary, making it suitable for scientific texts and, to an extent, simultaneous speech. However, it has yet to fully succeed with creative literary works because literature is often denotatively rich and contextually nuanced.

A classic example illustrating this challenge is the Russian phrase meaning “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”, which, when translated via early MT systems and back-translated, reportedly became “The vodka is agreeable, but the meat has been spoiled.”

Such errors necessitate a vital step in the MT workflow: Pre-editing and post-editing. Simple, formulaic sentence structures are often used as input, and the resulting translated text must be meticulously edited by human TL experts to correct semantic and stylistic errors.

Despite these limitations, significant progress is being made. Institutions such as the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore are actively developing sophisticated MT programmes for Indian languages, successfully creating software for English-Hindi translation and working to connect other vernaculars.

The fundamental challenge in translation stems from the inherent tension between the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL), specifically in achieving equivalence and establishing the limits of translatability. No two languages are identical in their structures, semantics, or cultural encoding, making perfect equivalence a precise replication of the SL text in the TL an impossible ideal. The translator must navigate this gap by constantly mediating between the linguistic features of the SL and the communicative needs and cultural norms of the TL.

Equivalence in Scientific and Technical Translation

The debate over equivalence shifts drastically when moving from literary or creative translation to Scientific and Technical



Translation. Here, the translator's freedom is significantly curtailed. The primary goal is not stylistic recreation, but absolute, unambiguous precision in transferring intellectual content.

- ◆ In Scientific and Technical Translation, precision and terminological consistency are paramount

In this domain, the translator is often restricted to word-for-word or sentence-by-sentence methods, particularly for terminology. This rigidity is necessary to ensure that the intellectual value of the SL term, its denotation, its fixed position in a classification system, or its agreed-upon measurement is transferred to the TL with absolute precision and conciseness. If a medical term or an engineering specification is translated freely, the result can be catastrophic, leading to technical failure or misdiagnosis. The required equivalence here is referential and terminological, demanding meticulous consistency. The problem of non-equivalence arises when an SL technical concept is utterly new to the TL culture (e.g., a specific legal term or a newly invented component), forcing the translator to either borrow the term, create a new TL neologism, or provide an elaborate definition, thus highlighting the inherent limitations of translatability when facing technological gaps.

The Problem of Translatability: Overarching Principles

The concept of translatability addresses the degree to which a text can be rendered across a linguistic barrier. While everything is, in theory, translatable (if one accepts the use of lengthy explanations), in practice, translatability is constrained by pragmatic concerns. To manage this constraint and achieve effective communication, several overarching principles guide the translator's ethical and stylistic choices:

1. Conceptual Priority over Form

In the translation process, the core ideas and concepts must take precedence over the style or word order, which are inherently secondary. The SL's formal features (its syntax, rhythm, and local imagery) are transient properties that must be sacrificed if they impede the transfer of conceptual meaning. The problem of translatability often centres on connotation: while the denotation (literal meaning) of a word might be transferred, its connotation (implied or associated meaning) is often rooted in the SL culture. Prioritising the concept ensures that the core message survives, even if the poetic device that conveyed it in the SL must be abandoned.

- ◆ In translation, conceptual meaning must take precedence over form, with style and word order

2. Target Language Focus (Domesticating the Text)

The effective translator must prioritise the linguistic style and cultural norms of the TL. This principle dictates that the final product must feel natural and comprehensible to the target reader. Literal translation of idioms or rigid adherence to SL syntax and style is



- ◆ Effective translation requires prioritising the target language style and cultural norms

inappropriate because it imposes the source culture’s communicative habits onto the target culture, a practice known as foreignisation. By focusing on the TL, the translator domesticates the text, ensuring that expressions like “It is raining cats and dogs” are replaced by the TL’s natural equivalent, regardless of the SL’s literal expression. The problem here is that excessive domestication risks erasing the foreignness of the original, a challenge particularly acute when translating ancient texts that embody radically different worldviews.

3. Pragmatic Choice and Functional Equivalence

- ◆ The translator must make pragmatic, context-driven choices, using sense-for-sense or functional

Ultimately, the translator must always make a pragmatic choice based on the communication goal. When a literal or sentence-by-sentence translation proves awkward, unnatural, or misleading, a sense-for-sense or conceptual rendering is the most effective and pragmatic choice. This principle aligns with functional equivalence, aiming for the TT to function in the TL context in the same way the ST functioned in the SL context. For instance, translating the Sanskrit concept of Dharma literally as ‘duty’ is inadequate. The pragmatic choice is to use a definition or a functional equivalent like ‘righteous conduct’ or ‘cosmic order’ depending on the surrounding context, acknowledging that no single TL word provides absolute equivalence. This pragmatic decision-making is the translator’s final answer to the intractable problem of perfect translatability.

Summarised Overview

Translation is a multifaceted process requiring linguistic expertise, cultural sensitivity, and intellectual agility. Perfect equivalence between two languages is impossible; the translator must navigate between fidelity to the source and clarity for the target reader. Formal equivalence preserves structure and words, while dynamic equivalence focuses on meaning and reader response. Effective translation prioritizes conceptual clarity, cultural adaptation, and pragmatic decision-making. Both literary and technical translations demand rigorous subject knowledge, linguistic competence, and methodological precision. The translator acts as a mediator, balancing the demands of the SL and TL, ensuring that the target text communicates the intended message while respecting cultural and linguistic norms.



Assignment

Short Questions:

1. Define translation equivalence and explain its importance.
2. What is the difference between formal and dynamic equivalence?
3. Why is word-for-word translation often inadequate?
4. What are the limitations of machine translation?

Essay Questions:

1. Discuss the challenges a translator faces when translating culture-specific terms. Provide examples from literary or technical texts.
2. Explain the principles of dynamic equivalence and its application in contemporary translation.
3. Describe the essential attributes of a competent translator and explain how these qualities affect the quality of translation.
4. Examine the role of machine translation in modern communication and its limitations.
5. Discuss the concept of functional equivalence and the translator's ethical responsibility in achieving it.

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Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

BLOCK-02

Sanskrit and translation culture in India

Block Content

- Unit 1: Translation in India- Indian theories of aesthetics and translation
- Unit 2: Contribution of Western scholars in Sanskrit translation--Sir William Johns (1789)- Charles Wilkinson (1784)- their translations of Sanskrit texts
- Unit 3: Sanskrit prose in translation- problems in translating Kadambari in English- sEnglish Translation of Arthasastra,
- Unit 4: Translations of Sanskrit works in other Indian languages





A brief history of translation

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ❖ Understand India's Multi-lingual translating tradition
- ❖ Analyze the role of translation in cultural exchange
- ❖ Evaluate Indian theories of translation
- ❖ Apply Rasa theory to translation practice
- ❖ Examine the role of Dhvani (suggestion) in translation

Background

In the Western tradition, The word 'translate' comes from the Latin 'translatio' where 'trans' means across and 'latus' means carrying; the word thus means the carrying across of meaning from one language to the other. The various Indian language words for translation do not convey this meaning. Anuvad (speak after), bhāṣāntar (linguistics transference, tarjjama (reproduction), rūpāntar (change of form), vivartanam(change), mozhimātam(change of speech)-what P. Lal, one of India's well-known translators, has described as 'transcreation'. This is a process whereby the translation, rather than a docile transference of meaning from one linguistic system to the other, becomes a retelling by the translator in another language. So this implies that our basic concept of translation was different, and we need to explore if this is because classical Indian critical theories conceptualized it differently.

Sanskrit, a classical language of India, has profoundly influenced the translation culture within the country. Its rich literary and philosophical heritage has been a major source for translations into other Indian languages and even European languages. This translation activity has played a crucial role in preserving and disseminating knowledge, religious beliefs, and cultural values across different linguistic and geographical boundaries.

Keywords

Multi-lingual country, translating consciousness, medieval period, Baburnama, Bilingualism, British colonization, Bible translation, equivalence, Sanskrit aesthetics, Aurobindo.



Discussion

2.1.1. Translation in India

India is a multi-lingual country and has always remained so. There are two major language families in India-the Indo-Aryan and the Dravidian. The most ancient of the Dravidian languages is Tamil, the others being Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam which evolved later than Tamil. The major Indian languages of today derive from either of the two groups, and sometimes two Indian languages might not have many linguistic traits in common. For example, translation from Hindi to Malayalam means that translation is between two languages that are radically different although they belong to the same region called India. But despite this diversity, we can safely state that Indian languages own a shared sensibility, partly derived from the common heritage of Sanskrit and from ancient theories of literature and language.

- ◆ The two distinct language families of India are Indo-Aryan and Dravidian.

In ancient India, Sanskrit was the dominant language, especially in the northern region. It was used primarily for literature, philosophy, and religious rites. However, languages like Prākṛit, Pāli, and Apabhramśa served as the languages of the common people. Even in Sanskrit plays, such as those of Kālidāsa, it was common for women and lower caste/class characters to speak in Prākṛit or dialects like Sauraseni and Magadhi. It was normal and acceptable to change from one dialect into another or one language into another in the course of the same text. G.N. Devy, in his book *In Another Tongue: Essays on Indian English Literature*, highlights India's long history of bilingual and multilingual literary practices. He observes that the ability to move between languages, such as Sanskrit and Prākṛit in the same play, shows how naturally Indians accepted bilingual literary production. Devy calls this phenomenon India's "translating consciousness," meaning that Indian literature has always been shaped by translation and code-switching, making linguistic plurality a natural feature of Indian culture.

- ◆ Languages like Prākṛit, Pāli, and Apabhramśa served as the languages of the common people

As India entered into the medieval period, the influence of Sanskrit declined. The various invasions during this period also brought with them different cultural and linguistic influences. Persian became the dominant language because it was the language of the court; it was also considered to be the elite language of scholarship under the Mughal rulers. The Mughal courts had scholars who were also translators. Baburnama, the autobiography of Babur was originally written in a language called Chagatay but was translated into Persian by Humayun's minister Bairam Khan. Akbar commissioned translations of Sanskrit works into Persian. The Mahabharata was translated into

- ◆ The various invasions during medieval period also brought with them different cultural and linguistic influences.



Persian during Akbar's time. His great-grandson Dara Shukoh translated the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita into Persian.

Translations during the medieval period had a significant impact on language and literature in India. Firstly, it helped to make people bilingual- that is, many people became fluent in both Persian and their local language. Secondly, it gave rise to new languages like Urdu which was the result of the interaction of Persian with the local language. Thirdly, translations from other works had the effect of introducing new genres to India. For example, translations from Persian brought in new genres like masnavi, qasida and importantly, the ghazal. They were Indianised to suit the local readers' tastes; Mirza Ghalib, the most important of ghazal writers wrote in Persian and Urdu. Fourthly, many Indian texts reached the west through Persian translations. As is the case with most texts, there are no accurate written records about these, which makes tracking them down difficult. But we can say without hesitation that translations helped to make Indian culture what it is today, a happy blending of multiple cultural influences. Bilingualism is a common Indian trait even today.

- ◆ The masnavi and qasida were two literary genres introduced through Persian translations.

2.1.1.1. Translation in the Colonial Period

During British colonization, English replaced Sanskrit and Persian as the dominant language. They initially attempted to establish that the English language and literature were superior to all the Indian languages and literature put together. But it was also important for the British to know the local language as matters of administration had to be in Indian languages. They had to know India well to govern it better. So there was also a reverse movement of translation from India to England. Sir William Jones, founder of the Asiatic Society, translated *Abhijñāna śākuntalam* into English in 1789. Charles Wilkins, official translator of Persian and Bengali to the Commissioner of Revenue, was the first to translate the *Bhagavad Gita* into English in 1784. These translations had official support and were done with the purpose of strengthening British control by better understanding the people they ruled.

- ◆ Sir William Jones translated *Abhijñāna śākuntalam* into English in 1789.

English became the language of administration in India after the First War of Indian Independence in 1857. There were large-scale efforts to translate English books into Indian languages and promote English literature. Many obscure 18th and 19th-century English novels found their way to Indian languages. It was during this period that the Bible came to be translated into most of the regional Indian languages. The Bible translations helped a great deal in strengthening the regional languages of India. These translations used simple language that was easy for ordinary people to understand. It also enriched the vocabulary by bringing in idioms and imagery to illustrate

- ◆ The Bible translations helped a great deal in strengthening the regional languages of India.



its concepts. The British also contributed to the local languages by bringing out systematic books on grammar and compiling dictionaries. The credit for compiling the first dictionary in most Indian languages goes to some European or the other.

- ◆ Fidelity became important because it was believed that the word of God had to be conveyed accurately without distortion.

Bible translations brought a new seriousness to the act of translation in India by introducing the ideas of fidelity and equivalence. Since the Bible was considered the word of God, translators aimed to convey its message without any distortion. This emphasis on staying true to the original text introduced Indian translators to the importance of faithfulness and accurate representation of meaning. It marked a shift in translation strategies, where the accuracy of meaning and maintaining the intent of the original became central concerns for the first time in India.

- ◆ Equivalence refers to how truthfully and successfully a translation carries across the meaning of the original text

The obsession with the original and the anxiety of not being able to capture the meaning is in some way connected to the theological concept of a paradise that has been lost and has to be regained. The Hindu belief is that human existence on earth is a constant progression of the soul from one birth to the other. It is not concerned about an original state. Time is not conceived of as a linear progression but as a cycle where there are no origins or endings. Hence the almost metaphysical obsession about equivalence that haunts translation activity in the west is alien to us.

- ◆ Sphota refers to the final stage of articulation-when a word is actually uttered and meaning emerges.

The Sphota theory, first introduced by Patanjali and developed by Bhartrhari in his Vakyapadiya, suggests that meaning arises in the final moment of articulation, known as sphota. The sphota concept goes back to another grammarian called Patanjali who used it to describe the various stages in the articulation of a word. According to this, sphota is the final stage in the process of articulation, the moment when the word is uttered aloud. Bhartrhari expanded this concept to the realm of philosophy, maintaining that the world is brought into existence by the articulation of the word. Language is not the medium for us to express ourselves, but is the medium that expresses us. This combines 'a material view and a transcendental view of language'. According to Bhartrhari, language by itself does not have a sequence although it is expressed in a sequentially graded body. The relation between the uttered word and meaning, or nada and Sphota is like the relation between an object and its reflection in flowing water. Like the reflection, the uttered word reflects the meaning as well as the nature of the giver of that meaning. So meaning is not a fixed entity, but is entirely contextual; trying to grasp the unchangeable meaning of a word is as futile or impossible to hold water in the palm of your hand. If this is the case, then how can a translator translate? What s/he translates would be her/his interpretation of the meaning which would be purely subjective. Hence according to the Indian



concept there can be no translation-‘carrying across’ of meaning-but only an anuvad or a ‘saying after’ or retelling. This emphasizes the subjective and interpretive nature of translation, suggesting that what is translated is not the original meaning itself, but the translator’s contextual interpretation of it.

2.1.2. Indian theories of aesthetics and translation

- ◆ Indian translators aimed for emotional and stylistic equivalence, focusing on aspects like *rasa* and *dhvani*

The influence of Indian critical theory also impacted other aspects of translation. Equivalence as we understand the concept today, as in achieving the same meaning in the target language as in the source language, thus was not a major concern as far as Indian translators were concerned. But there was a different sort of equivalence that translators hoped to achieve, which was in matters of the emotional impact of the text and other matters of style, like *rasa*, and *dhvani*.

- ◆ *Rasa* refers to the aesthetic flavor or emotional essence experienced by the audience.

Rasa theory is the most important theory of Sanskrit aesthetics. According to Bharata in his work *Natyasastra*, *rasa* is the ultimate emotional pleasure that can be derived from a work of art. The *rasasūtra* or the formula for the arousal of *rasa* is: *vibhāvānubhāva vyabhichārisamyogād rasa niṣpatthi*, which means that the combination of *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhichāribhāva* gives rise to *rasa*. *Vibhāvas* (emotional stimulants), *anubhāva* (physical bodily reaction that is naturally produced with these emotional responses) and *vyabhichāri-bhavas* (transitory emotions). The basic emotions (*bhāvas*) of the reader or spectator, who reads/watches a literary text or performance, are aroused by the *vibhāvas*. The emotional response is indicated by the *anubhāvas* and *vyabhichāribhāvas*. *Rasa* is this heightened emotional response to the text.

- ◆ *Rasanusar* is a method of translation where the translator captures the *rasa* of the original text.

Rasa theory plays a crucial role in the translation of literary texts in Indian aesthetics. T.R.S Sharma in his text, ‘*Translating Literary Texts through Indian Poetics: A Phenomenological Study*’, comments that, *Rasa* is the ‘shaping principle’ of a work, giving it its distinctive artistic quality. For a translator to be effective, especially when translating from one culture to another, it is essential to recreate the same *rasa* in the target language. This means the translator must first understand and identify the emotional essence of the original text and then strive to evoke a similar response in the new audience. Gujarati writer Navalram called this the *rasanusar* method, emphasizing the need to preserve the spirit and emotional impact of the original work. This approach goes beyond literal translation and focuses on maintaining the aesthetic and emotional integrity of the source text.

Another important concept in Sanskrit aesthetics which is usually used along with *rasa* is *dhvani*. It literally means suggestion. Anandavardhana, in his work *Dhvanyaloka*, maintained that *dhvani* is the soul of poetry. What is meant by *dhvani* is actually a network of



- ◆ Anandavardhana described *dhvani* as the soul of poetry in his work Dhvanyaloka.

meanings that lies beyond denotation and connotation of a word; this often becomes the very essence of a work of art. The most famous example quoted by all theoreticians including Anandavardhana is the sentence ‘Gangāyāmgghōṣa’ or ‘the village on the Ganga’. To readers who are unfamiliar with Indian culture, it is a sentence that describes a village by a river. But for the Indian reader, there is a wide network of meanings that is associated with the Ganga. The denotation is a ‘village’ and the connotation is a ‘village by the side of the river Ganga’. But it has a wide range of suggestions which derive from the concept of the Ganga in the Indian imagination. Its *dhvani* is, or what the word suggests is seclusion, holiness and purity; a good translator will have to capture this resonance of meanings.

Translating *dhvani* poses significant challenges because it involves meanings deeply rooted in cultural and symbolic associations. As T.R.S. Sharma explains, *dhvani* exists in a space filled with puns, polysemy, personal allusions, and esoteric symbolism. It goes beyond what is explicitly said and taps into a shared cultural imagination. For example, a sentence like *Gangāyāmgghōṣa* might seem simple to a non-Indian reader, but for an Indian audience, it suggests ideas of sanctity and serenity linked to the river Ganga. This makes *dhvani* highly context-dependent and difficult to render in another language without losing its resonance. A good translator must therefore go beyond literal translation to creatively convey the cultural and emotional undertones, which may not always be possible through words alone.

- ◆ The concept of *dhvani*-suggested or implied meaning- is deeply embedded in cultural context, symbolism, and shared social knowledge.

Cultural understanding is crucial in translation because meaning in literature often extends beyond the literal use of language. The concept of *dhvani*-suggested or implied meaning- is deeply embedded in cultural context, symbolism, and shared social knowledge. A good translator must therefore go beyond word-for-word translation and grasp the cultural resonance behind the words. Without this awareness, the subtle nuances, emotions, and associations intended by the original text can be lost. Modern Translation Studies now recognizes that translation is not just linguistic transfer but also cultural transfer. Thus, a successful translator must be well-versed in both the source and target cultures to effectively capture *dhvani* and convey it in a way that makes sense to the target audience.

2.1.2.1. Major Indian Theoreticians of Translation

These concepts helped in the formulation of the Indian theories of translation that we possess. One of them is Sri Aurobindo, known primarily as a philosopher, but was also a good poet and a gifted translator. He was equally proficient in English, Sanskrit and Bengali languages and literatures, and this stood him in good stead in his extensive translations. He has translated the Upanishads, Bhagavad



Gita as well as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Anandamath into English. He has also written essays on the theory and practice of translation, like 'On Translating Kalidasa'.

Summarised Overview

The two distinct language families of India are Indo-Aryan and Dravidian. Tamil is the most ancient Dravidian language. The major Indian languages of today derive from either the Indo-Aryan group or the Dravidian group. Although Indian languages are diverse and belong to two distinct families, they possess a shared sensibility. This unity comes partly from the common cultural and literary heritage of Sanskrit and also from ancient Indian theories of literature and language. Thus, despite differences in structure and evolution, Indian languages reflect a cultural bond that brings them together.

In ancient India, Sanskrit was the dominant language, especially in the northern region. Languages like Prākṛit, Pāli, and Apabhraṃśa, apart from Sanskrit, were used as languages of communication by the common masses. In Sanskrit plays, Women and lower caste/class characters spoke Prākṛit or regional dialects like Sauraseni and Magadhi. This linguistic distribution not only reflected social hierarchies but also made the plays more realistic, as common people spoke in their everyday tongues. The practice also demonstrates the multilingual character of Indian literature.

As India entered the medieval period, the influence of Sanskrit began to decline due to repeated invasions that introduced new cultures and languages. These invasions, particularly those that led to the establishment of Muslim rule, brought Persian as a dominant language. Persian gained prestige because it was used in royal courts and among the scholarly elite, especially during the Mughal era. It replaced Sanskrit as the primary language of administration, literature, and scholarship. This linguistic shift marked a significant change in India's cultural and literary landscape.

Translations during the medieval period had a significant impact on language and literature in India. One of the key results was the rise of bilingualism, where many people became fluent in both Persian and their local language. This era also saw the emergence of new languages like Urdu, formed through the blending of Persian with local dialects. Additionally, translations introduced new literary forms such as the masnavi, qasida, and ghazal, enriching Indian literary traditions.

During British colonization, English replaced Sanskrit and Persian as the dominant language. While the British initially believed English and its literature to be superior to Indian languages, they soon realized the importance of understanding local languages for effective administration. This led to a reverse movement of translation, where Indian texts were translated into English. These translations helped British officials learn more about Indian culture, religion, and literature.

The translation of the Bible into various Indian regional languages had a significant impact. These translations used simple language that was easy for ordinary people to understand. This not only made religious texts accessible but also enriched the local lan-



guages. The Bible brought in new idioms and imagery, which helped illustrate abstract concepts and added depth to the vocabulary. Overall, these translations played a vital role in strengthening and developing regional Indian languages.

Vakyapadiya was written by Bhartrhari and is known for the Sphota theory. Sphota refers to the final stage of articulation-when a word is actually uttered and meaning emerges. Bhartrhari believed language expresses us; it is not merely a tool for expression but the medium through which existence is realized. According to Bhartrhari, the relationship between uttered word and meaning is like an object and its reflection in flowing water-contextual and constantly shifting.

In Indian translation theory, rasa and dhvani are central aesthetic concepts that guide the translator's choices. Rasa refers to the emotional essence or mood that a literary work evokes, such as love, anger, or heroism. Dhvani, on the other hand, means the suggestive power of language, where the meaning is not directly stated but implied, enriching the text's emotional and aesthetic depth.

Sri Aurobindo occupies an important place among Indian theoreticians of translation. His deep knowledge of multiple languages, his philosophical insights, and his literary sensibilities allowed him to bring Indian texts into the global literary space.

Assignment

I. Short questions

1. Name the two distinct language families of India.
2. From what sources do Indian languages share a common sensibility?
3. Which languages, apart from Sanskrit, were used as languages of communication by the common masses in ancient India?
4. What role did Sanskrit play in ancient Indian society?
5. Why did the influence of Sanskrit decline during the medieval period in India?
6. Who translated Baburnama into Persian?
7. What is bilingualism, and how did translations promote it during the medieval period?
8. What was the purpose behind translating Indian texts into English during British rule?
9. What is the concept of Sphota?
10. What is the Indian concept of translation, according to Devy?
11. What is the Rasa Sūtra (formula) given by Bharata?
12. How did Indian critical theory influence translation?
13. Discuss Sri Aurobindo's contribution as a theoretician and practitioner of translation.



II. Paragraph questions

1. How was language used differently by different classes of people in Sanskrit plays?
2. Explain G.N. Devy's idea of India's "translating consciousness."
3. Write a short note on the role of Sanskrit and other languages in ancient India.
4. Discuss the decline of Sanskrit and the rise of Persian during the medieval period in India.
5. Explain the contribution of the Mughals to translation and literary exchange between cultures.
6. Explain the impact of Bible translations on Indian regional languages.
7. Explain the concept of dhvani in Sanskrit aesthetics. Explain the concept of Rasa as described by Bharata in the Natyasastra.

III. Essay

1. Discuss the impact of translations on language and literature in medieval India.
2. Explain how the British used translations as a tool for governance in India.
3. What is the Sphota theory and how does it influence the Indian view of language and meaning?
4. What is the role of rasa and dhvani in Indian translation theory?

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

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SGOU





Contribution of Western scholars in Sanskrit translation--Sir William Johns (1789)- Charles Wilkinson (1784)- their translations of Sanskrit texts

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ❖ Understand the early Western encounters with Sanskrit
- ❖ Identify the pioneering contributions of Sir William Jones
- ❖ Evaluate the significance of Charles Wilkins
- ❖ Examine the impact of Western translations on global thought

Background

Sanskrit is considered the mother of all languages, having its roots deeply embedded in Indian culture. Ancient scriptures like the Vedas and Upanishads were written in Sanskrit, highlighting its historical and spiritual importance. Despite being such a foundational language, many Indians today do not learn it, feeling that it has no modern relevance or scope. However, it remains significant in understanding India's ancient wisdom and traditions. Its systematic grammar and structure have also influenced many modern Indian languages.

The British came to India for trading purposes and needed to communicate with the local population, which led them to learn various Indian languages. In the process, they were also attracted to Sanskrit due to its richness and scholarly nature. Some of them became well-versed in the language and made significant contributions to its study. They documented, translated, and analyzed Sanskrit texts, laying a foundation for future research. Their efforts have helped preserve and promote Sanskrit literature and inspired many scholars around the world.

Western scholars who came to India for trade eventually developed a deep interest in Sanskrit. They not only learned the language but also became scholars in it. They translated numerous Sanskrit texts into English and other European languages, enabling the global community to access and appreciate India's literary and philosophical traditions. Their scholarly work helped establish Indology as a field of study. These contributions laid the groundwork for future generations, both in the East and the West, to study Sanskrit seriously and understand India's cultural legacy. With this background let us discuss the contributions made by some western people to Sanskrit Literature.



Keywords

Alexander's invasion, Sanskrit manuscripts, Abraham Roger, poems of Bhartruhari, First translation of Bhagavad Gita in 1785, Asiatic Society of Bengal, translation of Shakuntala, "Code of Manu.", "Father of Indology", A Grammar of the Sanskrit Language, two lyrical works translation, "Caxton of India".

Discussion

2.2.1. Contribution of Western Scholars in Sanskrit translation

Western interest in Sanskrit began in the 18th century, and by the 19th century, it became significant in the field of comparative linguistics, particularly among Indo-European languages. During British rule in India (1857-1947), many Western scholars edited and translated Sanskrit manuscripts into English. Their efforts made Sanskrit literature more accessible to the West. Even before that, some early interactions occurred. After Alexander's invasion, the Greeks acquired some knowledge of Indian languages. Later, during the middle Ages, Arab scholars transmitted Indian scientific knowledge to the West. From the 16th century onwards, European missionaries became aware of Sanskrit and even became familiar with it.

- ◆ The British ruled India between 1857 and 1947, during which many Sanskrit manuscripts were translated into English.

- ◆ Abraham Roger translated Bhartruhari's poems into Portuguese in 1951

- ◆ Voltaire mentioned the Ezour Vedam in his work *Essai Sur les Moeurs et l'Esprit des Nations*.

In 1951 a scholar by name Abraham Roger translated the poems of Bhartruhari into Portuguese language. But however for about 120 years there was no authentic information in Europe about the existence of Sanskrit literature. But only in stories we could find about the wisdom of Indian's very vaguely.

A scholar Voltaire in his work, *Essai Sur les Moeurs et l'Esprit des Nations* greeted the lore of the Ezour Vedam was brought to India which was an incomplete work. A philosopher by name Dugladd Stewart wrote an essay in which he endeavored to prove that not only Sanskrit literature but also Sanskrit language was a forgery made by the crafty Brahmins on the model of Greek after Alexander's conquest, but however this view was defended by another professor at Dublin as late as in the year 1838.

Foreigners studied Sanskrit because it served the practical administrative needs of the British in ruling India effectively, especially by understanding Indian laws and customs. Warren Hastings who was the governor general at that time saw the advantage of ruling the Hindus as far possible according to their own laws and customs caused a number of Brahmins to prepare a digest based on the best ancient



- ◆ Foreigners studied Sanskrit to meet the practical administrative needs of governing India according to Indian laws and customs.

Indian legal authorities. An English version of this Sanskrit compilation made through the medium of a Persian translation, was published in 1776. The introduction to this work besides giving specimen's of the Sanskrit script for the first time supplied some trustworthy information about the ancient Indian language and literature. One of the earliest contributors to Sanskrit studies was Charles Wilkins. Under Hastings' encouragement, he studied Sanskrit in Benares and became proficient in it. In 1785, he translated the Bhagavad Gita into English, titled *The Song of the Adorable One*. In 1787, he also translated the *Hitopadesha*, a collection of fables. These translations played a crucial role in introducing Sanskrit literature to Europe and helped create academic interest in Indian culture and language.

2.2.2. Contribution of Sir William Johns in Sanskrit translation

Western scholars have played a significant role in bringing Sanskrit literature and philosophy to the attention of the Western world through translations, grammars, dictionaries, and critical editions.

Sir William Jones (1746 - 1794): He is considered the "Father of Indology" for his pioneering work in Indian studies. His translation of Kalidasa's play *Shakuntala* into English in 1789 opened the doors to ancient Indian literature for the Western world. Jones also translated the *Manusmriti*, an ancient law book, and established the Asiatic Society of Bengal, a significant institution for Oriental studies. His work also led to the discovery of the Indo-European language family, highlighting the common ancestry of Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin.

- ◆ Sir William Jones translated Kalidasa's drama "Shakuntala" in 1789

2.2.2.1 Contribution to comparative linguistics

In his *Third Anniversary Discourse* (1786), Sir William Jones made a ground breaking observation about the relationship between Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Gothic, Celtic, and Persian. He noted striking similarities in their vocabulary and grammatical structures and suggested that they all had "sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists." This insight laid the foundation of comparative linguistics and the concept of the Indo-European language family. His work marked a turning point by making the study of languages more scientific, moving it away from mythological or biblical explanations for language diversity.

- ◆ Sir William Jones delivered his famous "Third Anniversary Discourse"

2.2.2.2 Translations of key Sanskrit texts

Jones translated several important Sanskrit works into English, making them accessible to a wider audience both in the West and in India.



- ◆ Sir William Jones two lyrical works translated Jayadeva's Gita Govinda and Kalidasa's Ritusamhara

In 1789, Sir William Jones translated Kalidasa's famous Sanskrit play *Abhijñāna śākuntalam* (śākuntala) into English. This was the first time that a major Sanskrit drama was introduced to the Western world. The translation sparked significant interest in Indian literature and even influenced prominent European literary figures like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. He also translated Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* and Kalidasa's *Ritusamhara*, lyrical works that showcased the richness of Indian poetry. In addition, he worked on legal texts, notably translating the *Manusmriti* (Laws of Manu), and began compiling a *Digest of Hindu and Mohammedan Laws*. These works not only introduced Indian literature to the West but also influenced India's own rediscovery of its heritage.

2.2.2.3 Asiatic Society of Bengal

- ◆ Sir William Jones founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 in Calcutta

The Asiatic Society of Bengal was founded in 1784 by Sir William Jones in Calcutta (now Kolkata). It was established as a centre for the study of Asian history, antiquities, arts, sciences, and literature. Jones served as the society's first president, and his annual discourses inspired further research in Indology. The society's publications, which included many Sanskrit texts, played an important role in preserving and promoting Sanskrit learning. It became a pioneering institution for Oriental studies, influencing both Western scholarship and Indian cultural revival.

- ◆ Jones laid the foundations of comparative linguistics and strengthened East-West cultural exchange

Apart from translations and legal studies, Sir William Jones made significant contributions to various fields. His fluency in 13 languages and familiarity with many more gave him a unique perspective in studying Sanskrit. He wrote extensively on various aspects of Indian culture, including music, chronology, botany, and geography, demonstrating a broad intellectual curiosity that further enriched the field of Indology. In essence, Sir William Jones's contributions to Sanskrit translation and Indology were ground breaking and far-reaching. He not only introduced the richness of Indian literature and thought to the Western world but also laid the foundations for comparative linguistics and initiated a new era of scholarly engagement with the subcontinent's past. His work, though viewed through the lens of a particular historical context, remains a significant landmark in the history of East-West cultural exchange.

2.2.3 Contribution of Charles Wilkinson in Sanskrit translation

Charles Wilkins was a British orientalist and typographer whose multifaceted contributions significantly impacted Sanskrit translation and the spread of Indological studies in the West.



2.2.3.1 First translation of the Bhagavad Gita

- ◆ Charles Wilkins produced the first English translation of the Bhagavad Gita

Wilkins is best known for producing the first English translation of the Bhagavad Gita directly from Sanskrit. Published in 1785, titled “Bhagvat Gita, or Dialogues of Krsna and Arjuna”, this work marked the beginning of Western engagement with one of India’s most important sacred texts. The translation introduced Hindu philosophy to Europe, sparking interest in Indian spirituality and influencing European thinkers and writers. Although not free from limitations, Wilkins’s work opened the door for further translations into other European languages and played a crucial role in the cultural exchange between India and the West.

- ◆ Charles Wilkins called the “Caxton of India”

Wilkins was a skilled typographer, earning him the title “Caxton of India”. He created the first Bengali typeface for printing and oversaw the production of the first typeset book in Bengali. He also designed the first Persian typeface and later developed a Devanagari font for Sanskrit, which allowed for the wider dissemination of Sanskrit texts. His typographic innovations were crucial in making Indian literature accessible to both Indian and European audiences, thereby promoting scholarship and cultural exchange.

2.2.3.2 Contribution to Sanskrit grammar

- ◆ Wilkins’s grammar was the first comprehensive guide to studying Sanskrit systematically in the West.

Building on his deep understanding of Sanskrit, Charles Wilkins published *A Grammar of the Sanskrit Language* in 1808, marking one of the earliest systematic studies of Sanskrit in the West. The grammar covered Sanskrit phonology, morphology, and syntax, providing clear explanations and structured rules for students. This work was invaluable for European scholars who had little access to traditional Indian systems of grammar like Panini’s. Wilkins’s grammar helped lay the foundation for modern Indology by enabling Western learners to approach Sanskrit with greater accuracy and consistency.

- ◆ Charles Wilkins is regarded as the first European pioneer of Indian epigraphy

Wilkins was also a pioneer in Indian epigraphy, being the first European to study and decipher Sanskrit inscriptions. In 1785, he published an essentially correct translation of the Gopika Cave Inscription, written in a 6th-century CE Late Brahmi script.

He was one of the founding members of The Asiatic Society, established by Sir William Jones in 1784. This institution played a vital role in promoting Orientalist scholarship and research, fostering a greater understanding of Indian languages and culture. In conclusion, Charles Wilkins’ contributions were instrumental in introducing Sanskrit and its rich literary heritage to the Western world. His translation of the Bhagavad Gita ignited a wave of interest in Hinduism and influenced prominent intellectuals of the time. His work in typography, grammar, and epigraphy further solidified his legacy as a prominent figure in the field of Indology.



Summarised Overview

Western scholars have played a significant role in bringing Sanskrit literature and philosophy to the attention of the Western world through translations, grammars, dictionaries, and critical editions.

Sir William Jones, a British scholar and judge, left an indelible mark on Sanskrit translation and the broader field of Indology (the study of Indian languages, cultures, and history). His contributions had a profound impact on Western understanding and appreciation of Indian culture and language, and also helped spark a renewed interest in India's own heritage.

Jones's translations not only enriched Western literature and scholarship but also inspired Indians to rediscover pride in their own cultural heritage. His role as a translator made him a key figure in both Indology and comparative literature, the Asiatic Society of Bengal became a key institution for Oriental learning. By preserving Sanskrit manuscripts and fostering cross-cultural scholarship, it played a crucial role in shaping both Indian studies in the West and cultural awareness in India itself.

Sir William Jones's contributions were not limited to translation. They were wide-ranging, ground breaking, and influential, sparking renewed interest in India's heritage while creating a new era of East-West cultural exchange. He remains a towering figure in both linguistic science and Indological studies.

Charles Wilkins was the first to translate the Bhagavad Gita directly from Sanskrit to English in 1785. Wilkins also created the first Sanskrit typeface in Europe and wrote a Sanskrit grammar, making the language more accessible to Western scholars. His translation of the Bhagavad Gita sparked significant interest in Hindu thought and philosophy in the West.

Wilkins's translation of the Bhagavad Gita was not only a milestone in the history of Oriental studies but also a key moment in the dialogue between Indian and Western intellectual traditions.

Wilkins's work as a typographer was just as influential as his translations. By enabling Indian languages to enter the world of print, he not only preserved cultural heritage but also facilitated East-West intellectual exchange. His legacy as the "Caxton of India" reflects his lasting impact on Indian literature, printing, and scholarship.

Wilkins's Grammar of the Sanskrit Language was a milestone in Sanskrit studies, as it bridged Indian grammatical knowledge with European scholarship. It ensured that Sanskrit could be studied not only as a literary language but also as part of a larger linguistic and cultural heritage.

Wilkins's epigraphical work expanded the scope of Indology beyond manuscripts and literature to archaeology and history. As the first European to study and translate Sanskrit inscriptions, he occupies a crucial place in the early history of Indian epigraphy.



Charles Wilkins's wide-ranging contributions- translation, printing, grammar, and epigraphy - established him as one of the most important figures in early Indology. His work not only introduced Sanskrit to the Western world but also preserved and popularized India's literary and cultural heritage.

Assignment

I. Short questions

1. Who translated Bhartrihari's poems into Portuguese, and when?
2. What was Abraham Roger's contribution to Sanskrit translation, and how was it received in Europe?
3. Why did foreigners study Sanskrit?
4. Who was Warren Hastings and what was his role in Sanskrit studies?
5. What important law book of ancient India did Sir William Jones translate?
6. Name two lyrical works translated by Sir William Jones.
7. What was the aim of the Asiatic Society of Bengal?
8. Who produced the first English translation of the Bhagavad Gita?
9. Why was Wilkins's translation of the Gita significant?
10. What was Wilkins's major grammatical work on Sanskrit?
11. Why was Wilkins's grammar significant for Western scholars?

II. Paragraph questions

1. Describe the early contributions of Western scholars to Sanskrit translation and study.
2. Discuss Sir William Jones' contribution to linguistics and Indian studies.
3. Explain the significance of Jones's "Third Anniversary Discourse" in 1786
4. Write a short note on the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
5. Why Sir William Jones considered a landmark figure in East-West cultural exchange?
6. Explain the historical importance of Wilkins's 1785 translation of the Bhagavad Gita.

III. Essay

1. Discuss the translations of Sir William Jones and their impact on Indian and Western scholarship.
2. Discuss the founding and significance of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
3. Evaluate the wider contributions of Sir William Jones beyond Sanskrit translation
4. Explain Charles Wilkins's contribution to Sanskrit translation.



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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

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SGOU



Sanskrit prose in translation - problems in translating Kadambari in English- English Translation of Arthasastra

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ❖ understand India's multi – lingual translating tradition
- ❖ analyse the role of translation in cultural exchange
- ❖ understand the major linguistic and grammatical features of Sanskrit prose that influence translation into English
- ❖ explain the common difficulties encountered while translating Sanskrit prose into English

Background

Translating Sanskrit writing into English is really hard. It's not just about swapping words; it's about bridging two completely different ways of thinking and speaking. The grammar, the style of writing, and the ideas are all worlds apart. We can see this clearly when we compare two famous books: the literary story Kadambari and the political guide Arthashastra. While both are difficult to translate, the problems for each are different, showing just how complex the job is.

Keywords

Literary style, rich vocabulary, major prose works, challenges – grammatical, compound words, Aesthetics, alankaras, Banabhatta's Kadambari, C.M.Redding, M.R, Kale, Chanakya's Arthasastra, Dr.R.Shamasastri, Dr.R.P.Kale, L.M.Rangarajan



Discussion

Sanskrit prose is a significant and diverse body of work that evolved from the Vedic period, becoming a crucial part of classical Indian literature. Unlike its poetic counterpart, Sanskrit prose is celebrated for its straightforward, descriptive, and often elaborate style, which allowed for a wide range of genres. Its influence extends far beyond the Indian subcontinent, leaving a lasting mark on world literature, philosophy, and linguistics.

Sanskrit prose is profoundly important in world literature for several reasons. It has significantly influenced the development of modern Indian languages by providing a foundational literary style and a rich vocabulary. Beyond India, Sanskrit prose fostered cross-cultural connections, as evidenced by the widespread translation of works like the Panchatantra, which influenced global storytelling traditions and fables. Its linguistic and philosophical legacy is remarkable; the meticulous grammar of texts like Panini's Ashtadhyayi is a cornerstone of ancient linguistics, and its philosophical prose, such as the Upanishads, has had a lasting impact on global thought. Furthermore, Sanskrit prose served as a crucial bridge to ancient knowledge, preserving invaluable historical and scientific records in fields like medicine (Charaka Samhita), astronomy (Aryabhatiya), literature (Kadambari) and politics (Arthashastra), making these works indispensable historical resources.

- ◆ Sanskrit prose is profoundly important in world literature

2.3.1. Major Prose Works in Sanskrit

Sanskrit prose encompasses a wide variety of genres, from fables and romances to scientific and political treatises. Some of the most notable works and their authors include:

- ◆ **Dandin's Dashakumaracharita:** A collection of ten tales of princes, celebrated for its varied and realistic depiction of life.
- ◆ **Subandhu's Vasavadatta:** A complex and highly ornamental romance known for its intricate style and clever wordplay.
- ◆ **Banabhatta's Kadambari:** Often considered one of the first novels in world literature, this romantic tale is famous for its elaborate descriptions and the use of the "stream of consciousness" technique.
- ◆ **Vishnu Sharma's Panchatantra:** A collection of animal fables with moral lessons, which has been translated into numerous languages worldwide and has influenced countless folktales.
- ◆ **Kautilya's Arthashastra:** A comprehensive treatise on state-

- ◆ Sanskrit prose encompasses a wide variety of genres



craft, economic policy, and military strategy, demonstrating the use of Sanskrit prose for non-literary, scholarly purposes.

2.3.2.Challenges in Translating Sanskrit Prose

2.3.2.1.Grammatical Challenge

- ◆ Sanskrit's grammar is very complex

One of the biggest issues is Sanskrit's complex grammar. It's a highly "inflected" language, which means a single word can hold a lot of information—like who is doing the action (he, she, they), how many of them there are, and what their role is in the sentence. This makes the word order very flexible.

English is the opposite. It's a "fixed-order" language, so we have to use prepositions and pronouns to get the same information across. In Sanskrit, a small change to a word's ending can completely change its meaning, so a translator has to be very careful. This is so difficult that even computer programs need to break down the words first before they can translate correctly. On top of that, names of people and places often don't have a direct English equivalent, which adds another layer of complexity.

2.3.2.2.The Challenge of Compound Words (Samāsa)

- ◆ Sanskrit has incredibly long compound words

A unique and very difficult feature of Sanskrit is its use of incredibly long compound words, called samāsa. Unlike simple English compounds like "bookcase," Sanskrit can join many words, and even entire phrases, into a single, long word. To translate these, a translator has to "unravel" the one Sanskrit word into a full English sentence or phrase. This process changes the original style and feel of the text.

There are four main types of these compounds:

- ◆ **Tatpurusha:** The first word modifies the second. For example, (तत्पुरुषः) tatpurusha means "his servant" (तस्य पुरुषः).
- ◆ **Karmadharaya:** The first word describes the second. For example, maharaja means "a great king" (mahan raja). (महान् राजा)
- ◆ **Dvandva:** This simply joins two or more words with an "and." For example, sukha-duhkham means "joy and sorrow." (सुखदुःखम्)
- ◆ **Bahuvrihi:** This describes a third thing not named in the compound. For example, पीताम्बरः literally means "yellow-garment," but it translates to "he whose garment is yellow." पीतं अम्बरं यस्य सः पीताम्बरः

As a scholar named Daniel Ingalls pointed out, these long compounds in Sanskrit create a smooth, powerful flow of thought, like a



single rock, not a bunch of pebbles. When a translator has to break this one powerful word into many English clauses, the artistic impact is lost. Making the text understandable fundamentally changes its original artistic nature.

2.3.2.3. Literary vs. Technical Translation

The translations of Kādambarī and the Arthashastra show a fundamental difference in the goals and methods for translating different types of classical Sanskrit prose. The challenges, while rooted in the same linguistic features, are handled in distinct ways, changing the role of the translator for each task.

2.3.2.4. Aesthetics vs. Accuracy

For the literary translator of a work like Kādambarī, the main goal is to capture the stylistic and emotional core of the kāvya tradition. The translator must be a “transcreator”, aiming for an aesthetic equivalent that resonates with the target audience, even if it means moving away from strict literalness. The elaborate hyperbole and long compounds are tools to create a specific emotional and sensory experience. The challenge is to convey the rasa (aesthetic “taste”) of the original, a goal that goes beyond simply transmitting the plot or meaning.

- ◆ The translator must be a “transcreator”

In contrast, the technical translator of a work like the Arthashastra must prioritize conceptual and terminological accuracy above all else. The goal is to avoid anachronisms and to accurately “reconstruct... ‘complexes of meaning’” from the source text and put them into a modern academic vocabulary. The long compounds in this context are not stylistic decorations but devices for intellectual compression. Unraveling them is not a loss of artistic impact but a necessary act of clarification to make the ancient concepts of statecraft and economy understandable to a contemporary scholar.

- ◆ Prioritize conceptual and terminological accuracy

2.3.3 Bāṇabhaṭṭa’s Kādambarī -English Translation

Translating Kādambarī, a famous Sanskrit romance written by Bāṇabhaṭṭa, is a great example of how difficult it is to translate classical literature. This book is not just a story; it is a masterpiece of the ornate kāvya style, where the beautiful language is just as important as the plot. Makarandikopakyanam, which figures in this compendium, bears enough similarities to Kadambari for us to concede that Bana must have taken the plot, albeit in a skeletal form, from it. However, with his considerable skill as a storyteller, he develops it in his own way. He introduces many changes in the plot; he invents new characters and alters the nature of several others to make the story more effective. In the process he removes the brittleness of the original story. He introduces enough realism into the kavya to



- ◆ Kādambarī is a masterpiece of the ornate kāvya style.

- ◆ Kādambarī is a perfect example of a kāvya text

- ◆ Shringara is the main rasa in Kādambarī text

prevent the characters from becoming two-dimensional stereotypes. Like modern writers he weaves skeins of suspense into it concealing the real identity of several of the characters till the very end, including that of the hero Chandrapida. Again like modern writers he uses the dramatic technique of irony by making his characters use words the real significance of which is unperceived by the speakers themselves. Thus Kadambari as we now have it is a delightful romantic thriller played out in the magical regions between this world and the other, in which the divine and the earthly blend in idyllic splendour.

2.3.3.1. The Kāvya Style of Kadambari

Kādambarī is a perfect example of a kāvya text, known for its very flowery prose, exaggeration, and detailed descriptions. The book has “pages upon pages of hyperbole,” where every character is described as the best or most beautiful and every place as the most perfect. This style, which might seem “tiring” or “melodramatic” to a modern Western reader, is actually the heart of Bāṇabhaṭṭa’s genius, similar to how great a poet Kālidāsa was.

Apart from his great skill in describing natural phenomena like sunrise and sunset, forests and rivers and depiction of character Bana excels in delineating several rasas in varying degrees of intensity. It is these rasas that make Kadambari a beautiful work. And it is the elegant portrayal of the rasas that has earned for Bana the title of Mahakavi.

Shringara rasa in both its manifestations, vipralamba (separation) and sambhoga (union) is the dominant rasa of Kadambari, which is a love story-the romantic love between Chandrapida and Kadambari, as well as that of Mahashveta and Pundarika forms the dominant emotion of the story.

A kavya without alamkaras is no kavya at all. Alamkaras are adornments, figures of speech that embellish the language and help to express an idea in a picturesque and striking manner. Properly used, alamkaras could convey emotion effectively and heighten the mood. Bana uses similes (upama) and metaphors (rupaka), utpreksha (poetic fancy which suggests that the subject and object of comparison may be identical on the strength of some similarity), atishayokti (hyperbolic expression), parisankhya (enumeration) and virodha (contradiction) to name but a few. He is especially effective in handling utprekshas in the descriptive passages in Kadambari. The series of utprekshas that he uses in describing the magical beauty of the Achoda Lake is a good example. Bana is at his best when he uses swabhavokthi. The writers on poetics are not agreed on whether swabhavokthi might be termed an alamkara at all. Be that as it may, Bana rises to great heights when simply describing a scene;



- ◆ A kavya without alamkaras is no kavya at all.

the comedy of the princes rushing hither and thither at the dismissal of the court by Shudraka, the beauty of the Pampa Lake, Tarapida talking of his longing for a son, Pundarika's travails on his deathbed, the love play between Kadambari and Chandrapida or Mahashveta falling in love. With very few figures of speech thrown in, these passages brim with rasa.

The highest achievement of Bana as a creative writer is the delineation of character. In spite of the fabulous nature of the story all the characters in Kadambari are full of life, and drawn with great subtlety. So Alamkaras are plentiful in Kadambari. Many of them depend upon words, which are difficult to translate without slipping into paraphrasing the idea contained in them.

- ◆ ornate style is to create a specific rasa

From a classical Indian point of view, this ornate style is not just for decoration. Its purpose is to create a specific rasa (aesthetic emotion or "taste") in the reader. The long, descriptive sentences are meant to build a vivid emotional world, helping the reader understand and feel their own emotions. So, a translator's job is not to "fix" or "simplify" this style to suit modern tastes for simple language. Instead, the challenge is to find a way to create the same emotional and artistic impact in English. A translation that focuses only on being clear and short might be a technical success, but it would be an artistic failure, because it would lose the very essence of the original. This shows that translation is not just about words; it's a careful negotiation between two different cultures, sometimes requiring a creative transcreation to get a similar effect.

2.3.3.2 Kādambarī -A Complicated Story

- ◆ Apart from its style, Kādambarī also has a very complex narrative

Apart from its style, Kādambarī also has a very complex narrative. The plot is "extremely intricate" and hard to summarize, with many side stories and "stories within stories." A large part of the story is narrated by a parrot, who is, in turn, retelling a tale told to it by a sage. The story is made even more complicated because many characters appear in different lives as humans, gods, or animals. Their real identities are deliberately hidden and only become clear at the very end. This means the translator has to be very skilled at managing these many threads to make sure the complex storyline is still easy for the reader to follow.

- ◆ Kadambari was completed by Banabhatta's son Bhushanabhatta

Banabhatta and Bhushanabhatta's romantic prose work in Sanskrit, Kadambari, is an example of that. Kadambari was started by Banabhatta and then was completed by Banabhatta's son Bhushanabhatta after his father's death. This ancient story has been dated back to the 7th century C.E. and is considered one of the first novels in world literature. So much so, that today the word 'kadambari' is used as a generic term for a romance or a novel in Kannada and Marathi.



- ◆ Pundareeka and Kapinjala meet Kadambari and Mahashveta

A handsome hermit Pundareeka and his friend Kapinjala meet the Gandharva princess Kadambari and her friend, Mahashveta while praying in a temple on the banks of Lake Achchoda. Mahashveta and Pundareeka are smitten by each other instantly, but they go their separate ways since Pundareeka is a hermit, who has left all worldly pleasures behind.

- ◆ Pundareeka curses the Moon to be born on earth

Though he does not pursue her, Pundareeka pines for Mahashveta. Seeing his friend's misery, Kapinjala informs Mahashveta of his friend's love for her. She sets out to meet him, with the moon shining brightly to illuminate her path. While sitting under the bright moonlight that night, Pundareeka looks up to see the smiling face of the Moon. Assuming that the Moon is mocking him, Pundareeka curses the Moon to be born on earth and suffer the misery of unrealised love. The moon retaliates by cursing the Pundareeka back, leading to his death. It is at this moment that Mahashveta reaches the spot and sees her beloved lying dead. Filled with grief, she decides to end her life, but the Moon, now regretting his hasty actions, stops her and assures her reunion with Pundareeka.

She decides to wait for Pundareeka at the banks of Achchoda as an ascetic. Her dear friend Kadambari, the Gandharva princess, vows to remain unmarried until her friend is reunited with her lover.

Soon, the Moon, stricken by Pundareeka's curse, is born as Chandrapeeda, the son of king Tarapida. At the same time, Pundareeka is born to Tarapida's chief minister and is named Vaishampayana. The two boys grow up together, becoming fast friends. When Chandrapeeda is crowned as the king, he is married off to the beautiful Patralekha. She is in fact Rohini, the Moon's wife, who also takes birth as a human to accompany her husband. Chandrapeeda is also gifted a horse, who is actually Kapinjala reborn due to a sage's curse.

- ◆ Mahashveta tells Chandrapeeda about Kadambari's vow

Chandrapeeda sets out to conquer the surrounding empires, along with Vaishampayana and Patralekha. One day, while exploring, Chandrapeeda and his horse reach the place where Mahashveta is waiting for Pundareeka. She narrates her story to Chandrapeeda and tells him about Kadambari's vow. She takes him to Kadambari's kingdom, Hemakuta, in the hopes of changing her friend's mind. There, both Kadambari and Chandrapeeda fall in love with each other.

However, Kadambari decides to stay true to her vow and soon Chandrapeeda leaves. Both of them pine for each other, and soon Mahashveta sends for Chandrapeeda, unable to bear her friend's pain. Chandrapeeda takes Patralekha with him and visits Hemakuta again. Upon receiving word from his father, Chandrapeeda returns to his kingdom, leaving Patralekha behind with Kadambari.



Meanwhile, Vaishampayana meets Mahashveta near Achchoda and proclaims his love for her. As a hermit, she is angered by his declaration and curses him to be reborn as a parrot, not realising he is the reincarnated Pundareeka. Upon learning of his friend's death, a grief-stricken Chandrapeeda too, falls dead at the banks of Lake Achchoda.

Kadambari and Patralekha reach the spot and are heartbroken. Kadambari prepares to die for her lover, but a heavenly voice intervenes and proclaims that Chandrapeeda's body shall be preserved and Kadambari would soon be united with her lover. Patralekha, saddened by her husband's loss, jumps into the lake on Chandrapeeda's horse. When the horse enters the water, the curse is broken and Kapinjala gets his original form back. Kapinjala then informs Mahashveta that the man she cursed was actually Pundareeka, who vows to wait for his return.

Kadambari continues to look after Chandrapeeda's body at the lake and soon he opens his eyes, brought back to life by her love. Meanwhile, Vaishampayana completes his life as a parrot and regains his original form, that of Pundareeka. Mahashveta is overjoyed and soon both the couples are married off with great pomp. Chandrapeeda hands over the kingdom to Pundareeka and spends his time with his beloved Kadambari, sometimes on earth and sometimes in his celestial abode.

- ♦ Mahashveta is overjoyed and both the couples are married off with great pomp.

2.3.3.3. Kadambari's English Translations

Translators themselves admit how difficult it is to translate Kādambarī. One modern translator wrote that there is “no easy way to translate highly ornamental Sanskrit into English.” One of the first and most important English translations was done by C.M. Ridding in 1896. M.R.Kale Produced a literal English translation of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's work around 1924. M. R. Kale is famous for his excellence in Indian literature, linguistics and Sanskrit plays . The following is an excerpt from the English translation by M.R.Kale's Kadambari work (Purvabhaga).

- ♦ M.R.Kale Produced a literal English translation of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's work.

कथा-मुखम

शूद्रकवर्णनम्

आसीदशेष-नरपति-शिरः-समचित-शासनः पाकशासन इवापरः, चतुस्त्रिंश-मालामे-
खलाया भुवो भर्ता, प्रतापानुरागावनत-समस्त-सामन्तचक्रः, चक्रवर्तिलक्षणोपेतः, चक्रधर
इत्र करकमलोपलक्ष्यमाण-शङ्ख-चक्र-लाञ्छनः, हर इव जितमन्मथः, गुह इवाप्रतिहतशक्ति,
कमलयोनिरिव विमानीकृतराजहंसमण्डल, जलधिरिव लक्ष्मीप्रसूतिः, गङ्गाप्रवाह इव
भगीरथपथप्रवृत्तः, रविरिव प्रतिदिवसोपजायमानोदयः, मेस्त्रिव सकलोपजीव्यमान-पाद-
च्छायः, दिग्गज इवानवरतप्रवृत्तदानाद्रीकृतकरः, कर्ता महाश्वर्याणाम्, आहर्ता क्रतूनाम्,



आदर्शः सर्वशास्त्राणाम्, उत्पत्तिः कलानाम्, कुलभवनं गुणानाम्, आगमः काव्यामृतरसानाम्, उदयशैलो मित्रमण्डलस्य, उत्पातकेतुरहितजनस्य, प्रवर्त्तयिता गोष्ठी-बन्धानाम्, आश्रयो रसिकानाम्, प्रत्यादेशो धनुष्मताम्, धौरेयः साहसिकानाम्, अग्रणी-विदग्धानाम्, वैनतेय इव विनतानन्दजननः, वैन्य इव चापकोटिसमुत्सारितसकलाऽराति-कुलाचलो राजा शूद्रको नाम ।

English Translation

(Once) there lived a king named Śūdraka whose commands were worshipped (ie., obeyed) with (bent) heads by all (other) kings, and who was like another Indra. He was master of the Earth having for its girdle the string of the four oceans; all the numerous subsidiary princes bowed to him, loving him for his valour. He had (on his body) the marks of a sovereign emperor. Like Vishnu (lit., the discus-bearer), he was one on whose lotus-like hands were visible the marks of conch and discus. Like śiva, he had vanquished Cupid (curbed passion). Like Karthikeya, he was one whose prowess was irresistible. Like Brahma who is born of the lotus, he had repressed the pride of the whole circle of swan-like (i.e. noble) kings. Like the Ocean, he was the source of wealth. Like the stream of the river Ganga, he followed the path of Bhagiratha. Like the Sun, he was one whose rise occurred every day. Like Meru, he was one on the shadow of whose feet all the world depended (for its protection). Like a direction-elephant, he had his hand moistened with gifts which he continuously bestowed. He did the most wonderful things. He performed sacrifices. In him were mirrored all the Sastras. He was the birth-place (encourager and improver) of (all) the arts. He was the hereditary abode (so to say), of merits. He was the spring of the nectar-like delights of poesy. He was the rising-mountain to (the source of the rise of) the circle of his friends, (and) was the evil-bringing comet to his enemies. He founded literary societies, (and) was a patron of connoisseurs. He threw into background (all eminent) archers. He was the leader of the adventurous, (and) was the foremost among men of culture. Like Garuda, he gave delight to those who submitted to him. Like Prithu (son of Vena), he had uprooted with the end of his bow all his enemies (who were formidable) like the Kula-mountains.

- ◆ English translation of first paragraph of Banabatta's Kadambari.

2.3.4 English Translation of Kautilya's Arthashastra

Translating Kautilya's Arthashastra is a different kind of challenge, moving the focus from literary style to getting the concepts and technical terms right. This ancient text on governance, politics, and economics is dense, sometimes unclear, and has changed over many centuries.

- ◆ Translating Kautilya's Arthashastra is a different kind of challenge.

2.3.4.1 Structure and Content of Arthashastra

The Arthashastra, compiled by Kautilya, is called by scholars as



- ◆ Arthashastra is divided into 15 chapters, 150 chapters and 180 chapters.

the Encyclopedia of Political Science. The book deals with Dhramasastra, ethics, pedagogy, sociology, medicine, tantra, agriculture, and so on. This economics is divided into 15 chapters, 150 chapters and 180 chapters. These fifteen chapters are divided into three parts, Tantram, Atapaha, and Shesha. The Tantra contains Adhikaranas on Vinayadhikarikam, Adhyaksha Prachara, Dharmasthiya, Kanta-ka Shodhana, and Yoga Vrttam. In the second part, the Avapadhikara contains the authorities of Mandalayoni, Shadgunya, Vyasa-nadhikari, Abhiyasyatkarma, Sangramika, Sangavritta, Abaliasa, and Durgalambhopaya.. The rest of the third part contains two chapters on the Oupanishadikam and Tantrayukthi. In the first Vinayadhikarikam there are eighteen chapters on the purpose of knowledge, in the second thirty-eight chapters on the settlement of the country, in the third twenty chapters on the establishment of behaviour; Thirty-one chapters on the six-fold ocean, the eighth on the class of nature and addiction, the ninth on power, country, time, strength and knowledge, the tenth on thirteen chapters on shoulder-investment, In the fourteenth, there are three chapters, such as the experiment of killing others, and in the fifteenth, there are divisions of the Tantra Yukti.

- ◆ The first five books deal with internal administration

After a brief introduction setting the Arthashastra in the context of other sciences, Book 1 deals with the King-his training, the appointment of ministers and other officers of the state, the daily routine to be followed by the ruler and his safety and security. Book 2 describes the duties of the various executive officers of the state and gives a full picture of state activities in agriculture, mining, leisure activities and so on. Book 3, which is concerned with law and the administration of justice, reproduces a complete code of law. Book 4 deals with the suppression of crime and includes sections on detection of crime, control over merchants and artisans, torture and capital punishment. Book 5 is a miscellaneous collection of topics including the salary scales of officials. Book 6 is very short, containing only two chapters, but both are important, since they set out the theoretical basis for the whole work. The first chapter sets out the theory of the constituent elements of a state and the second the theory of foreign policy.

Book 7 contains an exhaustive discussion on the way in which each of the six methods of foreign policy may be used in various situations that are likely to arise in the conduct of foreign policy. Book 8 is concerned with vyasanas, usually translated as calamities, which may affect adversely the efficient functioning of the various constituent elements. Book 9 deals with preparations for war and includes topics such as: the different kinds of troops that could be mobilised, the proper conditions for starting an expedition and the dangers to be guarded against before starting. Book 10 is concerned with fighting and describes the main battle camp, types of battle ar-



rays and different modes of fighting. Book 11 has only one chapter and describes how a conqueror should tackle oligarchies governed by a group of chiefs instead of a single king. Book 12 shows how a weak king, when threatened by a stronger king, should frustrate the latter's designs and ultimately overcome him. Book 13 is concerned with the conquest of the enemy's fort by subterfuge or by fighting. It also describes how the conquered territories should be ruled.

- ◆ The last eight on a state's relations with its neighbours.

Book 14 deals with secret and occult practices, and the last Book describes the methodology and the logical techniques used in the work. Though the placement of some books and some chapters may not seem strictly logical, it can be said that, by and large, the first five books deal with internal administration and the last eight on a state's relations with its neighbours.

2.3.4.2 Arthashastra- commentaries and translations

- ◆ Arthashastra's German translation with voluminous notes by J.J. Meyer

Kautilya's Arthashastra had never been forgotten in India and is often mentioned in later literature, sometimes eulogistically and sometimes derisively. But the text itself was not available in modern times until, dramatically, a full text on palm leaf in the grantha script, along with a fragment of an old commentary by Bhattasvamin, came into the hands of Dr. R. Shamasastri of Mysore in 1904. He published not only the text (1909) and an English translation (1915) but also an Index Verborum in three volumes listing the occurrence of every word in the text. Subsequently another original manuscript and some fragments, in a variety of scripts, were discovered as well as old commentaries of the text. In addition to Dr. Shamasastri's translation, there is an edition of the text with a complete Sanskrit commentary by T. Ganapati Sastri, a German translation with voluminous notes by J.J. Meyer, a Russian translation and translations in many Indian languages.

Dr. R.P. Kangle of the University of Bombay devoted many years of painstaking erudition and scholarship to comparing the various texts and translations. His monumental three-volume edition of the Arthashastra was first published between 1960 and 1965. The set contains: (i) a definitive critically edited text with precise numbering of the sutras and verses, (ii) an English translation with detailed notes which take into account all other translations and (iii) an exhaustive study.

All students of the Arthashastra owe a great debt to Dr. Shamasastri and Dr. R.P. Kangle. That is why I have dedicated this new translation, in all humility, to these two great scholars.

The text contains fifteen adhikaranas or Books. The first chapter of Book 1 is a detailed table of contents and in one verse (1.1.18), states that the text has 150 chapters, 180 prakaranas and six thousand



- ♦ The text contains fifteen adhikaranas or Books.

verses in all. A prakarana is a section devoted to a specific topic; the number of chapters is not the same as the number of sections because sometimes a chapter deals with more than one topic and sometimes a topic is spread over more than one chapter. In Shamasastri's text, the sutras are divided by appropriate stops but are not numbered. Every sutra and shloka is clearly numbered in Kangle's text and translation and we shall follow the same system.

The Arthashastra is mainly in prose of the sutra form, with only 380 shlokas. Though sutra can be translated as 'maxim', we shall refer, for the sake of convenience, to both sutra and shloka as 'verse' in this translation. The actual number of verses (sutras and shlokas) in Kangle's edition is 5348. The fact that the text does not contain 6000 verses as claimed in (1.1.18) has led to the speculation that a part, about one-ninth of the present length, may have been lost over the centuries. Kangle's analysis establishes that this is quite unlikely. In fact, it is more likely that some verses might have entered into the text due to scribal error from marginal glosses by commentators; these number 35 in all. The figure of 6000 is an approximation, not meant to be an exact count.

Barring any new discoveries, the text, as we now have it, can be taken to be as complete and as faithful a rendering of the original as is possible for a work of this antiquity.

Since, for reasons explained below, the verses are arranged in this translation in an order different from that of the original text, it may be useful to have a brief indication of the contents of the different Books. The following summary is an extract from Kangle's 'Study',”

L. N. Rangarajan's 1992 translation is a “simpler and rearranged version,” intended for a wider audience. However, some readers have criticized this approach, finding that the original text is never presented in a continuous form but is instead “a series of quotes interwoven with the translator's analysis.

L. N. Rangarajan's 1992 translation is a “simpler and rearranged version,”

2.3.4.3. The Range of Arthashastra

Artha follows dharma. As used in Arthashastra generally and by Kautilya, the last and greatest master of the science, artha has a much wider significance than merely 'wealth. The material well-being of individuals is a part of it. As Kautilya says in the concluding section of his book: 'The source of the livelihood of men is wealth'. He then draws the corollary that the wealth of a nation is both the territory of the state and its inhabitants who may follow a variety of occupations (15.1.1). The state or government has a crucial role to play



- ◆ Artha follows dharma

in maintaining the material well-being of the nation and its people. Therefore, an important part of Arthashastras is 'the science of economics', including starting productive enterprises, taxation, revenue collection, budget and accounts.

The aim of pursuing successful economic policies, particularly through productive enterprises, is also to increase the revenues of the state and appropriate the surpluses for the state treasury. Kosha (treasury) is an essential constituent of the state, A King with a depleted treasury cars into the very vitality of the citizens and the country' says Kautilya (2.1.16). At the same time, a King who impoverishes his own people or angers them by unjust exactions will also lose their loyalty [7.5.27). A balance has to be maintained between the welfare of the people and augmenting the resources of the state.

This presupposes two things-maintenance of law and order and an adequate administrative machinery. In this context, maintaining law and order involves not only the detection and punishment of criminals (as in Book 4 of the text on "The removal of thorns', i.e., anti-social elements) but also upholding the fabric of society. The state has a responsibility for ensuring the observance of laws concerning relations between husbands and wives, inheritance, the rights of women, servants and slaves, contracts and similar civil matters. Further, there have to be laws to avoid losses to the state treasury and to prevent embezzlement or misuse of power by servants of the state. Therefore an integral part of Arthashastra is dandaniti, the enforcement of laws by a voluminous and comprehensive set of fines and punishments.

Dandaniti, the science of law enforcement, is the name given in the Mahabharata to the mythical original work of this kind, said to have been handed down by Brahma himself at the time of creation. Danda, meaning rod or staff, stands for the sceptre wielded by rulers; it also has many other meanings. For example, the army is called danda. It is also one of the four methods of dispute settlement and connotes the use of force. Kosadanda (the treasury and the army) is an expression which occurs often to indicate the combined economic power and military might of a state. Danda thus covers all aspects of the coercive power of a state. Where it means punishment, it has to be understood as just punishment. For: "A king meting out unjust punishment is hated by the people he terrorises while one who is too lenient is held in contempt; whoever imposes just and deserved punishment is respected and honoured (1.4.7-10).

- ◆ Dandaniti, the science of law enforcement

The extensive responsibilities of the state for promoting economic well-being and preserving law and order demand an equally extensive administrative machinery. Any text on Arthashastra has to contain details of the organization of the civil service as well as the duties and responsibilities of individual officials.



- ◆ A ruler's duties in the internal administration of the country are three-fold

A ruler's duties in the internal administration of the country are three-fold: raksha or protection of the state from external aggression, palana or maintenance of law and order within the state, and yogakshema or safeguarding the welfare of the people.

The prosperity of the state and its inhabitants cannot be maintained unless new territory is acquired by settlement of virgin lands, by alliance or by conquest. In a political environment which had many kings, any one of them resting content with his own territory was likely to fall prey to the expansionist ambitions of another. How to deal with other kings by using peaceful or warlike methods is the foreign policy aspect of Arthashastra. Since conquest is the most important method of acquisition (labha) of new territory, preparing for and waging war also becomes an integral part of the science.

Artha is an all-embracing word with a variety of meanings. In (1.7.6-7), it is used in the sense of material well-being; in (15.1.1), livelihood; in (1.4.3), economically productive activity, particularly in agriculture, cattle rearing and trade; and, in general, wealth as in the Wealth of Nations'. Arthashastra is thus 'the science of politics' as it is used in (1.1.1) or (1.4.3). It is the art of government in its widest sense. The subjects covered include: administration; law, order and justice; taxation, revenue and expenditure; foreign policy; defence and war. Its three objectives follow one from the other: promotion of the welfare of the subjects leads to acquisition of wealth which, in turn, makes it possible to enlarge the territory by conquest.

It is true that many areas covered by the Arthashastras are also included in the Dharmashastras. There is, however, a crucial difference between the two. The Dharmashastras address themselves to the individual, teaching him his dharma, and regard deviations from it as sins to be expiated by ritual. The Arthashastras are addressed to rulers and regard transgressions of law as crimes to be punished by the state.

A passage translated Dr.Shama Sastry, into English, from Arthashastra is given below.

विनयाधिकारिकम् - प्रथममधिकरणम्

Óm.

Salutation to Sukra and Brihaspati.

This Arthasástra is made as a compendium of almost all the Arthasástras, which, in view of acquisition and maintenance of the earth, have been composed by ancient teachers.

Of this work, the following are the contents by sections and books

◆ विनयाधिकारिकं
प्रथमाधिकरणम्

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. विद्यासमुद्देशः । | 10. परविषये कृत्याकृत्यपक्षोपग्रहः । |
| 2. वृद्धसंयोगः । | 11. मन्त्राधिकारः । |
| 3. इन्द्रियजयः । | 12. दूतप्रणिधिः । |
| 4. अमात्योत्पत्तिः । | 13. राजपुत्ररक्षणम् । |
| 5. मन्त्रिपुरोहितोत्पत्तिः । | 14. अवरुद्धवृत्तम् । |
| 6. उपधाभिः शौवाशौचज्ञानममात्यानाम् । | 15. अवरुद्धे च वृत्तिः । |
| 7. गूढपुष्पोत्पत्तिः । | 16. राजप्रणिधिः । |
| 8. गूढपुष्पमनिषिः । | 17. निशान्तप्रणिधिः । |
| 9. स्वविषये कृत्याकृत्यपक्षरक्षणम् । | 18. आत्मरक्षितकम् । इति विनयाधिकारिकं
प्रथमाधिकरणम् ।। |

BOOK I. Concerning Discipline

The end of Sciences; association with the aged; restraint of the organs of sense; the creation of ministers; the creation of councillors and priests, ascertaining by temptations purity or impurity in the character of ministers; the institution of spies. Protection of parties for or against one's own cause in one's own state; winning over the factions for or against an enemy's cause in an enemy's state, the business of council meeting, the mission of envoys: protection of princes; the conduct of a prince kept under restraint, treatment of a prince kept under restraint, the duties of a king, duty towards the harem; personal safety.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. जनपदविनिवेशः । | 13. अक्षशालायां सुवर्णाध्यक्षः । |
| 2. भूमिच्छिद्रविधानम् । | 14. विशिखायां सौवर्णिकप्रचारः । |
| 3. दुर्गविधानम् । | 15. कोष्ठागाराध्यक्षः । |
| 4. दुर्गविनिवेशः । | 16. पण्याध्यक्षः । |
| 5. सन्निधातुनिचयकर्म । | 17. कुप्याध्यक्षः । |
| 6. समाहर्तृसमुद-यप्रस्थापनम् । | 18. आयुधागाराध्यक्षः । |
| 7. अक्षपटले गाणनिक्याधिकारः । | 19. तुलामानपौतवम् । |
| 8. समुदयस्य युक्तापह्नतस्य प्रत्यानयनम् । | 20. देशकालमानम् । |
| 9. उपयुक्तपरीक्षा | 21. शुल्काध्यक्षः । |
| 10. शासनाधिकारः । | 22. सूत्राध्यक्षः । |
| 11. कोशप्रवेश्यरत्नपरीक्षा । | 23. सीताध्यक्षः । |
| 12. आकरकर्मान्तप्रवर्तनम् । | 24. सुराध्यक्षः |



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|---------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| 25. सुनाध्यक्षः । | 32. पत्यध्यक्षः । |
| 26. गणिकाध्यक्षः । | 33. सेनापतिमचारः । |
| 27. नावध्यक्षः । | 34. मुद्राध्यक्षः । |
| 28. गोध्यक्षः । | 35. विवीताध्यक्षः । |
| 29. अश्वाध्यक्षः । | 36. समाहर्तृप्रचारः । |
| 30. इस्त्यध्यक्षः । | 37. गृहपतिकवैदेहकतापसव्यञ्जनाः प्रणिधयः । |
| 31. रथाध्यक्षः । | 38. नागरिकप्रणिधिः । |

Formation of villages; division of land; construction of forts; buildings within the fort; the duty of the chamberlain, the business of collection of revenue by the collector-general; the business of keeping up accounts in the office of accountants; detection of what is embezzled by government servants out of state-revenue; examination of the conduct of Government servants; the procedure of forming royal writs; the superintendent of the treasury; examination of gems that are to be entered into the treasury, conducting mining operations and manufacture; the superintendent of gold; the duties of the state goldsmith in the high road; the superintendent of store-house; the superintendent of commerce; the superintendent of forest produce, the superintendent of the armoury; the superintendent of weights and measures, measurement of space and time; the superintendent of tolls; the superintendent of weaving; the superintendent of agriculture; the superintendent of liquor, the superintendent of slaughter-house; the superintendent of prostitutes; the superintendent of ships, the superintendent of cows, the superintendent of horses; the superintendent of elephants, the superintendent of chariots, the superintendent of infantry, the duty of the commander-in-chief. the superintendent of passports. the superintendent of pasture lands; the duty of revenue collectors, spies in the guise of householders, merchants, and ascetics, the duty of a city superintendent.

2.3.4.4 The Complex Text: A Layered and Coded Work

The Arthashastra has a complicated history. Its authorship, attributed to Kautilya (also known as Chanakya), is debated by scholars due to differences in style and historical errors. The surviving manuscripts are not the originals. The text itself is a layered work with 15 books, 150 chapters, and 180 topics. The rediscovery of a single manuscript in 1905 by Rudrapatna Shamasastri was a huge event, and his first English translation, though based on just one source, was a crucial first step. Later scholarly editions, like the one by R. P. Kangle in the 1960s, used multiple manuscripts to create a more reliable source for future translations. This shows that thorough scholarly work on the original text is essential before any good translation can be done.

- ◆ The Arthashastra has a complicated history.



The Conceptual Gap: The Challenge of Artha and Statecraft

The difficulty of the Arthashastra starts with its title. The word Artha has many meanings. Scholars have translated it in various ways, such as “the science of politics,” “a treatise on polity,” “the science of material gain,” and “the science of political economy.” This ambiguity reflects the larger translation problem.

- ◆ Artha is one of the four Puruṣārthas

Artha is one of the four Puruṣārthas (aims of human life) along with dharma, kāma, and mokṣha. Simply translating it as “wealth” or “political economy” risks losing its broader cultural and philosophical meaning as a complete goal of human existence. The translator must bridge this conceptual gap, choosing a term that is both accurate and understandable to a modern reader without oversimplifying the original concept.

- ◆ The Arthashastra uses technical terms for governance

This challenge extends to the main political terms. The Arthashastra uses technical terms for governance, such as swami for the king and amatya for ministers. Translating these terms requires careful thought to avoid making false comparisons. For example, Western scholars have often compared Kautilya to Machiavelli. While this comparison provides a familiar starting point, it often oversimplifies the Arthashastra by focusing only on its “ruthless realism” and ignoring its detailed discussions on economics, law, and social welfare. This practice can be seen as an act of intellectual orientalization, where a complex, native Indian political resource is forced into a familiar Western category, compromising its original nature. Translating a term like amatya as “minister,” for instance, can create the mistaken idea of a modern cabinet, exaggerating their power and understating the king’s ultimate authority. The intellectual frameworks brought to the text are just as important as the choice of words.

2.3.4.5 Major English Translations of Arthashastra

- ◆ Arthashastra was brought to light for the first time by Dr. Shama Sastry

Since its rediscovery, the Arthashastra has been translated many times, with each version having a different approach. This great work was brought to light for the first time by Dr. Shama Sastry, who was the Librarian of Oriental Research Institute, University of Mysore during the year 1909, and aroused the interest of several Orientalists throughout the world. initial translation was groundbreaking despite being based on a single manuscript.

R. P. Kangle’s three-volume edition and translation from the 1960s is considered a major scholarly achievement. However, his work is sometimes criticized for being too literal, which can make parts of the text “very difficult to understand,” especially since Sanskrit often lacks explicit subjects for verbs. “



- ◆ Translation is an ongoing scholarly process that evolves with new understanding.

A more recent translation by Patrick Olivelle (2013) aimed to fix the issues in previous versions by incorporating decades of new research. Olivelle's key contribution was to explicitly explain in English things that were only implied in Sanskrit, making the text clearer for modern readers. He also corrected previous translation errors, such as Kangle's rendering of official ranks, by explicitly translating the many names for royal officials. This clarified that the king, not a central administration, held the ultimate power, correcting the idea from Kangle's translation that ministers might have balanced the king's authority. Olivelle's approach shows that translation is an ongoing scholarly process that evolves with new understanding.

2.3.5. The Translator's Role

- ◆ The translator must be an artist

Translating Kādambarī requires a high degree of creative intervention and a deep understanding of the literary conventions of the target language. The translator must be an artist, capable of recreating a sense of flow and emotional intensity that a literal translation of the source's complex sentences would not provide.

The translation of the Arthashastra, on the other hand, requires a broad, multi-disciplinary knowledge base. The translator must be a Sanskrit philologist, an ancient historian, and a scholar of modern political and economic theory to avoid misrepresenting the concepts. A key part of this role is to engage with and correct past translations, as shown by Olivelle's clarification of the king-minister relationship. The translator's preface becomes a crucial site for this intellectual work, where they can explain their strategy and promote understanding of the source culture.

Summarised Overview

The analysis of the translations of Kādambarī and the Arthashastra shows that translating classical Sanskrit prose is a multifaceted and challenging task that is fundamentally shaped by the genre of the source text. It is a process challenged by linguistic differences, such as complex grammar and the use of compounds, as well as significant cultural and conceptual gaps. These challenges appear as a stylistic problem for literary works and as a conceptual problem for technical treatises.

Ultimately, there is no single "correct" way to translate these works. The different translations—from Ridding's partial summary to Olivelle's explicit notes and Rangarajan's simplified commentary—are not just competing versions but different tools for different purposes. They are a testament to the fact that translation is an ongoing human effort



to connect cultures and intellectual traditions. As technology advances with hybrid machine translation, the linguistic hurdles may decrease, but the deeper, more nuanced challenges of aesthetic and conceptual faithfulness will continue to require a human act of intellectual and cultural empathy. The enduring value of these texts, and the translations that make them accessible, lies not just in their content but in the intellectual and artistic negotiations that bring them to a wider audience.

Assignment

1. What makes translating Sanskrit into English so difficult, and how does the concept of an “inflected” language relate to this challenge?
2. How do Sanskrit’s long compound words, or *samāsa*, present a unique problem for translators?
3. Translating *Kadambari* and the *Arthashastra* presents different challenges. How does the translator’s goal (aesthetic vs. accuracy) change for each work?
4. Explain why the ornate *kāvya* style of *Kadambari*, with its hyperbole and long descriptions, is considered a feature of its artistic genius rather than a flaw.
5. Describe the content of Banabhatta’s *Kadambari*
6. What is the primary goal of a technical translator when working on a text like the *Arthashastra*?
7. Analyze the *Kavya* style of *Kadambari*.
8. According to the *Arthashastra*, what is the all-encompassing meaning of ‘*artha*’ as used?
9. What is the core distinction between the *Arthashastras* and the *Dharmashastras*.
10. Explain the content of *Arthashastra*

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Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU





Translations of Sanskrit works in other Indian languages

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ❖ understand India's multi – lingual translating tradition
- ❖ analyse the role of translation in cultural exchange
- ❖ evaluate linguistic and literacy impact
- ❖ analyse cultural adaptation

Background

Sanskrit, as the classical language of ancient India, has profoundly influenced the development of literature, philosophy, and religion across the subcontinent. The translation and adaptation of Sanskrit works into various Indian languages have been a continuous process for centuries, serving as a powerful force in shaping regional identities and cultural narratives. Rather than simple, word-for-word translations, these creative retellings often involve a deep engagement with the source material, reinterpreting myths, epics, and philosophical texts to resonate with local customs and sensibilities. This process has been crucial in the spread of devotional movements, as it made complex religious and philosophical knowledge accessible to a broader audience who did not understand Sanskrit. By weaving Sanskrit narratives into the linguistic and cultural fabric of regional languages, these adaptations have not only preserved ancient wisdom but also transformed it, creating a rich tapestry of literary and spiritual traditions that continue to thrive today.

Keywords

Historical context, Sanskrit epics, philosophical texts, mugal kings, religious and political support, bhakthi movement, Ramacharithmanas, Ramavatharam, Adhyathmaramayanam, Kabir's dhoha, veerashaivism, Andhra Mahabharatham, Shakunthalam translation, Dravidian languages



Discussion

Translating Sanskrit works into other Indian languages was a very big and important thing that changed our country's literature, culture, and politics a lot. It was not just about changing words from one language to another. This was a complicated project with many reasons behind it, like kings wanting to show their power, people wanting to fix society, and religious groups wanting to spread their ideas.

Because of this, many new books were written in local languages. These were not just copies of the Sanskrit ones; they were new and different stories that stood on their own. This translation work was also very political. It was used to bring different cultures together under a new ruler or to make one particular religious belief stronger.

But the biggest change came from the Bhakti movement. The Bhakti saints used local languages to make spirituality simple for everyone and to fight against the caste system and the old ways of the upper-class. The great Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, are perfect examples of this. The people who translated these big stories were not just translators; they were like writers themselves. They changed the stories and religious ideas to fit the values of new communities.

Over time, this exchange made a big mix of languages. Many modern Indian languages took words and grammar from Sanskrit, even while they grew in their own way. Now, our main focus is no longer on making new translations. Instead, we have a very important task: to save the old handwritten books. This has led to the creation of digital libraries and joint projects to share this ancient knowledge with the whole world, before it is lost forever.

2.4.1. A Historical and Cultural Context for Translation

Sanskrit, a very old Indian language, was special. It was the main language for high-level talk and important knowledge across India. However, only a small group of educated people used it. The oldest Sanskrit books, like the Rigveda, were first passed down by speaking for a long time before being written down. Sanskrit literature was not just about religious books; it also had poetry, plays, and books on science, medicine, and mathematics. As Indian cultures spread to places like Southeast Asia, Sanskrit became a key "link language," and many languages there still have words from it. The vast knowledge in this language set the stage for later translations that would make this information available to more people.

◆ The biggest change came from the Bhakti movement.

◆ A Historical and Cultural Context for Translation



2.4.1.1. Mughal Kings and the Translation Project

- ◆ Translation was not a neutral act but a powerful political and religious tool.

Translating was not just for scholars; it was a strong political tool. The Mughal Empire, which came from Central Asia, started one of the biggest “knowledge transfer” projects in early Asia between 1570 and 1660 CE. They had many Sanskrit books, especially the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, translated into Persian. This was a team effort. Mughal elites who knew Persian worked with Brahmins or Jains who knew Sanskrit. They would talk in Hindi to understand each other and bridge the language gap. Emperor Akbar had a political reason for this: he wanted to bring different cultures together and strengthen his rule. This shows that translation was not a neutral act but a powerful political and religious tool.

2.4.1.2. Religious and Political Support: Buddhist Books Translated into Tibetan

A similar history of translation, but for different reasons, happened in Tibet. During the time of the Tibetan kings (from the mid-7th to mid-9th century), translating Buddhist books from Sanskrit into Tibetan was a government project. The main goal was to keep the religion pure and to create a clear set of holy books. They even created official translation teams and special dictionaries for this work.

- ◆ Buddhist Books Translated into Tibetan

Later, in the 17th century, powerful religious leaders like the Fifth Dalai Lama took over this role. He ordered new translations of old Sanskrit grammar books and knew that this work would bring him respect by showing he was following the traditions of the old translators. This shows that translation was also a way to gain political and religious power. Unlike the Mughals who wanted to mix different cultures, the Tibetans wanted to protect their own religious identity by making the original Sanskrit texts easy to understand in their own language.

2.4.1.3. The Bhakti Movement: A Big Change in Language and Devotion

- ◆ Bhakti Movement moved away from the strict rituals and caste rules of the time.

The Bhakti movement, which started in South India around the 6th century, brought a major change in how people practiced their religion and used language. This movement was all about showing personal, heartfelt love for a god. It moved away from the strict rituals and caste rules of the time.

A key part of this change was that the poet-saints started writing their songs and poems in local languages like Tamil, Kannada, Hindi, and Marathi, instead of Sanskrit. This was a clear decision to make spirituality open to everyone and share the message of love and devotion with common people, no matter their social or religious background.



- ◆ Bhakti movement was also a form of social protest.

This shift in language was not just a simple change; it was a powerful act that challenged the existing power structures. By writing in local languages, the Bhakti poets made spiritual ideas available to everyone. Before this, these deep religious ideas were only for the educated elite who knew Sanskrit. The Bhakti movement used simple poetry and stories to make these ideas easy to relate to. This was also a form of social protest. The poems of saints like Tulsidas and Tukaram directly spoke against the caste system. They promoted the idea that divine love is for everyone.

This shows how a literary movement can bring about a big social and cultural change. The Bhakti saints were not just poets; they were social reformers whose most important tool was language.

2.4.1.3.1 Examples of Bhakti Poets and Their Works

The way Sanskrit texts were reimagined in local languages is best seen in the works of major Bhakti poets.

Tulsidas

The poet Tulsidas, who lived in the 16th century, wrote his great book, the Ramcharitmanas, in Awadhi, a form of Hindi. His clear goal was to make the beautiful story of Rama easy for common people to understand. This work is different from the original Valmiki's Ramayana because Tulsidas shows Rama as a divine god, not just a human prince. This was a core idea of the Bhakti movement. Tulsidas even said he wrote the book as a loving act of devotion, not just as a piece of literature.

- ◆ Tulsidas - Ramcharitmanas

Kambar

Similarly, the Tamil poet Kambar wrote his Ramavataram in the 12th century. This was another devotional version that also showed Rama as a god. This masterpiece of Tamil literature changed female characters to give them more respect and introduced new ideas like "universal brotherhood." The direct link between Kambar's work and the Bhakti beliefs of his time shows how deeply these new religious ideas shaped the story.

- ◆ Kambar wrote Ramavataram

Other Important Bhakti Poets

Other well-known Bhakti figures include the Tamil Alvars and Nayanars, who started the movement. Their hymns became important religious texts for followers of Vishnu and Shiva. The two-line poems (dohas) of Kabir in Hindi went beyond religious and caste barriers. In Karnataka, Basavanna of the Veerashaivism movement used his prose-poems (Vachanas) in Kannada to fight social discrimination and teach devotion to Shiva.

- ◆ The two-line poems (dohas) of Kabir in Hindi



2.4.2. The Grand Epics Reimagined: Translation as Creative Adaptation

- ◆ Translation as Creative Adaptation

The translation of the great Hindu epics serves as a powerful case study for the concept of translation as a form of cultural adaptation, where the original narrative is reimagined to suit the values, beliefs, and linguistic sensibilities of a new audience. The translated works are not static reproductions but living, dynamic narratives that continue to evolve.

2.4.2.1 The Ramayana: From Valmiki's Ur-Text to a Plurality of Narratives

The *Ramayana* is best understood not as a singular text but as a “fluid, evolving narrative” with a plurality of tellings across different languages and cultures. The variations found in the vernacular versions are not random deviations but deliberate, culturally-specific changes that reflect the prevailing religious and social values of their time.

- ◆ *Ramavataram* is a quintessential example of this creative re-imagination.

- ◆ **The Tamil *Ramavataram* of Kambhar:** Composed in the 12th century, Kamban's *Ramavataram* is a quintessential example of this creative re-imagination. It is an independent work of “great literary artistry” that stands on its own merits. A key theological difference is that Kamban portrays Rama as a god, an incarnation of Vishnu, in contrast to Valmiki's Rama, who is presented as a “mere human, a prince”. The narrative introduces significant alterations, such as Ravana lifting Sita's entire hermitage without touching her, a detail added to uphold the sanctity of Sita's character. Kamban also reinterprets the last rites of King Dasharatha and recasts female characters like Ahalya and Tara to command greater respect and sympathy from the reader. New themes, such as “universal brotherhood,” are introduced by having Rama accept Guhan, Sugreevan, and Vibhishana as his brothers.

- ◆ *Ramcharitmanas*: The Epic of the People

- ◆ **Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*: The Epic of the People:** Tulsidas's 16th-century version, written in Awadhi, is more devotional in style and includes musical elements that make it ideal for public recitation and singing. Its central purpose was to impart “divine wisdom” and the “transformative power of devotion”.

- ◆ **Other Significant Vernacular *Ramayanas*:** The Bengali *Krittivasi Ramayan* (15th c.) transforms the “solemn Sanskrit epic” into a “sung, lively and familiar” narrative through a reorientation of its style. It elaborates on incidents that were only briefly mentioned in the original and even introduces new episodes, like the story of the demon Vasmalochon. The Malayalam *Adhyath-*



maramayanam Kilippattu (17th c.) by Ezhuthachan is a unique retelling in the *Kilippattu* (“bird song”) format .

These translations show that the originals were not seen as sacred, untouchable artifacts but as a flexible framework for re-narration, continuously re-shaped and reinterpreted by new generations of poets and communities.

2.4.3. The *Mahabharata*: A Compendium of Knowledge in Regional Tongues

The *Mahabharata*, a massive collection of different poetic works in its own right, was also a subject of early translation into Dravidian languages .

♦ The Telugu *Andhra Mahabharatam*: The Trinity of Poets:

This monumental work was the result of a collaborative effort spanning three centuries (11th-14th c. CE) by a trio of poets—Nannayya, Tikkana, and Errana—known collectively as the *Kavitrayam* . The initial challenge was immense, as Nannayya, the *Adi Kavi* (“first poet”) of Telugu, first had to “revise Telugu by building new grammar rules and increase its vocabulary” to even begin the translation . This demonstrates that the language itself had to be developed to handle the complexities of the Sanskrit epic. The final product is not a direct, stanza-by-stanza translation but an “independent translation” rendered in the *Champu* style, which is considered of “high literary excellence” . The work’s fluidity is exemplified by Errana, who seamlessly connected the work of his predecessors by writing the second half of a section in the style of both Nannayya and Tikkana, acting as a literary bridge.

- ♦ Monumental work was the result of a collaborative effort spanning three centuries

4.3 Sanskrit literary works like Kalidasa’s **Shakuntalam** and **Bhasa’s dramas** have been widely translated into various Indian languages over centuries. This tradition of translation isn’t just a modern phenomenon; it has deep roots in India’s history. These translations have played a crucial role in introducing classic stories, themes, and characters to a broader audience, shaping the literary traditions of different regional languages.

2.4.4. *Shakuntalam* (*Abhijñānaśākuntalam*)

Kalidasa’s **Abhijñānaśākuntalam** is one of the most celebrated Sanskrit plays and has been a popular subject for translation. Its story, which follows the romance between King Dushyanta and the hermit-raised Shakuntala, is a favorite across India.

- ♦ **Hindi**: The play has been translated into Hindi multiple times, often serving as a foundation for modern Hindi drama. These



translations helped popularize the themes of love, duty, and fate from the original work.

- ◆ Abhijñāna śākuntalam translation

- ◆ **Bengali:** In Bengal, the play was translated and adapted, influencing the nascent Bengali theater movement. The story became a staple in Bengali literature and performing arts.
- ◆ **South Indian Languages:** Shakuntalam's narrative, originally found in the Mahabharata and later dramatized by Kalidasa, has been retold in different forms in languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, often through dance, music, and folk theater.

2.4.5. Bhasa's Dramas

The plays of **Bhasa**, a celebrated dramatist believed to predate Kalidasa, were lost for centuries and rediscovered in the early 20th century. These works, including *Svapnavasavadattam* (The Dream of Vasavadatta) and *Urubhangam* (The Shattered Thighs), are known for their direct, powerful language and dramatic plots.

- ◆ **Rediscovery and Translation:** The discovery of Bhasa's plays in Kerala was a major literary event. Since their rediscovery, they have been translated into numerous Indian languages, including Malayalam and Hindi, by scholars and theater practitioners.
- ◆ **Influence on Modern Theatre:** The translations of Bhasa's plays, especially his powerful tragedies like *Urubhangam*, have been instrumental in influencing modern Indian theatre. For example, directors like Kavalam Narayana Panicker have staged these works in Malayalam, incorporating traditional art forms and martial arts to bring them to life.
- ◆ **Themes:** Bhasa's works often depart from the rigid conventions of classical Sanskrit drama. His tragic ending in *Urubhangam* and his sympathetic portrayal of villains from the Mahabharata provided a different kind of dramatic material that has appealed to modern sensibilities and led to more nuanced translations.

Sanskrit literary translations into Indian languages, such as those of **Shakuntalam** and **Bhasa's dramas**, are more than literal transfers; they are often "**transcreations**" or "**retellings**" that adapt the original work to the cultural and linguistic nuances of the target language. This process significantly impacts regional literature by **adapting the narrative** to resonate with local audiences, sometimes adding or removing scenes and altering characters. These translations also play a vital role in **incorporating local traditions**, blending Sanskrit stories with regional folklore, customs, and beliefs, which helps them feel like an integral part of the local literary landscape. Ultimately,

- ◆ Kalidasa's and Bhasa's works translated in most of the Indian languages



this translation and adaptation process has profoundly **influenced literary forms** in languages like Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada, contributing to the development of regional drama, poetry, and prose.

2.4.6. The Influence on Philosophical and Religious Texts

The *Bhagavata Purana*: Disseminating the Heart of Vaishnava Thought

The *Bhagavata Purana*, a central scripture for Vaishnava theology and the Bhakti movement, was another major text to be translated into regional languages . A prominent example is the Telugu *Pothana Bhagavatam* (15th c.), which is a translation of the Sanskrit *Srimad Bhaagavatam* . A key anecdote related to the work is that the poet, Pothana, refused to dedicate his translation to a king, choosing instead to dedicate it to Lord Rama . This act directly reflects the Bhakti ideal that art and talent are a divine gift to be used for the sole purpose of salvation, rather than for the patronage of mortal rulers.

- ◆ *Bhagavata Purana* also translated in most of the Indian languages

2.4.7. Sanskrit's Contribution to the Indo-Aryan Family (Bengali, Hindi)

Sanskrit, a member of the Indo-European family, is a linguistic ancestor to many modern Indo-Aryan languages, which evolved from the less-formal Prakrit languages . The relationship between Sanskrit and its descendants is a complex interplay of natural evolution and deliberate borrowing. Bengali, for instance, is composed of two distinct categories of words derived from Sanskrit . Tadbhava words are those that underwent a natural, continuous evolution from Sanskrit through Prakrit over millennia, with “tiny changes every generation” in pronunciation . The word for “truth,” for example, evolved from the Sanskrit *satya* into the authentic Bengali word *shach* . In contrast, *tatsama* words are Sanskrit words that were later “reintroduced” or directly borrowed into Bengali by the elite classes, often bypassing this natural evolution. The deliberate use of *tatsama* words by the educated class was a marker of sophistication, demonstrating a tension between a language’s organic evolution and its conscious manipulation for social or cultural purposes.

- ◆ Sanskrit is a member of the Indo-European family

2.4.8 The Enrichment of Dravidian Languages (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada)

The influence of Sanskrit is equally profound on the Dravidian language family, which is of a different linguistic origin . Telugu, in particular, has been so deeply impacted that it has adopted a “huge number of Sanskrit terminology” . These *tatsama* words have been



- ◆ The influence of Sanskrit is equally profound on the Dravidian language family

so thoroughly assimilated that it has become “almost impossible to accurately identify whether the word is adapted from Sanskrit or it is a Telugu word” . The influence extends beyond vocabulary to grammar and even the creation of new aspirated consonants in the Telugu alphabet specifically to facilitate the writing and pronunciation of Sanskrit words . Similarly, Sanskrit has significantly enriched the vocabulary and literary traditions of Tamil and Malayalam, especially during periods of religious exchange .

2.4.9. Linguistic Influence of Sanskrit on Regional Language

2.4.9.1 A Comparative Analysis of *Tatsama* and *Tadbhava* Words

- ◆ Analysis of *Tatsama* and *Tadbhava* Words

The distinction between *tatsama* and *tadbhava* words is a powerful illustration of the social dimension of language. The deliberate re-introduction of “cryogenically frozen” Sanskrit words by an educated elite shows that a language can be consciously shaped to reflect social aspirations. This creates a tension between a language’s natural, organic evolution and the social manipulation of its vocabulary. In many cases, the *tatsama* word is associated with sophistication, while its native *tadbhava* counterpart can be perceived as less refined. This phenomenon is not unique to Bengali and can be observed in the media and literary circles of languages like Kannada and Telugu as well.

2.4.10. Bridging Traditional Scholarship and Digital Humanities

- ◆ Bridging Traditional Scholarship and Digital Humanities

A key challenge is the gap between traditional scholars, who may be unfamiliar with modern digital techniques, and computer experts who lack training in Sanskrit. Initiatives like the Samskriti Foundation’s *Nyayakosha* portal, which provides detailed online definitions and etymologies for terms from the ancient Indian system of logic, exemplify efforts to bridge this divide. These projects demonstrate a clear understanding that preservation is not just about storing digital images, but about creating searchable, interactive, and pedagogically sound platforms that can make a manuscript’s content intelligible and relevant to a new generation of learners.

Summarised Overview

The history of Sanskrit translation in India is a dynamic narrative of creation, adaptation, and preservation. From the early, state-sponsored projects of the Mughals and Tibetan empires to the revolutionary vernacular translations of the Bhakti movement, the translation of Sanskrit works has served as a powerful tool for political legitimation, social reform, and intellectual exchange. The translated works are not static reproductions but vibrant, distinct literary phenomena that reflect the prevailing cultural and religious values of their time. The profound linguistic impact on both Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages underscores the enduring legacy of Sanskrit as a formative force in the subcontinent's linguistic evolution. In the contemporary era, the imperative has shifted from creating new translations to preserving and re-contextualizing the original manuscripts. Modern digital preservation projects are a new frontier of translation—from the physical and oral medium to the digital one—and are crucial for ensuring that the valuable knowledge contained in India's classical literature remains accessible to future generations, reinforcing the enduring nexus between text and context that has defined this long and rich history.

Assignment

1. How did the translation of Sanskrit works into regional languages serve as a political tool for the Mughal Empire ?
2. Explain how the Bhakti movement used vernacular languages not only to spread spiritual ideas but also to challenge existing social hierarchies and power structures.
3. In what ways did the Bhakti poets like Tulsidas and Kambar go beyond simple translation to reimagine and adapt the stories from the epics to align with their devotional and social values?
4. Explain the different translations and adaptations of the Valmiki Ramayana.
5. Explain the different translations and adaptations of the great epic Mahabharata .
6. How did translations of Sanskrit literary works like Kalidasa's Shakuntalam influence the development of regional Indian literature?
7. Discuss Sanskrit's Contribution to the Indo-Aryan Family .
8. Analyze the linguistic Influence of Sanskrit on Regional Languages.
9. Discuss the Influence on Philosophical and Religious Texts
10. Explain the historical context and nature of translation in India.



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Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



BLOCK-03

Sanskritin Translation to Malayalam

Block Content

- Unit 1: Possibilities of translation of Sanskrit to Malayalam–General views
- Unit 2: Malayalam translation of Sakuntala by Attur Krishna pisharoti and A R Rajarajavarma -Kalidasa's works translated by Kuttikrishna Marar



Possibilities of translation of Sanskrit to Malayalam – General views

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ❖ Analyze the historical phases that established the structural and lexical possibility of Sanskrit-Malayalam translation.
- ❖ Differentiate between the structural challenges posed by Sanskrit's inflectional grammar and Malayalam's agglutinative syntax.
- ❖ Evaluate the significance of the *Līlātilakam* and Ezhuthachan's *Kilippāṭṭu* in standardizing the Malayalam language.
- ❖ Explain how the multi-valence of Sanskrit terms necessitates dual expertise in the target tradition and its philosophy.

Background

The journey of translating Sanskrit into Malayalam is far more than a simple linguistic exercise; it is the defining narrative of Malayalam's literary and structural evolution. Unlike translation efforts between completely unrelated language families, the relationship between Sanskrit (Indo-European) and Malayalam (Dravidian) is one of profound historical symbiosis. This synergy has created a unique linguistic landscape where translation is not an imposition but an intrinsic possibility. Kerala's history bears witness to three major phases—from the elite *Manipravalam* of the 12th century to the popular *Kilippāṭṭu* of the 16th- all of which involved systematically integrating Sanskrit's vast, sophisticated lexicon into the stable, native Dravidian syntax. This constant process of linguistic confluence has resulted in a language that is inherently receptive to classical texts, possessing the necessary vocabulary (*Tatsama* and *Tadbhavas*) and a script (*Arya Ezhuthu*) specifically modified to handle the complex phonemes of the source language. This foundational compatibility is the primary reason for scholars viewing the Sanskrit-Malayalam translation endeavour as highly feasible.

However, this inherent feasibility does not negate the profound intellectual challenges that remain. Translating a Sanskrit text is not merely swapping words, but navigating the treacherous waters of semantic complexity and structural divergence. Classical Sanskrit, particularly in its philosophical and poetic *ślokas*, is characterized by multi-valence (*Anekārtha*), where single words like “Dharma” or “Rasa” carry distinct technical meanings depending on the specific canonical tradition (*Śāstra*) being referenced. Furthermore, the highly inflectional and condensed grammar of Sanskrit, replete with intricate compound



words (*Samāsa*) and strict *sandhi* rules, clashes directly with the agglutinative, rigid SOV (Subject-Object-Verb) syntax of Malayalam. A successful translator must first deconstruct the Sanskrit compound into its logical components, then re-structure the entire concept into flowing Malayalam prose, demanding skills that bridge two millennia of divergent linguistic evolution.

Ultimately, the consensus affirms that the translation of Sanskrit into Malayalam requires a rare kind of dual expertise, transforming the translator into a cultural and linguistic architect. It is a demand that transcends mere bilingualism; it calls for a deep mastery of the Sanskrit subject matter, its grammar, and the intertextual traditions on one hand, and a masterful command of contemporary, lucid Malayalam on the other. This ensures that translated text is not only academically accurate to the source's philosophical intent but also accessible and clear to the modern, non-specialist reader. The historical journey, marked by the prescriptive grammar of *Līlātilakam* and the devotional *transcreation* of Ezhuthachan, proves that this possibility is actively realized. The history of Sanskrit translation is thus inseparable from the history of Malayalam, a continuous process that has armed the regional language with the intellectual capacity to serve as a powerful vehicle for both the ancient heritage and modern thought.

Keywords

Manipravalam, Kilippāṭṭu, Ezhuthachan, Līlātilakam, Tatsama, Samāsa

Discussion

The process of translating Sanskrit texts into Malayalam is a deeply significant activity, chronicling not merely a linguistic transfer but the very formation and standardization of the Malayalam language itself. This relationship is unique, stemming from a profound historical, cultural, and linguistic connection that places Malayalam at the confluence of the Dravidian and Indo-European language families. While Indian tradition, at first glance, appears to lack a robust, dedicated theory of translation, unlike the ancient West, the sheer volume of texts transferred across languages and forms within the subcontinent suggests that translation has been an unconscious, effortless, and pervasive cultural practice.

- ◆ Transilation is deeply rooted in India's literary history reflecting linguistic fluidity and cultural exchange

The Indian Context of Translation: An Overview

In the vast multilingual landscape of India, translation has been a constant necessity and a common literary behaviour. The absence of a formalized "theory" in Sanskrit scholastic or literary tradition might imply that the fundamental components of Western translation theory, the "original text," the "author," and "cultural transference",



were perhaps not inherently problematized. This acceptance of linguistic fluidity is evident from early times, as Pali and Prakrit texts were translated into Sanskrit, and later, Chinese scholars travelled to India specifically to translate Buddhist texts.

Translation as “Transcreation”

The nature of translation in India differed significantly from the concept of “docile transference” prevalent in the West. The various Indian language words for translation reflect this unique process: *Anuvad* (speak after), *Bhāshāntar* (linguistic transference), *Vivartanam* (change), and *Rūpāntar* (change of form). This is best encapsulated by the term “transcreation”, coined by the translator P. Lal. Transcreation is a retelling or re-imagining by the translator, where the new text is an act of creative adaptation rather than mere reproduction. This implies that the classical Indian critical theories may have conceptualized the transfer of meaning differently, prioritizing the accessibility and cultural resonance of the resulting text.

Shared Sensibility and Linguistic Fluidity

India’s linguistic diversity, encompassing the radically different Indo-European (Sanskrit, Hindi) and Dravidian (Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada) families, makes translation a constant negotiation. Yet, all Indian languages share a common sensibility, largely derived from the shared heritage of Sanskrit and ancient literary theories.

- ♦ India's linguistic diversity coexists with a shared cultural sensibility, fostering a natural "translating consciousness"

The fluidity between languages was historically a normal practice. In ancient Sanskrit plays by figures like Kalidasa, it was customary for the elite and male characters to speak Sanskrit, while women and lower-class characters used Prakrit or other dialects like Sauraseni and Magadhi. Devy points rightly observes that “the extent to which bilingual literary production has been accepted in India as a normal literary behaviour... are indicative of India’s ‘translating consciousness’.”

Evolution of Indian Translation Practice

The movement of texts evolved through various phases:

Ancient Inter-Dialectal Translation: Transferring knowledge between Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit, often in the context of religious and philosophical discourses.

- ♦ Translating is india adapted to cultural and linguistic changes over time.

Medieval Regional Adaptation: The decline of Sanskrit’s popular influence and the rise of the Bhakti (devotional) movement led to the translation of popular Sanskrit works, especially the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata, and the Purāṇas, into regional languages to grant masses access to religious and didactic works. For example, the Oriya Bhagavata Mahapurana (c. 15th–16th century) translated



by Jagannatha Dasa, became so popular that it virtually replaced the Sanskrit original for public readings in Orissa.

Mughal Court Translation: During the medieval period, Persian became the elite language of scholarship. Akbar commissioned major translations of Sanskrit works, including the Mahabharata into Persian. This period focused on intercultural knowledge transfer patronized by the ruling elite.

Translation from Sanskrit to Malayalam: A Historical Chronicle

The history of translation from Sanskrit to Malayalam is particularly pivotal, as it provided the vital Indo-European vocabulary and literary scaffolding necessary to evolve early Malayalam (Kerala Bhāṣa) into the modern language. This history is marked by three distinct phases of engagement between the two languages.

1. The Medieval Foundation: The Era of *Manipravalam* (c. 12th–14th Century)

The genesis of a formal literary relationship between Sanskrit and Malayalam is traced to the *Manipravalam* era, a period defined not by direct translation but by a profound linguistic and literary synthesis. Emerging around the 12th century, *Manipravalam* represents the earliest systematic attempt to integrate the sophisticated Indo-European tradition with the native Dravidian structure of the evolving language of Kerala, *Kerala Bhāṣa* or early Malayalam.

- ◆ Manipravalam blended Sanskrit and Malayalam traditions

A Deliberate Hybrid Literary Style

The term *Manipravalam* is a poetic compound derived from “Mani” (Ruby), signifying the native Malayalam language, and “Pravalam” (Coral), representing the Indo-European Sanskrit. The combination was intended to evoke the image of a beautiful string of gems, symbolising the ideal and harmonious blend of the two tongues. This style was, critically, a deliberate literary experiment undertaken by the intellectual and social elite, primarily the Namboodiri Brahmins and the aristocratic classes of Kerala. For them, *Manipravalam* served as a high cultural marker, distinguishing their sophisticated aesthetics from the common vernacular prose.

- ◆ Manipravalam symbolized a harmonious blend of Malayalam and Sanskrit, representing a sophisticated literary experiment by Kerala elite.

The key mechanism of *Manipravalam* involved:

1. **Sanskrit Lexicon and Aesthetics:** The style heavily incorporated the vast Sanskrit vocabulary (*Tatsama* and *Tadbhava* words). It also adopted the highly regulated structures and ornamental devices of classical Sanskrit literature, particularly the conventions of *Kāvya* (court poetry).



2. **Sanskrit Metres:** Crucially, *Manipravalam* utilised the quantitative Sanskrit meters (*Vṛttas*), such as *Śārdūlavikrīḍitam* and *Vasantatilakam*, which were alien to the purely native Malayalam poetic tradition of the time.
3. **Dravidian Morpho-Syntax:** Despite the rich Sanskrit overlay, the grammatical backbone (morpho-syntax) remained distinctly Dravidian. The sentences adhered to the native Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) word order, and the verb conjugations and case markers were taken from early Malayalam, providing the essential structure upon which the Sanskrit lexicon was layered.

Seminal Works and Sanskrit Influence

The literary output of the *Manipravalam* period was significant in establishing Sanskrit as the *lingua franca* for abstract and elegant expression. These works often drew their themes and genres directly from Sanskrit models:

- ◆ Sanskrit models shaped Manipravalam literature's themes and genres

- ◆ **Vaiçikatantram:** Often cited as one of the earliest known full-fledged *Manipravalam* works, this text deals with the conduct and education of courtesans, a subject common in classical Sanskrit literary culture.
- ◆ **Sandeshakāvya** (Message Poems): was the most famous genre of this era, exemplified by the *Unnuneeli Sandesham* (14th century). This genre was a direct imitation of Kālidāsa's seminal Sanskrit work, the *Meghadūta* (The Cloud Messenger), where a lovelorn hero sends a message to his beloved through a natural messenger. The use of Sanskrit *Vṛttas* (metres) and the lush, descriptive language of the *Kāvya* tradition clearly demonstrate the overwhelming aesthetic debt to the Indo-European classical model.

The Codification and Canonical Authority of the *Līlātilakam*

The status of the *Manipravalam* literary style as a legitimate and high-brow aesthetic form was formally consecrated by the 14th-century Sanskrit treatise, the *Līlātilakam* (The Mark of Play). This monumental text, penned by an anonymous author, almost certainly a Namboodiri scholar, and written entirely in the classical language, is arguably the most important theoretical work in the history of the Malayalam language. Its significance lies in its dedication of formal Sanskrit scholastic authority to a hybrid vernacular, making it a critical bridge in the translation process from Sanskrit to Malayalam.

- ◆ *Līlātilakam* formally established Manipravalam as a high-brow aesthetic form, bridging Sanskrit and Malayalam

Establishing a Poetics and Grammatical Code

The *Līlātilakam* functions as the foundational poetics and prescriptive grammar for the composite *Manipravalam* language. Its



primary goal was to establish the necessary rules and standards for the “union” (*yogam*) of *Kerala Bhāṣa* (early Malayalam) and Sanskrit (*saṃskṛtam*). By doing so, it moved *Manipravalam* from an informal literary trend to a codified, classical system.

The treatise meticulously detailed:

- ♦ Lilathilakam defined "good" Manipravalam outlining rules for blending Sanskrit and Dravidian Structures harmoniously

- ♦ **Definition of ‘Good’ Manipravalam:** It laid down precise criteria, or *lakṣaṇam*, for what constituted acceptable literary practice. The text explicitly cautioned against the mixing of the two languages in a discordant or inharmonious manner (*bhraṣṭa*), stipulating that the Sanskrit words must blend seamlessly with the Dravidian structure.
- ♦ **Permissible Sanskrit Words:** The *Līlātilakam* distinguished between two categories of Sanskrit words:
 - ♦ **Tatsama (Same as that):** Words directly adopted from Sanskrit without change (e.g., *kālam*, *bhāgyam*). These were largely accepted.
 - ♦ **Tadbhava (Born of that):** Words that were phonologically adapted or corrupted (in the classical sense) when entering Malayalam (e.g., Sanskrit *Krishna* becoming *kaṇṇan*). The text was more restrictive about the use of *Tadbhava* forms in high literature.
- ♦ **Interaction with Malayalam Grammar:** Crucially, the treatise insisted that even when Sanskrit nouns and verbs were used, they had to be integrated using Malayalam conjugations, declensions, and syntax. This ensured the resulting language, while rich in Sanskrit vocabulary, remained structurally a Dravidian language, adhering to the native Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) word order. This prescriptive function provided an authoritative benchmark for all subsequent writers.

Proof of Linguistic Synthesis and Compatibility

By dedicating a formal treatise on *alaṅkāra* (poetics) and *vyākaraṇa* (grammar) to this hybrid tongue, the *Līlātilakam* implicitly but powerfully acknowledged the inherent linguistic capacity of early Malayalam to absorb and integrate the Indo-European material.

This was a profound admission because Sanskrit scholastic tradition generally held a hierarchical view of languages. The *Līlātilakam* sanctioned the idea that the *Kerala Bhāṣa*, a regional Dravidian vernacular, was not only capable of sophisticated literary production but was also structurally robust enough to withstand and incorporate the complex lexicon and metrical patterns of Sanskrit without collaps-

- ♦ Lilathilakam acknowledged Malayalam's capacity to absorb Sanskrit, show casing language's compalibilty



ing its own fundamental Dravidian structure. The text thus stands as historical evidence that the linguistic infrastructure for Sanskrit-Malayalam translation was fundamentally compatible.

Solidifying Malayalam's Distinct Literary Identity

Prior to the *Lilātilakam*, the linguistic status of *Kerala Bhāṣa* was often debated, sometimes viewed merely as a dialect of Tamil due to their shared Dravidian root. The treatise played a decisive role in solidifying the status of Malayalam as a distinct and independent language.

- ◆ Lilātilakam established Malayalam as a distinct language, separate from Tamil, with its own literary identity

- ◆ **Differentiation from Tamil:** By defining *Manipravalam* poetics and its relationship to the *Kerala Bhāṣa* uniquely, the text helped carve out a specific literary space for Malayalam, separating its evolution and its Sanskrit relationship from that of classical Tamil.
- ◆ **Theoretical Basis for Influence:** The *Lilātilakam* provided the intellectual and theoretical justification for the continuous, deep Sanskrit influence that followed. It authorized the future coining of abstract, technical, and scholarly vocabulary from Sanskrit roots, paving the way for Malayalam to evolve into the comprehensive, highly expressive, and culturally rich modern language capable of complex philosophical and scientific discourse.

The *Lilātilakam* was not just a book of rules; it was a declaration of cultural identity and linguistic potential. It served as the “laboratory” authorisation that rigorously tested and ultimately validated the possibility of Sanskrit-Malayalam fusion, setting the precise cultural and linguistic trajectory that would later be democratised by the *Kilippāṭṭu* movement.

2. The Defining Era: The *Kilippāṭṭu* Movement (c. 15th–17th Centuries)

- ◆ Kilippattu Movement transformed Malayalam literature, democratizing knowledge and aligning with the Bhakti Movement

The transition from the elite and structurally complex *Manipravalam* era to the *Kilippāṭṭu* (Parrot Song) Movement marked a revolutionary departure in Malayalam's history. This period firmly established translation not as a courtly aesthetic exercise, but as a democratising force used to disseminate profound religious and philosophical knowledge, aligning Kerala with the larger pan-Indian Bhakti (devotional) movement. This phase is therefore considered the true genesis of Modern Standard Malayalam.

Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan: The Linguistic Architect

The undisputed central figure of this epoch is Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan (c. 16th century), who is universally revered as the Father of the Malayalam Language (*Bhaasha Pithav*). His contribution was not just literary, but profoundly linguistic, providing the normative standard that the language urgently required.



Ezhuthachan's pivotal works were his masterful translations, or more accurately, transcreations, of the great Sanskrit epics: the *Adhyātmārāmāyaṇam Kilippāṭṭu* and the *Mahābhāratam Kilippāṭṭu*. These texts drew their spiritual authority from the Sanskrit tradition, but their form and linguistic texture were revolutionary in Malayalam.

The Mechanics of *Kilippāṭṭu* and Accessibility

- ◆ Kilippattu Metre used simple, musical rhythms to spread devotional knowledge widely

The choice of the *Kilippāṭṭu* metre (literally, a 'Parrot Song', often featuring a parrot addressing the reader at the beginning of each section) was deliberate and brilliant. It replaced the restrictive, quantitative Sanskrit *Vṛttas* of the Manipravalam style with lighter, indigenous, and music-friendly meters (*Drāvika Vṛttas*) like *Kākaḷi* and *Kēka*. This change achieved immediate popular appeal:

- ◆ **Oral Tradition Integration:** The *Kilippāṭṭu* metre was easily sung, recited, and memorised, making the dense epic narratives accessible to the masses, regardless of their literacy levels. The texts thus moved out of the temple and court into every home, becoming texts of domestic devotion.
- ◆ **Devotional Adaptation:** Ezhuthachan's renderings were free, popular, and deeply devotional adaptations, focusing on the Bhakti ethos. He simplified philosophical passages and intensified the emotional resonance of the narrative, prioritizing the spiritual impact (*bhakti*) over a strict, academic fidelity to the original Sanskrit.

Linguistic Synthesis and Standardization: The Ezhuthachan Model

- ◆ Ezhuthachan shaped Modern Malayalam's foundation

The lasting legacy of Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan lies not just in his devotional poetry, but in his revolutionary linguistic act: forging a harmonious synthesis between the Indo-European and Dravidian language families. This innovation effectively resolved the structural tension present in the earlier, Sanskrit-heavy *Manipravalam* style, establishing the bedrock for Modern Standard Malayalam. Ezhuthachan's genius was in creating a literary language that was both elevated by the Sanskrit tradition and anchored in the native vernacular, thus making it universally accessible.

1. Selective Sanskritisation: The Principle of Necessity

Ezhuthachan's approach to incorporating Sanskrit was defined by selective Sanskritisation, a marked contrast to the pedantic excess of *Manipravalam*. Where the older style often used Sanskrit words gratuitously for mere ornamentation, Ezhuthachan adopted them based on necessity and functionality:



- ◆ Ezhuthachan's sanskritisation was selective and functional

- ◆ **Filling Lexical Voids:** He purposefully incorporated Sanskrit loanwords (*tatsamas* and *tadbhvas*) specifically to articulate abstract, religious, philosophical, and technical concepts for which the native Dravidian vocabulary was inadequate or non-existent (e.g., terms like *moksha*, *karma*, *pāpa*, and *punya*). This enriched Malayalam's capacity for complex thought.
- ◆ **Vocabulary for the Structure:** Ezhuthachan ensured that the Sanskrit vocabulary was subordinate to the Malayalam structure. The Sanskrit words were used primarily as nouns or adjectives, taking on the necessary Dravidian suffixes and inflections to fit seamlessly into the sentence. This practice ensured that the Sanskrit elements *functioned for* the Malayalam grammar, rather than imposing their own grammatical rules *against* the native structure. The language became sophisticated without becoming inaccessible.
- ◆ **Setting the Literary Tone:** This deliberate and judicious use of Sanskrit elevated the tone of the language, providing the dignity and depth required to handle monumental works like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, making it a fit vehicle for *śāstra* and philosophy, without alienating the common folk.

2. Dravidian Syntactic Rigour: The Anchor of Accessibility

The most crucial aspect of the Ezhuthachan model was his unwavering commitment to a simplified and stable Dravidian-based syntax. This adherence provided the structural stability and predictable word order that was fundamentally lacking in previous, more fluid literary efforts:

- ◆ **Fixed SOV Order:** Ezhuthachan rigorously maintained the Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) word order, the native grammatical sequence of Dravidian languages. This rigidity made the prose easily understandable to the non-elite reader, who spoke the vernacular and relied on this basic syntactic structure.
- ◆ **Native Morphology:** The essential verb morphology, case markers, and tense structures remained firmly native Malayalam. Unlike Sanskrit, which uses complex inflectional endings, Ezhuthachan's Malayalam used clear, agglutinative Dravidian suffixes to denote grammatical relations. This guaranteed that the *structural reading* of the sentence was instantly clear to all segments of society.
- ◆ **Standardization through Repetition:** By employing this harmonized linguistic approach consistently across his monumental works, the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇam* and *Mahābhāratam*, Ezhuthachan effectively standardized the literary language

- ◆ Ezhuthachan's syntax was Dravidian based simple and stable



through the sheer popularity and widespread circulation of these sacred texts. What was acceptable in his works became the norm for future writers.

This synthesized, streamlined language became known as the “Ezhuthachan model” and quickly rose to be the universally accepted standard for literary and formal Malayalam. By translating the core Sanskrit religious texts into this lucid, accessible form, Ezhuthachan achieved the ultimate goal of the Bhakti movement: he democratised the spiritual depth of the Sanskrit tradition, ensuring that the Malayalam language itself became the primary, revered vehicle for high-cultural expression across all social strata in Kerala.

3. The Modern Age: Systematic and Scholarly Translation (c. 19th–20th Century)

- ♦ Modern Malayalam translation became systematic and scholarly driven by print education and secular interests

The 19th and 20th centuries ushered in the Modern Age of Sanskrit-to-Malayalam translation, characterized by a fundamental shift from devotional adaptation to systematic, scholarly, and textually faithful rendering. This transition was fundamentally driven by the confluence of three major forces: the introduction of the printing press, the establishment of a modern, Western-style education system, and the corresponding rise of a new, educated reading public interested in secular knowledge and scholarly rigour.

The Shift to Scholarly Fidelity and Literary Translation

The primary goal of modern translation was redefined: it was no longer sufficient to merely convey the narrative or the *bhakti* ethos, as Ezhuthachan had done. The new focus demanded translations that preserved both the aesthetic beauty (*rasa*) and the textual fidelity (*pramāṇam*) of the Sanskrit original. This shift necessitated a sophisticated understanding of both Sanskrit grammar and the nuances of poetic and dramatic theory (*alaṅkāra* and *nāṭya-śāstra*).

The Pioneers of Systematic Translation

This academic resurgence was led by a cohort of scholar-translators often patronized by the royal courts and the burgeoning university system:

- ♦ Scholar-translators led Malayalam's academic resurgence

- ♦ **Keralavarma Valiya Koyi Thampuran (Kerala Kālidāsa):** He is credited with one of the earliest and most impactful systematic translations of a major Sanskrit work, Kālidāsa's famous drama, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (The Recognition of Śakuntalā). His translation set the standard for blending faithfulness to the source text with literary elegance in the target language.



- ◆ Vallathol's translation modernized classical Malayalam literature

- ◆ **A. R. Raja Raja Varma (Kerala Panini):** A.R was a pivotal figure in linguistic standardisation and his work extended beyond translation. However, his translations and his famous grammar text, *Kerala Panineeyam*, which adopted Sanskrit grammatical models to codify Malayalam structure, provided the theoretical apparatus necessary for rigorous, systematic translation.

- ◆ **Vallathol Narayana Menon:** Vallathol was a prolific poet and translator; his contributions were immense, including a near-complete and highly regarded translation of the entire Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇam. His work bridged the gap between the poetic tradition and the new demand for textual completeness, making the classical texts available in a clear, modern poetic style.

This sustained activity catered to an emerging, literate middle class that valued the classical heritage but required access to it through scholarly, published Malayalam texts.

The Enrichment of Abstract and Technical Vocabulary

Perhaps the most significant and lasting impact of this modern translation phase was its effect on the lexical capacity of Malayalam. As modern concepts of science, politics, economics, and law began to enter Kerala through English and modern education, Malayalam lacked the necessary indigenous vocabulary to discuss these abstract ideas.

Coinage and Lexical Expansion: Sanskrit as a Tool for Linguistic Modernization

- ◆ Sanskrit enlisted Malayalam's modernization through systematic coining of new vocabulary

The Modern Age (19th-20th centuries) dramatically utilized Sanskrit, the shared Indo-European resource, not just for classical revival, but as a strategic tool for linguistic modernization. This phase of translation and academic scholarship focused on neology—the systematic coining of new, formal, and abstract vocabulary—which was essential for transforming Malayalam into a language capable of handling contemporary scientific, political, and economic discourse that was entering the region primarily through English.

The Technical Revival and Templates for Science

The intellectual impetus for translation during this era extended far beyond literature and religion. Scholars recognised the rich Sanskrit knowledge base in specialized fields, which provided ready-made technical terminology and templates for modern concepts:

- ◆ **Ancient Sciences:** The systematic translation of Sanskrit *Śāstras* (knowledge texts) in areas like *Āyurveda* (traditional medicine), *Jyotiṣa* (astronomy and astrology), and traditional *Gaṇitam* (mathematics) brought a wealth of specialized terminology back



into active usage. Words describing diseases, planetary movements, or mathematical operations were revived, giving Malayalam precise, academic roots for vocabulary.

- ◆ Sanskrit knowledge bases fueled Malayalam's Scientific and technical vocabulary

- ◆ **Creating a Scientific Register:** This revived technical vocabulary provided the foundational elements (roots, prefixes, suffixes) necessary to coin equivalent terms for new Western scientific concepts. For instance, the Sanskrit root *jñāna* (knowledge) readily combined with *vi-* (special/distinct) to form *vijñānam* (science), a term instantly recognizable and academically precise, contrasting with a purely native, less formal word. This process allowed Malayalam to build a sophisticated scientific register quickly.

Systematising Formal and Abstract Concepts

The core challenge of modernisation was describing abstract, non-physical concepts related to governance and abstract thought. Scholars systematically leveraged the flexibility of Sanskrit morphology to create a new formal lexicon:

- ◆ Scholars used Sanskrit morphology to create Malayalam's formal, abstract vocabulary

- ◆ **Strategic Borrowing and Coining:** The process involved either direct borrowing (*tatsama*) or systematic coinage using prefixes (*upasargas*) and roots:
 - ◆ **Governance:** Terms like *rāṣṭrīyam* (politics), derived from *rāṣṭra* (nation/state), and *bharaṇam* (administration/governance), derived from the root *bhr̥* (to bear/support), and provided formal, authoritative words for the apparatus of the modern state.
 - ◆ **Abstract Systems:** Concepts such as *arthas'āstram* (economics)—literally the *sāstra* of *artha* (wealth/purpose)—were borrowed to discuss complex economic theories. *Dārs'anīkam* (philosophical) was created from *darśana* (view/school of thought).
- ◆ **The Role of Periodicals:** This process of neology was rapidly disseminated and standardised through the burgeoning Malayalam periodicals and the printing industry. Unlike the slow, word-of-mouth spread of the Bhakti movement, these printed, highly structured Sanskrit-derived terms became the definitive language of journalism, textbooks, and political debate, accelerating the acceptance of the language into formal public spheres.

The Modern Age saw Sanskrit translation evolve into a tool for linguistic and intellectual empowerment. It fundamentally validated the structural fusion achieved in earlier centuries, confirming that Malayalam's composite nature could be effectively leveraged to make it a complete and powerful vehicle for knowledge in the modern world,



equally capable of expressing classical poetic beauty and contemporary scientific thought.

Possibilities of Translation from Sanskrit to Malayalam

- ◆ Sanskrit - Malayalam translation benefits from centuries of linguistic overlap

The distinct linguistic history of Kerala offers exceptional possibilities for successful Sanskrit-Malayalam translation that would be unattainable in languages from completely different families. This feasibility rests primarily on the high degree of structural and lexical borrowing that has occurred over centuries.

Shared Linguistic Architecture

The most significant advantage is the Shared Vocabulary. Modern Standard Malayalam is heavily Sanskritised, with linguists estimating that its vocabulary is derived from both Sanskrit and the Dravidian roots in roughly equal proportion. This extensive borrowing ensures that direct equivalents (*Tatsama*) or phonologically adapted forms (*Tadbhavas*) exist for a vast array of Sanskrit words, particularly those related to abstract concepts, philosophy, religion, and science (e.g., *daivam* (God), *kālam* (time), *samayam* (time), *bhāgyam* (luck)). For many core concepts related to emotions, time, or life, Sanskrit-derived words are often the most common or even the only ones in literary and formal usage.

Furthermore, the *Manipravalam* tradition stands as historical proof of the inherent linguistic compatibility and cultural acceptance of this blending. This tradition was not a forced convergence but a natural, though elite, literary evolution, demonstrating Malayalam's capacity to seamlessly integrate the Sanskrit lexicon while retaining its Dravidian grammatical core.

Scriptural and Grammatical Symbiosis

- ◆ Malayalam's script and grammar are inherently receptive for Sanskrit

The fundamental possibility of translation from Sanskrit to Malayalam is not solely rooted in shared vocabulary; it is deeply embedded in the very visual and structural architecture of the Malayalam language. The unique evolution of the Malayalam script and its subsequent grammatical codification created a symbiotic environment highly receptive to Sanskrit material, easing the transition between the two linguistically distinct systems.

Scriptural Accommodation: Blending *Vattezhuthu* and *Grantha*

The development of the modern Malayalam script is a direct chronicle of its willingness to absorb Sanskrit. The indigenous script of Kerala was historically *Vattezhuthu* (meaning "round script"), which was well-suited for writing the native Dravidian sounds of early Ma-



Malayalam. However, *Vattezhuthu* lacked the necessary characters (or phonemes) to accurately represent the rich and complex sounds, especially the aspirate consonants (like *kha*, *gha*, *tha*) and vowel variations, prevalent in the Indo-European Sanskrit lexicon.

To overcome this deficiency, the *Vattezhuthu* was systematically modified by incorporating letters from the *Grantha* script, the classical script used in South India primarily for writing Sanskrit texts. This integration resulted in the *Arya Ezhuthu* (Arya script), the direct ancestor of the modern Malayalam script.

This fusion served a dual purpose vital for translation:

- ◆ Grandha script fusion enabled phonological accuracy and visual transfer case

1. **Phonological Fidelity:** By adopting *Grantha* letters, the Malayalam script gained the capability to write Sanskrit *Tatsama* words (unadapted loanwords) with complete phonological accuracy. This visual fidelity is crucial, as it allows philosophical and religious terms to retain their authoritative original pronunciation and form, preserving the integrity of the Sanskrit source.
2. **Visual Ease of Transfer:** For a reader familiar with Malayalam, the Sanskrit text, when transliterated, appears visually comprehensible because the basic characters share an origin or a strong similarity. This dramatically reduces the visual friction involved in transferring a text from the source language to the target language.

Grammatical Internalisation: the Role of Kerala Panineeyam

While early literary works like the *Līlātilakam* authorised the blending of lexicon, the formalisation of this linguistic synthesis was completed during the modern period through definitive grammatical works, most notably A. R. Raja Raja Varma's *Kerala Panineeyam* (1896).

This seminal text synthesized the two traditions:

- ◆ Kerala Panineeyam formalized Malayalam's linguistics synthesis

1. **Dravidian Structure as the Base:** The *Kerala Panineeyam* firmly established the Dravidian morpho-syntax (the SOV structure, native verb conjugations, and case systems) as the unshakeable foundation of Malayalam grammar.
2. **Sanskrit Models for Codification:** However, it systematically employed the highly rigorous, scientific, and hierarchical analytical framework of Sanskrit grammar (especially that of Pāṇini) to classify and describe the structure of Malayalam. By borrowing the methodology, such as the organization of phonemes (*varṇam*), roots (*dhātu*), and compounds (*samāsa*), from Sanskrit, it provided Malayalam a sophisticated, academic structure capable of discussing abstract linguistic concepts.



This formal internalisation of Sanskrit analytical principles makes Malayalam a highly receptive target language. When translating, the structural challenges posed by Sanskrit compounds and complex word forms are mitigated because Malayalam already possesses a formal grammatical mechanism (sanctioned by the *Kerala Panineeyam*) to analyse and restructure the Sanskrit sentence. The language, having formally acknowledged and integrated the analytical power of the Indo-European tradition, is structurally and academically prepared for the demands of systematic translation.

Challenges in Translation from Sanskrit to Malayalam

Despite the profound historical, scriptural, and lexical bond between Sanskrit and Malayalam, the task of translating classical and scholarly Sanskrit texts remains fraught with specific linguistic and cultural challenges. These difficulties stem primarily from the fundamental differences in their grammatical structures and the layers of semantic complexity embedded within the source texts, demanding exceptional dual expertise from the translator.

- ◆ Sanskrit - Malayalam translation requires expertise due to grammatical and semantic complexities

1. Morpho-Phonological Structure and Syntactic Divergence

The greatest structural hurdle lies in bridging the gap between the two language families. Sanskrit is a highly inflectional and synthetic Indo-European language, whereas Malayalam is a primarily agglutinative Dravidian language.

Complex Compounding (Samāsa)

Sanskrit often employs massive compounds (*Samāsa*), stringing together multiple nouns, adjectives, and particles to form single, dense lexical units that can span an entire line of poetry (e.g., *Rāma-lakṣmaṇa-bharata-śatrughna-caritam*).

- ◆ Sanskrit complex compounds and sandhi rules challenge Malayalam translators

- ◆ **The Challenge:** Translators cannot simply render these compounds word-for-word. They must first deconstruct the complex *samāsa* into its constituent parts, analyse the grammatical relationship between them, and then re-structure the entire phrase into a readable, flowing Malayalam prose that adheres to the native Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) syntax. Failing to deconstruct the compound correctly can drastically alter the meaning.
- ◆ **A-Dravidian Features:** The frequent use of prefixes and complex *sandhi* rules (rules for combining sounds at word boundaries) in Sanskrit are largely foreign to native Malayalam grammar, adding layers of difficulty in parsing and accurately representing the grammatical intent of the source text.

Rigid Metre vs. Flexible Prose

Classical Sanskrit is often written in highly regulated poetic metres



(*Vṛttas*) such as *Śikharīṇī* or *Mandākrāntā*. These metres constrain word choice and syntax to maintain rhythm.

- ♦ **The Constraint:** The translator must often sacrifice the literal word order or form of the Sanskrit to achieve the metre in Malayalam (as seen in the earlier *Manipravalam* period) or, more commonly in modern times, they must accurately convey the precise meaning of the highly compressed metre into lucid, expanded Malayalam prose, losing the original rhythmic effect in the process.

2. Semantic Ambiguity and Multivalence (*Anekārtha*)

Sanskrit, especially in its classical and philosophical registers, is notorious for its semantic depth, where words possess multiple meanings (*Anekārtha*).

Contextual Dependency

Many core Sanskrit words, particularly those carrying philosophical weight (e.g., *mukti*, *rasa*, *dharma*, *bhāva*), have several possible interpretations depending entirely on the specific discipline (*Śāstra*) or the school of philosophy (e.g., *Advaita*, *Mīmāṃsā*) from which the text originates.

- ♦ **The Dilemma:** The translator must not only know all possible meanings of a term but must also be a specialist in the specific *Śāstra* of the source text to choose the contextually intended, unambiguous meaning. A general dictionary equivalent in Malayalam will often fail to capture this precise philosophical nuance, leading to a loss of the full essence of the original word.

The Problem of Technical and Rare Lexicon

While common religious and abstract words are available as *Tatsama* in Malayalam, certain highly technical, obscure, or rare Sanskrit terms (often found in texts on logic, grammar, or ritual) may not have a single, direct, unambiguous equivalent in common usage.

- ♦ **The Solution/Compromise:** Translators are forced to choose between three imperfect options: 1) Borrowing the word entirely (risking inaccessibility for the general reader), 2) Coexisting with multiple variants (creating lexical instability), or 3) Providing an interpretive, explanatory phrase (sacrificing brevity and sometimes precision).

3. Cultural and Intertextual Density

Sanskrit texts are rarely self-contained; they are intricately woven into a vast, shared cultural and mythological fabric, making them highly intertextual and culturally dependent.

- ♦ Sanskrit words often have multiple layered meanings

- ♦ Technical Sanskrit terms often lack direct Malayalam equivalents

Mythological and Religious Allusions

Sanskrit literature is replete with unexplained allusions, metaphors, and similes drawn from the vast corpus of Hindu mythology, philosophy, and socio-religious practice. The original Sanskrit reader was assumed to possess this knowledge.

- ◆ Sanskrit texts relay heavily on shared cultural and mythological knowledge

- ◆ **The Gap:** For modern or non-specialist Malayalam readers, or those outside the immediate cultural context, these allusions can be opaque. For instance, a reference to *Maheśvara's third eye* implies the destruction of *Kāma* (desire).
- ◆ **The Requirement:** To ensure clarity, the translator is frequently obliged to provide extensive footnotes or explanatory paratexts. While necessary, these additions disrupt the text's flow and can turn a literary translation into an academic edition, changing the reading experience drastically.

The challenges of Sanskrit- to Malayalam translation lie not in the sheer impossibility of lexical transfer (which is facilitated), but in the precision required to navigate the structural differences and the semantic complexities inherent in classical Sanskrit. The translator's role transcends mere linguistic substitution; it demands a mastery of the cultural and philosophical traditions that inform the source text.

Semantic Complexity and Contextual Nuance: The Challenge of *Anekārtha*

The greatest intellectual hurdle in translating classical Sanskrit into Malayalam stems from the language's remarkable capacity for semantic complexity, where singular lexical items possess multiple meanings (*anekārtha*). This quality is amplified in highly compressed poetic verses (*ślokas*) and dense philosophical treatises, making a literal, one-to-one word equivalence impossible and often misleading.

The Multi-Valence of Core Concepts

Many core Sanskrit words, particularly those carrying significant philosophical, aesthetic, or religious weight, are inherently multi-valent. Their meaning is not fixed but is profoundly context-dependent. The translator must act as a cultural interpreter to correctly discern the intended layer of meaning.

- ◆ Core Sanskrit concepts shift meaning based on context

- ◆ **Philosophical Terms:** Consider the word "*Dharma*". A literal Malayalam equivalent might simply be "*niyamam*" (law) or "*kaḍama*" (duty). However, in a philosophical context, "*Dharma*" can signify:
 - ◆ **Metaphysical Reality:** The underlying cosmic order.



- ◆ Dharma's meaning varies across metaphysical, ethical, and inherent contexts

- ◆ Rasa's meaning shifts between aesthetic, sentiments, literal juice, and alchemical mercury

- ◆ Sanskrit terms derive meaning from these sastra context

- ◆ **Ethical Duty:** One's prescribed moral or social obligation (*svadharma*).
- ◆ **Inherent Quality:** The intrinsic nature or property of a thing (e.g., the *dharma* of fire is heat). Translating this word accurately requires specialised knowledge of the specific school of thought (*Śāstra*), be it Mīmāṃsā, *Nyāya*, or *Vedānta*, from which the text originates.
- ◆ **Aesthetic Terms:** The term "*Rasa*" in a literary text can refer to:
 - ◆ **Aesthetic Flavour/Sentiment:** The dominant emotional experience evoked by a drama or poem (e.g., *śṛṅgāra rasa* - the sentiment of love).
 - ◆ **Juice/Essence:** The literal meaning of a liquid extract.
 - ◆ **Mercury:** A technical term in *Ayurveda* or *Alchemy* (*rasaśāstra*). The literal Malayalam word "*rasa*" (juice or taste) is inadequate; the translator must use an interpretive phrase like "*bhāvānubhavaṃ*" (emotional experience) to capture the intended aesthetic concept.

The Role of Śāstra and Intertextuality

The definitive meaning of a term in Sanskrit is often determined by the canonical tradition (*Śāstra*) to which the text belongs. A word used in a text on *Vyākaraṇa* (Grammar) will carry a precise technical meaning that is distinct from its usage in a *Kāvya* (Poetry).

- ◆ **Technical Precision:** Terms used in *Nyāya Śāstra* (Logic) or *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* (Exegesis of Rituals) are subject to rigid definitions. For instance, the term *jñāna* (knowledge) in *Nyāya* is technically defined as "apprehension," while in *Advaita Vedānta*, it is "realization" or "non-dual consciousness." A literal Malayalam equivalent, "ariuvu", fails to capture this subtle, yet critical, philosophical distinction.
- ◆ **The Loss of 'Essence':** Because the Sanskrit language is structurally dense, a single word often carries layers of connotation, allusion, and history that cannot be contained within a single Malayalam equivalent. The challenge for the translator is that a simple substitution inevitably leads to a loss of the original word's full 'essence,' reducing a multifaceted concept to a singular dimension and thereby impoverishing the intellectual depth of the resulting Malayalam text. This demands that the translator adopt a strategy of explanatory or interpretive paraphrasing, often within the main body of the translation, to convey the complete semantic load.



Structural and Morpho-Phonological Divergence

The structural dissimilarity between the source language, Sanskrit (Indo-Aryan and inflectional), and the target language, Malayalam (Dravidian and agglutinative), poses a significant, fundamental challenge to translation, despite their shared vocabulary. This challenge lies in accurately parsing and re-structuring the highly condensed Sanskrit sentences into fluid, readable Malayalam prose.

Inflection vs. Agglutination: The Core Difference

Sanskrit is a highly synthetic and inflectional language where grammatical roles (case, number, gender) are indicated by changes to the *endings* of nouns and verbs. Word order is relatively flexible because the case endings carry the weight of meaning.

- ◆ Sanskrit inflectional, while Malayalam is agglutinative with SOV structure

Malayalam, conversely, is primarily an agglutinative language where grammatical relations are typically conveyed by adding separate, unchanging suffixes and postpositions to the root word. Its core grammar follows a rigid Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure.

- ◆ **The Problem:** When translating a flexible Sanskrit word order into Malayalam, the translator must discard the Sanskrit sentence's structural flexibility and forcefully re-structure the entire phrase to conform to the Malayalam SOV order while finding the correct agglutinative suffix to replace the Sanskrit inflectional ending. This necessary reordering risks disrupting the original rhetorical emphasis or rhythm.

The Tyranny of *Samāsa* (Compound Words)

Sanskrit's most defining structural feature is the extensive use of long, intricate compounds (*samāsa*), often found in classical literature (*Kāvya*) and philosophical texts. These compounds string together multiple nouns, adjectives, or entire phrases into a single lexical unit, sometimes encompassing the length of a full poetic line.

- ◆ Sanskrit compound words (*samasa*) can be long and intricate

- ◆ **Deconstruction Requirement:** For the Malayalam translator, the *samāsa* presents a colossal task: they must first deconstruct the compound, a process called *vigraha*, to identify its constituent parts and, more importantly, analyze the precise grammatical relationship between them (e.g., whether it is a *Tatpuruṣa* (determinative) or a *Bahuvrīhi* (possessive) compound).
- ◆ **Restructuring into Phrases:** This deconstructed meaning must then be laboriously expanded into a full, sequential Malayalam phrase or subordinate clause. Failure to correctly interpret the internal structure of the *samāsa* can lead to a fundamental misrepresentation of the original meaning. For instance, a four-word Sanskrit compound may translate into a lengthy, descriptive, and complex clause in Malayalam.



The Impediments of *Sandhi* and Prefixes

Two specific morpho-phonological features of Sanskrit pose distinct difficulties:

- ◆ Sanskrit sandhi and prefixes after word forms complicating translation

1. **Sandhi Rules:** Sanskrit rigorously applies rules of *sandhi* (euphonic combination) where the final sound of one word merges or changes upon meeting the initial sound of the next word. The written text often shows only the combined form, which can obscure the original constituent words. The translator must first accurately undo the *sandhi* to identify the individual words before the process of translation can even begin.
2. **Prefix Usage:** Sanskrit is rich in verbal prefixes (*upasarga*) (e.g., *pra-*, *vi-*, *a-*, *anu-*). These prefixes, when attached to a verb root, drastically modify its meaning (e.g., *gacchat* - goes; *anugacchat* - follows). Since prefixes are rare or absent in native Dravidian Malayalam (which primarily uses separate adverbs or auxiliary verbs), the translator must recognize the subtle semantic shift caused by the prefix and render it using an entirely different and appropriate Malayalam adverbial or verbal structure.

Accurately resolving these structural and phonological complexities while simultaneously striving to preserve a measure of the original text's elegance or rhythm constitutes the primary structural challenge in Sanskrit-to-Malayalam translation.

Cultural Dependence and Lexical Gaps: Bridging the Cultural Chasm

- ◆ Sanskrit - Malayalam translation requires bridging cultural and textual gaps

The translation of Sanskrit into Malayalam is fundamentally a process of cultural transference. The greatest challenges arise when the translator encounters elements that are deeply rooted in a shared ancient Indian cultural milieu but have become opaque to the modern or non-specialist Malayalam reader, necessitating complex strategies beyond mere linguistic substitution.

1. Intertextual Saturation and Allusion

Classical Sanskrit literature, particularly the *Kāvya* and *Purāṇas*, is heavily saturated with intertextual references and allusions. These references are often brief and unexplained, as the original audience was assumed to possess comprehensive knowledge of the major Hindu mythological narratives, philosophical tenets, and socio-religious practices.

The Problem of Contextual Gaps

For the modern Malayalam reader, this density creates significant contextual gaps:

- ◆ **Mythological Allusions:** A single line of Sanskrit poetry might



- ◆ Sanskrit cultural reference create contextual gaps for modern readers

reference an entire epic event. For example, a reference to “Rudra’s third eye” immediately conjures the story of the destruction of Kāmadeva (god of desire) by Shiva’s wrath. If a translator simply translates the literal words, the underlying meaning, the victory of asceticism over desire, is lost.

- ◆ **Ritualistic and Social Practices:** Texts frequently reference specific, highly detailed Vedic ritual practices (*yajña*) or arcane social codes (*smṛti*) that have either evolved or become obsolete. Translating these terms literally risks rendering them nonsensical or archaic in the target language.
- ◆ **Thematic Density:** The use of metaphors and similes is often derived from a shared cultural landscape (e.g., references to Himalayan flora, sacred rivers, or the six classical *Darśanas* or schools of philosophy).

Interpretive License and Paratexts

To ensure comprehension, the translator must adopt one of two compromises:

- ◆ Translators balance cultural context with textual fidelity

1. **Extensive Interpretive License:** The translator may choose to weave the necessary cultural context directly into the translation, expanding a single phrase into a descriptive clause. While aiding immediate understanding, this strategy can be seen as an over-interpretation and risks altering the original text’s brevity and rhetorical power.
2. **Explanatory Paratexts:** The use of detailed footnotes, endnotes, or glossaries is often essential. While providing scholarly rigour, these paratextual elements disrupt the flow of the text and fundamentally change the nature of the reading experience, converting what was originally a direct literary consumption into an academic study.

2. Lexical Gaps and Philosophical Precision

Despite the abundance of Sanskrit loanwords in Malayalam, the translation process reveals critical lexical gaps when dealing with highly specialized terminology.

The Unambiguous Void

The most significant problem arises when highly technical, philosophical, or rare Sanskrit terms lack a direct, unambiguous, single-word equivalent in common Malayalam. The complexity of these terms is often cumulative, derived from centuries of scholastic commentary.

- ◆ **Loss of Precision:** In disciplines like *Vākyaārtha* (sentence meaning) or *Alaṃkāra Śāstra* (Poetics), terms are defined with ra-



- ◆ Technical Sanskrit terms often lack precise Malayalam equivalents

zor-sharp philosophical precision. A Malayalam equivalent may only capture a broad sense, leading to a loss of philosophical precision. For instance, the exact difference between *śabda* (word/sound) and *dhvani* (suggestion/meaning) in the context of poetics is virtually impossible to convey with single, uncompounded Malayalam words.

The Translator's Forced Choice

When faced with an irreplaceable Sanskrit term, the translator must choose between two suboptimal strategies:

- ◆ Translator must balance fidelity and accessibility

1. **Complete Borrowing (Risk of Obscurity):** The translator may simply borrow the Sanskrit word *in toto* (Tatsama), assuming the reader will understand it or look it up. While preserving fidelity, this risks making the translation inaccessible or obscure to the non-specialist readership, especially where the word's meaning has changed or been forgotten in modern usage.
2. **Lengthy Interpretive Phrase (Loss of Brevity):** Alternatively, the translator must replace the single, precise Sanskrit term with a lengthy interpretive phrase or a descriptive compound in Malayalam (e.g., translating *anirvacanīya* (indescribable) with “vacanattināl nirūpikkān sādikkāttatāyittuḷḷa,” a cumbersome phrase). This sacrifices the original text's brevity, compactness, and the intellectual punch of the singular term, fundamentally altering the rhetorical texture of the work.

In essence, the translator of Sanskrit must constantly navigate the tension between cultural accessibility (making the text understandable to the modern Malayali) and scholarly fidelity (preserving the intended precision and context of the ancient Indian text).

General Views on the Possibility and Practice of Sanskrit-Malayalam Translation

The consensus among linguists and scholars regarding Sanskrit-to-Malayalam translation is overwhelmingly positive, viewing it as a highly feasible undertaking rooted in the language's unique genetic and historical development. This translational possibility is seen as an intrinsic feature of Malayalam, setting it apart from attempts to translate Sanskrit into languages from entirely disparate families, such as English or even uninfluenced North Indian vernaculars.

Malayalam: A Confluent Linguistic Vehicle

The fundamental optimism stems from Malayalam's status as a confluent language, often poetically described as having inherited the best of both its Dravidian root and Indo-European influence:



- ◆ Malayalam blended of Dravidian and Indo-European elements makes it expressive and receptive to classical texts

- ◆ **The Dravidian Core:** The grammatical spine, or the morpho-syntax, of Malayalam is robustly Dravidian, sharing features with Tamil (hence the ‘Tamil root’ mentioned). This provides a stable and consistent structure, the rigid Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order, which is essential for creating coherent and readily understood sentences.
- ◆ **The Sanskrit Superstructure:** The Indo- European influence provides a vast portion of its sophisticated, abstract, and literary vocabulary. This lexical resource allows Malayalam to articulate complex philosophical, scientific and aesthetic concepts directly or through seamless coinages (*Tatsamas* and *Tadbhavas*).

The result of this historical confluence is a language that is uniquely expressive and receptive to classical texts. Malayalam does not merely borrow from Sanskrit; it has internalized the Indo- European lexicon into its Dravidian framework, making the translation process feel more like a natural migration of ideas rather than a forced linguistic conversion.

The Imperative of Dual Expertise

- ◆ Translating Sanskrit texts demands expertise in both Malayalam and Sanskrit traditions

While the language is receptive, the successful translation of classical or technical Sanskrit texts remains highly demanding, necessitating an elevated standard of expertise, a high demand for dual expertise. This requirement acknowledges the complex structural and semantic challenges discussed previously:

- ◆ **Mastery of the Target Language:** The translator must be a master of modern Malayalam, possessing a superb command of its rhetoric, rhythm, and capacity to handle abstract thought lucidly. The translator must be able to convert the dense, non-linear compounds of Sanskrit into flowing, accessible Malayalam prose.
- ◆ **Deep Knowledge of the Source Tradition:** Crucially, the translator requires deep knowledge of the Sanskrit subject matter, its grammar, and the text’s surrounding tradition (*Śāstra*). Without this, the translator cannot correctly deconstruct the *samāsa* (compounds), accurately discern the contextual meaning of *anekārtha* terms, or fully appreciate the intertextual allusions.

The translator, in this context, functions as a cultural and linguistic bridge, tasked with ensuring the final text is not just literally correct but also accurate to the source’s philosophical intent and lucidly clear to the target audience. This responsibility places the translator in a position of intellectual authority, necessary to mediate between two complex historical traditions.



Historical Validation and Transcreation

The general view is validated by the entire literary history of Kerala. The three major phases of linguistic evolution stand as irrefutable testaments to the fundamental possibility of this translational process:

1. **The Manipravalam Tradition:** Proved the linguistic compatibility by formally blending the Sanskrit lexicon with the Dravidian syntax, setting the academic precedent.
2. **The Kilippāṭṭu Movement (Ezhuthachan):** Proved the popular accessibility by creating a standardised, synthesised language that could carry the emotional and devotional weight of the epics to the masses, the ultimate act of transcreation.
3. **The Modern Script:** The accommodation of Sanskrit phonemes in the Malayalam script ensures the highest level of phonological and visual fidelity for the *Tatsama* (unadapted) vocabulary.

Ultimately, the history of translation from Sanskrit is, in essence, the history of literary evolution Malayalam. This process of continual transcreation, where original Sanskrit texts are creatively adapted and linguistically internalised, has enriched the regional language, making it a powerful and sophisticated vehicle for both the ancient Indian heritage and modern global discourse.

♦ Malayalam evolution showcases its compatibility with Sanskrit through transcreation.

Summarised Overview

The translation of Sanskrit into Malayalam is fundamentally the defining narrative of Malayalam's literary and structural evolution, rooted in a profound historical symbiosis between the Indo-European and Dravidian language families. This unique relationship has created a language inherently receptive to classical texts, possessing a modified script (Arya Ezhuthu) and a vast, integrated lexicon of Sanskrit loanwords (Tatsama and Tad-bhavas) that validate the feasibility of the translation endeavor. This historical journey is marked by three pivotal phases: the elite hybrid style of Manipravalam (c. 12th-14th Century), which was codified by the prescriptive grammar of the *Līlātilakam*; the democratizing Kilippāṭṭu Movement (c. 15th-17th Century) led by Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan, who synthesized a standard language accessible to the masses; and the modern era of systematic, scholarly translation (c. 19th–20th Century) that strategically utilized Sanskrit for coining abstract, technical, and scientific vocabulary.

Despite this foundational compatibility and shared vocabulary, the process remains intellectually challenging, requiring the translator to be a "cultural and linguistic architect". The primary challenges stem from the structural divergence between the highly inflec-



tional Sanskrit and the agglutinative Malayalam. Translators must navigate the density of Sanskrit's intricate compound words (Samāsa) and complex sandhi rules, forcing them to deconstruct and re-structure the entire concept to conform to Malayalam's rigid Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) syntax. Furthermore, the multi-valence (Anekārtha) of philosophical terms like Dharma and Rasa necessitates deep knowledge of the source text's specific canonical tradition (Śāstra), as a literal word-swap often fails to capture the precise, context-dependent meaning.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How did the relationship between Sanskrit (Indo-European) and Malayalam (Dravidian) differ from translation efforts between completely unrelated language families?
2. What does the term Manipravalam signify, and what was the key grammatical rule (*lakṣaṇam*) stipulated by the *Līlātilakam* for 'good' Manipravalam?
3. In the context of translation, what is meant by the term 'transcreation' as adopted in the Indian context?
4. What specific feature did the *Arya Ezhuthu* script incorporate to handle the complex phonemes of Sanskrit, and why was this crucial for translation?
5. What were the two primary types of Sanskrit words (*Tatsama* and *Tadbhava*) integrated into Malayalam, and which type did the *Līlātilakam* tend to be more restrictive about?
6. Explain the structural difference between Sanskrit's inflectional nature and Malayalam's agglutinative nature that creates a core challenge in translation.
7. How did Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan's choice of indigenous meters (*Drāvika Vṛttas*) like *Kākaḷi* democratize Sanskrit epics compared to the earlier *Manipravalam* style?
8. Identify three specific forces that drove the shift from devotional adaptation to systematic, scholarly translation in the modern age (19th–20th Century).
9. Why does the multi-valence (*Anekārtha*) of a philosophical term like *Dharma* require the translator to specialize in the specific canonical tradition (*Śāstra*) of the source text?
10. How did A. R. Raja Raja Varma's *Kerala Panineeyam* provide the theoretical apparatus for rigorous translation, even though it was a grammar text for Malayalam?



Assignment

1. Compare and contrast the linguistic approaches of the *Manipravalam* era and the *Kilippāṭṭu* movement, discussing how each phase influenced the integration of Sanskrit lexicon and the standardisation of Malayalam syntax.
2. Discuss the primary structural and semantic challenges in translating a Sanskrit *śloka* (verse) characterised by long compound words (*Samāsa*) and multi-valent (*Anekārtha*) terms into contemporary, lucid Malayalam prose.
3. Analyze the role of Sanskrit not just as a source of classical texts but as a strategic resource for linguistic modernization in the 19th and 20th centuries, focusing on the expansion of abstract and technical vocabulary in Malayalam.
4. Evaluate the assertion that the successful translation of classical Sanskrit into Malayalam transcends mere bilingualism and requires a "rare kind of dual expertise," providing specific examples related to grammar and cultural context.

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SGOU



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Unit : 2

Malayalam translation of Sakuntalam by Attur Krishnapisharoti and A.R Rajarajavarma-Kalidasa's works translated by Kuttikrishna Marar

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ❖ Distinguish between A. R. Raja Raja Varma's metrical fidelity and Attur Krishna Pisharody's scholarly prose in translating *Śākuntalam*.
- ❖ Articulate Kuttikrishna Marar's role in bridging the gap between classical Sanskrit aesthetics and the modern Malayalam reader.
- ❖ Analyze how the translation rivalry helped standardize the *Manipravalam* literary language and initiated the formal Malayalam drama genre.
- ❖ To explain the core tension between textual fidelity and poetic naturalization inherent in translating Kālidāsa's work.

Background

The translation of Kālidāsa's monumental Sanskrit drama, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, into Malayalam marks a pivotal moment in the language's literary modernity, transforming it from a mere vernacular into a sophisticated vehicle for classical aesthetics. This period, spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was defined not by a single dominant effort, but by a vibrant rivalry between scholarly giants, each striving for the most faithful and aesthetically resonant rendition of the playwright revered as the "Indian Shakespeare." At the heart of this contest lay the fundamental tension inherent in all translation: whether to prioritise textual fidelity to Kālidāsa's original metre and grammar, or to achieve poetic naturalisation into the Malayalam idiom. This critical tension spurred an explosion of literary activity, compelling scholars to deeply scrutinize the Sanskrit text and its complex dramatic and poetic conventions, thereby setting a rigorous standard for all subsequent classical translations in Malayalam.

Among the most celebrated and contrasting attempts were those by A. R. Raja Raja Varma and Attur Krishna Pisharody. Raja Raja Varma, often hailed as the "Kerala Panini" for his standardization of Malayalam grammar, approached the *Śākuntalam* with an unmatched focus on scholarly exactitude. His translation aimed for precision in rendering Kālidāsa's ornate ślokas and adherence to the intricate rules of Sanskrit dramatic poetics (*Nāṭya Śāstra*). Conversely, Attur Krishna Pisharody, a contemporary scholar, offered a version that often prioritized readability and emotional appeal in Malayalam, seeking a greater synthesis between the classical Sanskrit spirit and the native literary sensibility.



These competing translations forced the Kerala literary public to engage directly with the technical challenges of the source text, debating the merits of literalism versus graceful adaptation. Their combined efforts solidified the Śākuntalam as a staple of Malayalam literature and culture, confirming that the language had the capacity to absorb and perform the highest form of Indian dramatic art.

The commitment to bringing Kālidāsa to the Malayalam masses was further cemented by later critics and scholars, most notably Kuttikrishna Marar. While Marar himself was not primarily a translator, his profound critical commentaries and essays on Kālidāsa's works, particularly the Meghadūta and Śākuntalam, served as an invaluable bridge between the Sanskrit tradition and the modern Malayalam reader. Marar's analyses demystified the intricate layers of aesthetic theory (Rasa and Dhvani) and contextualised the mythological and cultural allusions, thereby deepening the appreciation for the existing translations. His work validated the foundational efforts of Raja Raja Varma and Pisharody, acknowledging the complex process of transcreation necessary to transplant classical genius into a new linguistic soil. Through the rigorous scholarship of these pioneers and the critical lens of commentators like Marar, Kālidāsa's corpus became inextricably woven into the fabric of 20th-century Malayalam literary identity.

Keywords

Abhijñānaśākuntalam, Malayalam Translation, A. R. Raja Raja Varma, Attur Krishna Pisharody, Kuttikrishna Marar, Textual Fidelity, Dhvani, Manipravalam

Discussion

The Genesis of Malayalam Drama: Translations of Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*

Kālidāsa is universally acclaimed as one of the finest dramatists and writers ever produced by India, with his *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* celebrated as a towering literary masterpiece. The drama's enduring appeal transcends linguistic barriers, famously eliciting profound admiration from European literary giants, such as Goethe, whose appreciation was translated by E.B. Eastwick (1791) into a renowned quatrain. This global renown—evidenced by the 46 translations into foreign languages that followed Sir William Jones's 1798 English rendition—underscored its status as a canonical text deserving of adaptation into every major language. In Kerala, the translation of *Śākuntalam* was far more than a simple academic exercise; it was the single most critical event that kickstarted the genre of formal Malayalam drama. Until this point, literary performance was dominated by highly codified visual art forms like *Kathakali*, *Koothu*, and *Thullal*,



leaving a void for realistic or classical stage plays. Tracing the trajectory of the *Śakuntalam* translations reveals not only the development of a new literary form but also the intense internal debates among the Malayali literati regarding language and aesthetics.

The Contested 'First' Translation: Prose vs. Poetic Form

- ◆ Multiple claims surround the first Malayalam translation of *Śakuntalam*.

The breakthrough that indisputably launched the development of Malayalam drama is commonly attributed to Kerala Varma Valiya Koi Thampuran's translation, published as *Keraleeya Bhashasakuntalam* in 1883. It is notable that before 1883, the literary community seemingly felt no pressing need for a formal dramatic genre, perhaps due to the pervasive influence of indigenous performance arts and later, the growing popularity of Tamil musical drama troupes.

However, the question of the 'first' translation became an immediate point of contestation, highlighting early critical sensibilities. Many eminent scholars, including M.N. Rajan, Vayala Vasudevan Pillai, and Erumeli Parameswaran Pillai, posited that the first translation belonged to Ayilyam Thirunal Ramavarma, the then-Maharaja of Travancore. He reportedly translated *Śakuntalam* as *Bhasha Sakuntalam* around 1853 (M.E. 1028). A.D. Harisarma noted that Ayilyam Thirunal's use of prose for translating a Sanskrit text during that era was, in itself, pioneering, given the underdeveloped state of literary prose in Malayalam at the time. Yet, this early claim was dismissed by figures like Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, who famously argued that Ayilyam Thirunal's work could not be counted as the first because its prose form disqualified it from being a proper translation of a Sanskrit *Kāvya* (poetic drama). This dispute reveals a critical underlying sensibility of the late 19th-century literati: form and style were perceived as decisive factors in authenticating a translation, particularly one from a highly-regarded classical source like Sanskrit.

Further complicating the narrative, Beatrice Alexis and Erumeli Parameswaran Pillai referenced earlier findings by A. Govindapillai (*Malayala Bhasha Charitram*, 1881), which suggested that Velutheri Kesavan Vaidyan had translated and even staged a version of *Śakuntalam* before both Ayilyam Thirunal and Kerala Varma. While this alleged translation, titled *Abhijnana Sakuntalam*, has been lost, and critics even debate whether it was a written or merely an oral translation, its mere mention underscores the historical activity surrounding the text and the fluid nature of early literary transmission in Kerala.

The Era of Rivalry: Linguistic Debates and the Quest for the Ideal Vernacular

Kerala Varma's 1883 publication of *Keraleeya Bhashasakuntalam* was the decisive, published text that opened the floodgates for the



- ◆ Kerala Varma's 1883 translation of Śakuntalam sparked a wave of translations and debates over language and style.

new genre, establishing the expectation for poetic drama. His translation triggered numerous subsequent efforts. M.N.R. Rajan lists a formidable number of immediate translations, including Kottarathil Sankunni's *Abhijnanasakuntalam Gadyam* (1896), Kodungalloor Kunjikuttan Thampuran's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* (1896), Attur Krishna Pisharody's *Kerala Sakuntalam* (1936), and Vallathol Narayana Menon's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* (1936), among over eighty-four known translations produced over the decades. This prolific translation activity not only established the drama genre but also led to the emergence of original Malayalam plays.

The primary critical focus, however, remained fixed on Kerala Varma's original 1883 translation. Despite its widespread use in schools and on stage—where it was taught with annotations by scholars like Ambalappuzha Krishna Sharma—a robust debate brewed over the "highly Sanskritized language" employed. Critics argued the language was overly complex and inaccessible to readers unfamiliar with Sanskrit. This linguistic pressure forced the involvement of A. R. Raja Raja Varma, Kerala Varma's cousin and friend, who was commissioned to revise the text.

The revised version, however, suffered intense criticism, with commentators arguing that A.R. had not only failed to sufficiently simplify the language but had also marred Kerala Varma's original literary craftsmanship. Faced with this backlash, Kerala Varma was ultimately compelled to dismiss the revision and bring out a completely new translation in 1912, which he titled *Manipravala Sakuntalam*. This change in nomenclature from *Bhasha Sakuntalam* to *Keraleeya Bhasha Sakuntalam* and finally to *Manipravala Sakuntalam* over three decades vividly reflects the inner dilemma and persistent efforts of the translators to appropriate the Sanskrit classic into an acceptable Malayalam form, often tied to regional pride and scholarly identity. Significantly, in the same year, A. R. Raja Raja Varma published his own independent translation, titled *Malayala Sakuntalam*, marking 1912 as the peak of this intense scholarly contestation.

The Legacy: Standardisation and Critical Commentary

The translations of the *Śakuntalam* did more than fill a literary gap; they provided the crucial arena for standardising Malayalam's literary language. The rivalry between scholars like Kerala Varma and A. R. Raja Raja Varma focussed critical attention on the minute details of Sanskrit grammar, prosody, and the necessary balance of *Manipravalam* (Sanskrit-Malayalam fusion) needed for high literary expression. The sustained scholarly debate over fidelity versus naturalisation provided the intellectual framework for future literary critique and pedagogical methods.

- ◆ The Śakuntalam translations shaped Malayalam's literary language and aesthetics.



This era's focus on classical aesthetics was further amplified by the work of critics like Kuttikrishna Marar. Marar, who provided insightful critical commentary on Kālidāsa's works, including *Śakuntalam* and *Meghadūta*, played a vital role in demystifying the Sanskrit tradition for the modern Malayalam reader. His analysis helped scholars and students appreciate the aesthetic theories of *Rasa* (sentiment) and *Dhvani* (suggestion) that underpinned the original Sanskrit, thereby deepening the intellectual engagement with the existing translations. Through the initial act of translation and the subsequent decades of critical scrutiny, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* became a touchstone, ensuring that the development of Malayalam literature was firmly rooted in rigorous scholarship and the sophisticated aesthetics of classical Indian tradition.

The Enduring Legacy of A. R. Rajarajavarma's *Sakuntalam* Translation

Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is not merely a play; it is a timeless piece of world literature that has captivated audiences and scholars for centuries. While the original Sanskrit text stands as a pinnacle of classical Indian drama, its true reach and popularisation in Kerala can be attributed to the masterful translation by A. R. Rajarajavarma. His work, titled *Malayaala Sakuntalam* or *Kerala Bhasha Sakuntalam*, is a landmark achievement that transcends a mere linguistic conversion. It is a work of profound scholarly rigour and exquisite literary artistry that has cemented its place as a cornerstone of modern Malayalam literature.

- ♦ A. R. Rajarajavarma's translation of *Sakuntalam* is a landmark work of scholarly rigour and literary artistry.

I. Fidelity to the Original Sanskrit Text

One of the primary challenges of translating a classical work like *Sakuntalam* lies in preserving its intricate layers of meaning, poetic devices, and cultural nuances. Kalidasa's original is a complex tapestry of rich Sanskrit prose and lyrical verse, full of alliteration, metaphorical language, and intricate grammatical structures. A. R. Rajarajavarma, a towering figure in Malayalam linguistics often hailed as “Kerala Panini” for his seminal contributions to the language, was uniquely equipped to tackle this task.

His translation is celebrated for its unwavering semantic accuracy. He meticulously conveyed the emotional depth of the characters, from Shakuntala's innocence and vulnerability to Dushyanta's conflicted heart, ensuring that the narrative's core essence remained intact. More than a simple word-for-word rendering, it was an act of scholarly interpretation, where he delved deep into the source material to faithfully represent its philosophical and emotional weight.

Furthermore, Rajarajavarma demonstrated unparalleled linguistic precision. Sanskrit, with its flexible word order and compound



words, poses a significant hurdle for translation. He skillfully navigated this, transforming multi-syllabic Sanskrit compounds into elegant and digestible Malayalam phrases without losing their power or meaning. His ability to maintain the poetic rhythm and metrical patterns of the original *shlokas* (verses) is particularly noteworthy. He chose appropriate Malayalam metres that mirrored the lyrical quality of the Sanskrit, allowing the translated work to be read with the same grace and musicality as the original. This metrical and poetic equivalence is a testament to his genius, as he managed to recreate the original's aesthetic experience in a different language, a feat few translators have achieved.

II. A Standalone Literary Work

- ◆ A. R. Rajarajavarma's *Malayaala Sakuntalam* is a masterpiece that stands on its own and elevated Malayalam literature.

Beyond its academic fidelity, *Malayaala Sakuntalam* is a powerful literary work in its own right. Rajarajavarma did not simply translate; he transposed the play's soul into the cultural and linguistic landscape of Kerala. His prose is fluid and evocative, and his verse sings with eloquence that makes the characters and their emotions relatable to the Malayalam audience. The translation is not a shadow of the original but a brilliant creation that stands on its own merits.

The publication of this work had a profound influence on the evolution of Malayalam literature. It set a new benchmark for literary style, demonstrating the flexibility and expressive potential of the language. Rajarajavarma's sophisticated use of Malayalam showed other writers and poets how the language could be elevated to handle complex literary and philosophical themes. The translation contributed to the enrichment and modernisation of the language, inspiring a new generation of writers to experiment with its capabilities and setting a gold standard for all future translations from Sanskrit and other languages.

III. Standard Reference and Public Readability

- ◆ Rajarajavarma's translation of *Sakuntalam* is both an academic cornerstone and a widely popular literary work.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Rajarajavarma's translation is its dual role: it serves as a cornerstone for academic study while also enjoying immense popularity with the general public. For scholars and students of literature, it is an essential resource for comparative analysis, offering a definitive interpretation of Kalidasa's text in Malayalam. Its detailed footnotes and scholarly introductions provide invaluable insights, making it a reliable reference for understanding the intricacies of the play.

Simultaneously, the translation's clear, elegant, and lyrical language made it highly accessible. For the first time, a large Malayalam-speaking audience could experience the beauty and emotional depth of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* without needing to learn Sanskrit. The work became a staple diet in households and libraries, introduc-



ing countless readers to the world of classical Indian drama. Its accessibility has ensured that the legacy of Kalidasa continues to thrive in Kerala, celebrated not just by academics but by a broad and appreciative audience. The enduring relevance and continuous reprinting of the book decades after its initial publication is a testament to its profound impact and timeless appeal.

IV. Semantic Accuracy and the Emotional Core

- ♦ Rajarajavarma's translation beautifully captures the emotional depth of Shakuntala's departure scene.

Rajarajavarma's translation excels in conveying the emotional core of the play, particularly in its most poignant scenes. For instance, the famous fourth act, which depicts Shakuntala's departure from the hermitage, is a masterclass in capturing pathos and sorrow. This act is widely considered the heart of the play, and Rajarajavarma's translation ensures its emotional weight remains palpable for the Malayalam reader. He meticulously translates the original sentiment of a loving father and her friends with such accuracy that the audience feels the same sense of loss and affection.

Consider the famous shloka where the sage Kanva expresses his sorrow, which he finds surprising for a forest dweller who is supposed to be detached from worldly affairs:

Original Sanskrit:

यास्यत्यद्य शकुन्तलेति हृदयं संस्पृष्टमुत्कण्ठया ।

कंठः स्तम्भितवाष्पवृत्तिकलुषः चिंताजडं दर्शनम् ॥

Rajarajavarma's Malayalam Translation:

പോകുന്നാളിവളെന്നുള്ളിലതു കേൾക്കേ ഞെട്ടിയെൻ നെഞ്ചകം
കണ്ണീർകൊണ്ടെന്റെ കണ്ഠം വിറകൊള്ളുന്നുണ്ടു പാരം മുദം.
ചിന്താഭാരം നിമിത്തം കനമൊടു മമ കൺ കാഴ്ചയും മങ്ങുന്നു
എന്നാലേവൻ വനാന്തേ കരകയറാതെന്നുള്ളിൽ നൊമ്പരം.

Rajarajavarma's translation is not a simple literal rendition; it is a deeply empathetic echo. He translates not just the words but the feeling of the choking sensation in the throat (കണ്ഠം വിറകൊള്ളുന്നുണ്ടു പാരം) , the blurring vision (കനമൊടു മമ കൺ കാഴ്ചയും മങ്ങുന്നു), and the deep sense of longing (ഉൾക്കണ്ഠയാ becomes നെഞ്ചകം). This attention to the raw emotion of the scene is what makes his translation very powerful and authentic.

Furthermore, Rajarajavarma demonstrates his mastery in the famous counsel given by Kanva to Shakuntala on the eve of her departure. The sage's advice, a blend of paternal love and practical wisdom for her new life as a queen, is rendered with absolute clarity and poetic grace.



Original Sanskrit:

शुश्रूषस्व गुरुन्, कुरु प्रियसखीवृत्तिं सपत्नीजने
भर्तुर्विप्रकृतापि रोषणतया मा स्म प्रतीपं गमः ।
भूयिष्ठं भव दक्षिणा परिजने, भाग्येष्वनुत्सेकिनी
यान्त्येवं गृहिणीपदं युवतयो वामाः कुलस्याधयः ।।

Rajarajavarma's Malayalam Translation:

ഗുരുക്കളെ സേവിച്ചിടുക, പ്രിയസഖി മട്ടിൽ സഹോദരിമാരെയും,
പതിനിന്ദിച്ചാൽപോലുമെതിർക്കരുതു നീ, ദാസ്യമുള്ളവർക്ക്
ദാക്ഷിണ്യം കാട്ടുക, വിനയമുള്ളൊരുവളായിടുക,
ഇങ്ങനെയുള്ളവളായി ഭർത്തുവീട്ടിലിരിക്കുന്ന സ്ത്രീയാണ്
ഭർത്താവിനു സൗഭാഗ്യം നൽകുന്നവൾ, അല്ലെങ്കിൽ ഒരു ശാപം.

Here, the translation is both an accurate transmission of meaning and a beautiful poetic expression. He maintains the moral force of the original advice, using accessible and elegant Malayalam to convey the principles of devotion to elders, kindness to co-wives, humility, and compassion towards servants.

V. Linguistic Precision and Metrical Equivalence

- ♦ Rajarajavarma skillfully preserved the poetic rhythm and metrical patterns of the original Sanskrit in his Malayalam translation.

Rajarajavarma demonstrated unparalleled linguistic precision by skillfully navigating the complexities of Sanskrit grammar and syntax into Malayalam without losing the original's essence. He masterfully transformed multi-syllabic Sanskrit compounds into elegant and digestible Malayalam phrases.

His ability to maintain the poetic rhythm and metrical patterns of the original shlokas is particularly noteworthy. He chose appropriate Malayalam metres that mirrored the lyrical quality of the Sanskrit, allowing the translated work to be read with the same grace and musicality as the original. This metrical and poetic equivalence is a testament to his genius, as he managed to recreate the original's aesthetic experience in a different language, a feat few translators have achieved.

Dhrutavrutham

Dhrutavrutham(ഘൃതവൃത്തം)is a classical Malayalam metere known for its swift and energetic rhythm. It is a type of Varnavruththam, a class of meteres where the rhythm is determined by the pattern of long (guru) and short (laghu) syllables. The name itself, which translates to “fast-paced rhythm” perfectly captures its character. Rajarajavarma skilfully employed this metere in passages requiring a sense of urgency, excitement, or sorrow.



An example of Dhrutavrutham from a famous Malayalam poem is:

നിന്നെത്താൻ വന്ദനം! നിത്യശ്രീമയം,
പൊൽക്കതിരണിഞ്ഞ പൊന്നുത്താൽ!
ചൊല്ലിനാൽ നീയെന്റെ ചിത്തം തൻ ഭാവം
തെളിയിക്കാൻ പോരുനൊരു വീണ!

(Translation: I salute you, ever beautiful, golden swing adorned with rays! You are the lute that can express the emotion of my heart!)

The rapid succession of syllables gives the verse a flowing, energetic feel that is well-suited for a variety of expressive needs.

Vasanthathilakam

Vasanthathilakam (വസന്തതിലകം) is arguably one of the most beloved and widely used meters in both Sanskrit and Malayalam poetry. Its name, “Tilak (ornament) of Spring”, alludes to its elegant and graceful quality. This meter is characterised by a fluid and lyrical rhythm that makes it perfect for conveying delicate emotions, serene descriptions, and profound thoughts. The steady, predictable beat of Vasanthathilakam makes the verse feel both majestic and easy on the ear.

The example provided in the Canvas document from Sakuntalam is a perfect illustration of this meter:

Rajarajavarma’s Malayalam Translation:

നൽവെള്ളം നിങ്ങൾ കുടിക്കാതെ മുമ്പിൽ കുടിപ്പാനുദ്യാമമേ
ചെയ്യാനില്ലവൾ; നിങ്ങളുളളൊരു പുപോലും സ്നേഹത്താലണി
ക്കില്ലാതാനും; പ്രഥമപുവു നിങ്ങൾക്കൊക്കുമെന്നോർത്തു നി
ങ്ങൾക്കുസവമുണ്ടാക്കിയൊരുവൾ പോകുന്നു, യാത്രയയച്ചാലും!

The rhythmic and syllabic structure of the Malayalam lines mirrors the beauty and grace of the Sanskrit original, demonstrating Rajarajavarma’s deep understanding of the languages’ poetic conventions of both languages. He chose this meter to make the emotional weight of Kanva’s farewell to the hermitage trees feel both poignant and natural.

A. R. Rajarajavarma’s *Malayaala Sakuntalam* is far more than a simple translation. It is a magnificent scholarly and literary achievement that stands as a bridge between two great linguistic traditions. By combining rigorous fidelity to the original with an unparalleled command of the Malayalam language, he created a work that is simultaneously a scholarly document and a vibrant literary masterpiece. Its enduring legacy is a powerful reminder that translation, when done with true genius and reverence, can not only preserve the essence of a text but also enrich the literary heritage of another culture. It remains a testament to his vision, artistry, and his unwavering dedication to both the past and the future of Malayalam literature.

◆ A. R. Rajarajavarma's *Malayaala Sakuntalam* is a masterpiece that bridges two linguistic traditions with genius and reverence.

Āṭṭūr Kṛṣṇa Piṣāraḍi

- ◆ Āṭṭūr Kṛṣṇa Piṣāraḍi was a renowned scholar and musician who mastered Sanskrit, logic, and music.

Āṭṭūr Kṛṣṇa Piṣāraḍi was born on September 29, 1875, to Vaṭakkeḍathu Nārāyaṇan Nambūdiri and Pāppikutṭi Piṣārasyaṛ in Āṭṭūr, a small village in Thrissur district, Kerala. He received his primary education from his father and was initiated into classical Sanskrit by a maternal uncle, Bharata Piṣāraḍi. He further studied *vyākaraṇa* (grammar) and advanced *kāvya*s (poetry) under Meleḍathu Rāmuṇṇi Naṃbiār, and later logic (*nyāya*), grammar, and rhetoric (*alaṃkāra*) under a paternal uncle, Vengeri Vāsudevan Nambūdiri.

At eighteen, dissatisfied with managing a Vedic school, he left for the Koḍuññallūr Kovilakam, then a major centre of learning. Despite having mastered *alaṃkāra*, he specialised primarily in *nyāya* under Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhaṭṭaśrī Godavarma Tampurān. The knowledge and experience gained here were crucial in shaping his intellect.

Returning home at twenty-two as a complete scholar, he began instructing Sanskrit. His first student, Mūppil Nair, taught him the Vīṇā in exchange for Sanskrit lessons. At twenty-five, he married Nāṇikutṭi Piṣārasyaṛ, a musically trained *vāinika* (Vīṇā player), whose father, Bharata Piṣāraḍi, was also an expert *vāinika*. This alliance provided the perfect environment for Āṭṭūr to deepen his study of music and the Vīṇā, a shared passion that lasted throughout their fifty-six years of marriage.

His academic career began with an appointment at Ālaññūr High School, followed by five years at the Bhāratavilāsam Press in Thrissur. In 1911, at the invitation of Kerala Pāṇini A. R. Rājarājavarma, he was inducted as a Professor at The Maharaja's College, Thiruvananthapuram. After Rājarājavarma's tenure, Āṭṭūr presided over the Oriental Language Department for sixteen years until his retirement from public teaching. This was followed by a prestigious appointment as Tutor to His Highness, the Mahārāja of Travancore in 1927, which lasted five years. He then officially retired, returning to Thrissur to his home, “Śrītilakaṃ,” where he and his wife ran a *gurukulam* focused on music. Following his wife's demise, Āṭṭūr completely withdrew from public life and teaching.

First and foremost, Āṭṭūr was an extraordinary teacher and a multi-dimensional scholar: a poet, dramatist, essayist, researcher, and musicologist in both Sanskrit and Malayāḷaṃ. His ideals were based on the Sanskrit dictum “knowledge is the foremost of all wealth” (न विद्या धनं सर्वं धनं प्रधानम्) and “with knowledge came humility” (विद्या ददाति विनयम्). He was known for his humility and generosity. His illustrious student, K. P. Nārāyaṇa Piṣāraḍi (1909–2004), noted Āṭṭūr's eagerness to teach or learn from anyone.



- ♦ Āṭṭūr Kṛṣṇa Piṣāraḍi was a polymath and scholar who excelled in literature, musicology, and various other fields.

His association with the Bhāratavilāsam Press marked the start of his literary career. His critical review of A. R. Rājarājavarma's *Maṇidīpika* led directly to his employment at the Maharaja's College, where his research abilities were honed. As a critic, he famously disputed with T. Gaṇapati Śāstri regarding the origins of Bhāsa's plays. His early works included *Bālaratnam* (an elementary grammar textbook) and *Līlātilakaṃ* (an authoritative text on literary, historical, and linguistic information). In 1925, he founded the journal *Rasikaratnam* to publish undiscovered classics. His most popular book was the 1937 translation of Kālidāsa's *Śākuntalam*, titled *Keraḷa Śākuntaḷam*. The King of Cochin conferred upon him the title 'Paṇḍitarāja' (King of Scholars).

His final work and magnum opus is *Samgīta Candrikā*, a 700-page treatise on music published in 1954 after years of research. This *lakṣaṇagrantha* (definitive text) follows the *sūtra-bhāṣyam* format with 1,728 *sūtras* across twelve chapters covering concepts such as *nāda* (sound), *śruti* (microtone), *vīṇā*, *meḷā* (melodic modes), and *tāla* (rhythm). The final chapter, *Gīta*, is a compilation of 443 songs based on stories from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, each set to a distinct *rāga* and *tāla*, complete with *sāhitya* (lyrics) and *svara* (notes). The treatise is a comprehensive compendium citing numerous musicologists from the time of Bharata to the present. He continued his literary pursuits until his peaceful death on June 5, 1964.

Āṭṭūr Kṛṣṇa Piṣāraḍi (1875–1964) was a polymathic Kerala scholar and academic renowned for his mastery of Sanskrit and Malayalam literature, grammar, rhetoric, logic, and musicology.

- ♦ Āṭṭūr Kṛṣṇa Piṣāraḍi was a polymathic scholar renowned for his mastery of literature, logic, and musicology.

Piṣāraḍi received his foundational education in classical studies through his family before immersing himself at the Koḍuññallūr Kovilakam, a prominent intellectual centre, where he specialised in logic (*nyāya*) under Bhaṭṭaśrī Godavarma Tampurān. His marriage to Nāṇikuṭṭi Piṣārasyaṛ, a proficient *Vīṇā* player, fostered his deep engagement with the science of music. His academic career featured key appointments, notably his professorship at The Maharaja's College, Thiruvananthapuram, in 1911, upon the invitation of A. R. Rājarājavarma, and his subsequent sixteen-year tenure as Head of the Oriental Language Department. Following his retirement, he served as Tutor to the Mahārāja of Travancore and ran a *gurukulam* focused on music.

Known for embodying the ideal that “with knowledge came humility” (विद्या ददाति विनयम्), Piṣāraḍi excelled as a teacher, critic, and author. His significant works include the elementary *Bālaratnam*, the authoritative *Līlātilakaṃ*, the founding of the journal *Rasikaratnam*, and the popular 1937 translation *Keraḷa Śākuntaḷam*. His most



enduring contribution is the 'Paṇḍitarāja'- titled magnum opus, *Samgīta Candrikā* (1954), a meticulous, 700-page *lakṣaṇagrantha* treatise on music that follows the traditional *sūtra-bhāṣyam* format, complete with a comprehensive compilation of 443 *gītams* from the *Rāmāyana*.

A Scholarly Reading of Kalidasa: Attoor Krishna Pisharody's Sakuntalam

The classical Indian drama *Abhijnanasakuntalam* by Kalidasa stands as an unparalleled masterpiece of world literature. In the context of Malayalam, the play's rich emotional and poetic depth has been brought to life by a number of scholarly and literary giants. While A. R. Rajarajavarma's translation is celebrated for its poetic beauty and metrical fidelity, and Kuttikrishnamarar's for its incisive critical commentary, Attoor Krishna Pisharody's (1875-1964) translation holds a unique and equally significant place. As a profound scholar of Sanskrit, poetics, and grammar, Pisharody approached the work not merely as a linguistic task but as an opportunity to reveal the intricate scholarly underpinnings of Kalidasa's genius. His translation of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is a testament to his erudition, offering a reading that is both deeply faithful to the original and a valuable pedagogical tool.

- ◆ Attoor Krishna Pisharody's translation of *Abhijnana sakuntalam* showcases his erudition and deep understanding of Kalidasa's masterpiece.

I. A Scholar's Philosophy: The Essence of the Translation

Attoor Krishna Pisharody was a scholar first and foremost, whose life was dedicated to the study and teaching of Sanskrit and the classical arts. His translation of *Sakuntalam* is a direct reflection of this intellectual foundation. Unlike his contemporaries, his primary goal was not to create a standalone poetic work in Malayalam but to serve as a bridge between the Sanskrit original and the Malayalam-speaking scholar or student. He believed that to truly appreciate Kalidasa, one must understand the complex layers of meaning, the nuances of *Alankara Shastra* (the science of poetics), and the grammatical precision that formed the backbone of the work.

Pisharody's approach was rooted in the concept of *rasa* (aesthetic emotion) and *dhvani* (suggestive meaning). He saw Kalidasa as the ultimate master of these principles, capable of evoking profound emotions and conveying complex ideas through seemingly simple verses. His translation, therefore, was meticulously crafted to ensure that none of this subtle beauty was lost in translation. He would often use his commentary to explain how a particular phrase or word choice in the original was designed to evoke a specific *rasa*, such as *sringara* (love) or *karuna* (pathos), or to suggest a deeper layer of meaning that was not immediately apparent.



This scholarly philosophy sets Pisharody's work apart. While other translations sought to make the play a work of popular literature, Pisharody's aim was to make it a work of approachable scholarship. He was a guide, leading the reader by the hand through the intricate landscape of Sanskrit literature, patiently explaining every turn and detail.

II. The Hallmarks of Pisharody's Translation

Pisharody's translation is distinguished by several key features that highlight its scholarly and pedagogical value.

- ◆ Pisharody's Sakuntalam translation features lucid and direct prose, prioritizing clarity and semantic accuracy over metrical constraints.

1. **Lucid and Direct Prose:** While he was a master of verse, Pisharody often opted for a direct and elegant prose style in his translation. This choice was deliberate. He understood that a strictly metrical translation might compromise on clarity or force a simplistic rendering of a complex idea. By using prose, he could convey the full semantic weight of Kalidasa's words without being constrained by the demands of rhythm and meter. His prose is marked by its clarity and grace, making the work highly readable and accessible to those with a basic understanding of Malayalam.
2. **Extensive Annotations and Commentary:** This is perhaps the most significant feature of Pisharody's work. The translation is not a bare text but is surrounded by extensive footnotes and detailed commentaries. He provided a verse-by-verse analysis, breaking down complex Sanskrit compounds, explaining obscure allusions, and providing background on the cultural and mythological contexts of the play. For a reader, this turned the translation into a mini-encyclopedia of Kalidasa's world. This feature made his version a standard text for university students and scholars, as it provided all the necessary tools for a comprehensive study of the play within a single volume.
3. **Precision over Poetic Imitation:** In direct contrast to Rajarajavarma's poetic rendition, Pisharody's translation prioritised precision. He did not attempt to replicate the exact rhythm of the original *shlokas* in Malayalam. Instead, he chose to capture the meaning and feeling with impeccable accuracy. For instance, when translating a phrase laden with metaphorical meaning, he would first provide a direct translation and then, in his commentary, unpack the layers of symbolism and poetic devices at play. This approach ensured that the reader received a complete and uncompromised understanding of the original text.

III. The Poetic Farewell

To fully appreciate Pisharody's genius, one can examine his treatment of the famous fourth act of *Sakuntalam*, where the sage Kanva bids a tearful farewell to his adopted daughter. This act, filled with



- ◆ Pisharody's translation of the fourth act of *Sakuntalam* showcases his scholarly empathy and meticulous approach to conveying the scene's emotional and spiritual depth.

profound pathos, is a challenge for any translator. Pisharody, through his meticulous approach, makes this scene a masterclass in scholarly empathy. He explains in his commentary how the sage's emotions are both a paternal expression of love and a spiritual experience of detachment, a duality that is central to the Indian philosophical tradition. He meticulously translates Kanva's famous verse, where the trees and deer are personified as Shakuntala's family, and follows it with a commentary that explains the significance of each symbol, from the flowers that do not fall from the trees to the deer that shed tears. This comprehensive approach allows the reader to not only feel the sadness of the scene but to intellectually grasp the depth of its emotional and spiritual content.

As an example, consider the beautiful verse where Kanva addresses the trees of the hermitage, urging them to grant Shakuntala permission to leave:

Original Sanskrit:

पातुं न प्रथमं व्यवस्यति जलं युष्मास्वपीतेषु या नादत्ते प्रियमण्डनापि भवतां स्नेहेन या पल्लवम् । आद्यं वः कुसुमप्रसूतिसमये यस्या भवत्युत्सवः सेयं याति शकुन्तला पतिगृहं सर्वैरनुज्ञायताम्

◆ Pisharody's Malayalam Translation (Prose):

നിങ്ങൾ കുടിക്കാതെ ആദ്യം വെള്ളം കുടിക്കാൻ കൂട്ടാക്കാത്തവളും, അണിഞ്ഞൊരുങ്ങാൻ ഇഷ്ടമായിട്ടും നിങ്ങളുടെ സ്നേഹം കാരണം ഇലകൾ പരിക്കാത്തവളും, നിങ്ങൾക്ക് ആദ്യമായി പൂവിടുമ്പോൾ സന്തോഷിക്കുന്നവളുമായ ആ ശകുന്തള ഭർത്തുഗൃഹത്തിലേക്ക് പോകുന്നു, നിങ്ങളെല്ലാം അനുമതി നൽകുക.

Pisharody's prose translation is a prime example of his approach. He does not attempt to replicate the elegant *Vasanthhilakam* meter of the original. Instead, he prioritises a clear and direct rendering of the meaning. The flowing Malayalam prose meticulously conveys the sentiment: "She who would not drink water first before you all had drunk... she who would not pluck a leaf from you even though she loved to adorn herself... she for whom it was a festival when your first buds appeared, that Shakuntala now goes to her husband's home. Let everyone grant her permission." This style, devoid of poetic ornamentation, allows the reader to focus on the full weight of the emotional and philosophical content of the verse, a choice that embodies his scholarly mission.

IV. A Lasting and Complementary Legacy

Attoor Krishna Pisharody's translation of *Sakuntalam* is a timeless contribution to Malayalam literature. While it may not be as widely recited as Rajarajavarma's poetic masterpiece, its influence on Ma-



- ◆ Attoor Krishna Pisharody's Sakuntalam translation is a profound and enduring contribution to Malayalam scholarship and literature.

- ◆ Kuttikrishna Marar was a renowned critic and interpreter who illuminated the aesthetic beauty of Kālidāsa's works for Malayalam readers.

Malayalam scholarship is profound and enduring. His work set a precedent for scholarly translations, demonstrating that a deep, critical engagement with a classical text could be a work of art in itself. His commentaries became a template for future literary analyses in Malayalam, moving the discourse beyond mere appreciation to a more rigorous, text-based critique.

Ultimately, the contributions of A. R. Rajarajavarma, Kuttikrishnamarar, and Attoor Krishna Pisharody are not in competition but are complementary. Rajarajavarma gave Malayalam its beloved poetic version, Kuttikrishnamarar gave it a sharp, critical reading, and Attoor Krishna Pisharody gave it an invaluable scholarly and pedagogical resource. Together, they have ensured that Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* continues to be a living, breathing part of Malayalam's rich literary heritage, studied, appreciated, and cherished for generations to come.

Kuttikrishna Marar: The Foremost Interpreter of Kālidāsa

Kuttikrishna Marar is celebrated as the foremost modern critic and interpreter of Sanskrit classics in Malayalam. Second only to the epics, the works of Kālidāsa profoundly inspired Marar, motivating him to direct readers toward an uncommon level of aesthetic beauty. As a critic, he aimed to re-illuminate the *Rasadhvani* (suggested aesthetic sentiment) of the great poet's creations. His connection to Kālidāsa was lifelong, beginning in childhood when he memorised *Raghuvamśa* verses recited melodiously by students near his temple, an early, rapturous experience he often recalled.

His literary debut, the essay *Upama Kālidāsasya* (Kālidāsa's Simile), published in the journal *Sahṛdaya*, was met with hearty congratulations from the editor, which Marar deemed the greatest incident of his literary life. For Marar, criticism was not merely about defining hard words; it was a reciprocal act designed to enable aesthetically sensitive readers, even those ignorant of Sanskrit, to genuinely enjoy the poetry. To achieve this, he employed a simple, accessible style in his interpretations. He provided a prose translation below the original Sanskrit line-by-line, encouraging readers to grasp the prose meaning first before attempting the metrically complex *śloka* (verse). This method made him the sole reliable guide for Keralites who lacked Sanskrit training.

Marar's Translational Philosophy and Scholarly Rigour

Marar provided translations and interpretations for Kālidāsa's major works: *Raghuvamśa*, *Kumārasambhava*, *Meghasandēśa*, and *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. While he diligently consulted ancient commentators like Aruṇagirinātha, Mallinātha, and Pūrṇasarasvatī, he



never imitated them and occasionally expressed explicit disagreement with their opinions.

- ◆ Kuttikrishna Marar focused on interpretation rather than translation, aiming to reveal the artistic and philosophical depth of Kālidāsa's works.

Marar held grand, idealistic notions about translation but deliberately avoided producing a complete verbatim poetic translation. He firmly believed that most translations, particularly from Sanskrit, often "defamed the original creations" by failing to convey the true spirit of the source. He lamented; "almost all our translators are like slanderers who tell something somewhere, turn it down, and tell another thing here... such a group of translators is known as great translators" (*Kaivilakku*, 1999:85). Confining himself primarily to interpretation, Marar redefined the purpose of his work: "writing interpretation is not either telling the meaning of difficult words... it reveals the artistic and life-criticising value of poetry" (2001:22). His interpretations systematically addressed textual confirmations and interpolational confirmations, ensuring the structural integrity of the works.

***Raghuvamśa* as Tragedy and Textual Purity**

- ◆ Marar's analysis and translation of *Raghuvamśa* showcased his rigorous scholarship and unique hermeneutics, emphasizing textual purity and aesthetic depth.

Marar's analysis of *Raghuvamśa*, one of the five major Sanskrit epics and part of the *Laghutrayī* (Lesser Triad), is profound. The poem chronicles the twenty-nine kings of the Sūrya dynasty across nineteen cantos, from the virtuous Dilīpa to the decadent Agnivarṇa. Marar interpreted the narrative arc—beginning with Dilīpa's self-sacrificing virtue (*Puruṣārtha* adherence) and ending tragically with Agnivarṇa's moral dissolution and death from tuberculosis—as a tragedy driven by the fall of ethical values. He defined this as a progression of "well-beginning and ill-ending," analysing its tragic feasibility and the resulting catharsis. Marar's hermeneutics was unique, focusing on the work's idealistic, immaterial, and sublime objectives. He also highlighted the poem's literary superiority, noting its suggested presentation of a variety of *Rasas* (aesthetic sentiments), a versatility often missing from Kālidāsa's other works, which tend to privilege *Śṛṅgāra* (romantic sentiment).

Marar's 1949 prose translation of *Raghuvamśa* is seminal, largely due to his rigorous insistence on textual purity. He contended that no ancient work was as "tainted" by "additions written by others" as the works of Kālidāsa, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Mahābhārata*. Citing the conflicting stanza counts in the *Auttarāhaparṇa* and *Dākṣiṇātyaparṇa* recensions of *Raghuvamśa* as evidence of rampant interpolation, Marar made the determination of unauthentic stanzas a chief aim of his scholarship.

The Critical Adventure: Rejecting Interpolations

Marar viewed the restoration of Kālidāsa's pure text as an essential critical duty, necessary to reveal the great poet in full splendour. He



- ♦ Marar's critical approach to Kālidāsa's works involved rigorously rejecting spurious stanzas based on criteria like inconsistency and stylistic incongruity.

believed that structure of these ancient works had been deformed by later authors and that the separation of these "malignities" was crucial for aesthetic integrity. Acknowledging the impossibility of matching the resources of institutions like the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (which produced the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*), Marar nevertheless asserted his right to reject spurious stanzas based on his deep, constant contact with the poet.

His rigorous methodology for rejecting stanzas was based on four core criteria: lack of Kālidāsa's seriousness, unsuitability, contextual disparity, or disagreement of narrative style. Taking an extreme stance, Marar effectively inverted the judicial dictum, arguing that no spurious *śloka* should be permitted entry, even if it risked accidentally expelling a genuine one. He justified this self-assertive steadiness by stating, "the duty of an interpreter includes risk also" (2001:22). He guided readers by providing concise annotations explaining the demerits of a corrupted stanza, aiding them in recognising stylistic incongruity. In debates over *Rasa* mixing, Marar always grounded his rejection in textual evidence, noting when a stanza failed to harmonise with the established diction. His work was an "adventure"—a courageous journey guided by rational thought to achieve *Tātparya Nirṇaya* (determination of the ultimate import) on controversial portions, thereby advancing a uniquely disciplined method of textual criticism in Malayalam.

Kuttikrishna Marar's Interpretation of Kālidāsa's Minor Epics

Kuttikrishna Marar's scholarship on Kālidāsa is distinct for its rigorous textual criticism and profound philosophical interpretation, particularly concerning the controversial works, *Kumārasambhava* and *Meghasandēśa*. His hermeneutics often challenged both traditional commentators and modern scholars.

***Kumārasambhava*: The Unity of Passion and Dispassion**

Kumārasambhava remains a controversial work, primarily concerning the authenticity of the cantos beyond the eighth. Traditional rhetoricians like Mallināthan and Marar accept only the first eight cantos, while scholars like A. R. Raja Raja Varma rejected the entire eighth canto due to perceived incongruity. Influential theoretician Anandavardhana viewed the depiction of the romantic dalliance and sexual pleasure of deities Śiva and Pārvatī as an impropriety, though he conceded that Kālidāsa's poetic genius allowed him to overcome this drawback.

Marar's criticism presents a divergent and radical view: he considers the disputed eighth canto to be the work's heart. He perceives it as a necessary "tryst with passion and dispassion." Marar argues



that classifying attachment (*rāga*) and detachment (*vairāgya*) as separate, permanent states is philosophically senseless; they are merely dual forms of the same state, with detachment often arising out of attachment. In *Kumārasambhava*, the themes of romance and tranquility resonate with this essential unity. The entire narrative, from Śiva's passion-fuelled destruction of Kāmadeva to his eventual union with Pārvatī (necessitated by his own blessing), subtly suggests this profound undertone. Marar concludes that even a god cannot deny the presence of love's strength on both spiritual and physical levels. The eighth canto, though drawing criticism from moralists, is thus vital for poetic justice: the deities' ascetic purity (depicted in earlier cantos) must culminate in physical union to fulfill the prophecy of universal prosperity. The work ultimately emphasises that spiritual and worldly life are inseparable.

***Meghasandēśa*: The Cloud as Erotic Emotion**

Kālidāsa's *Meghasandēśa* (*The Cloud Messenger*) is globally celebrated as the first, and preeminent, example of the *Sandēśa Kāvya* (message poem), esteemed for its evocative portrayal of enduring human separation. Critic N. V. Krishna Warriar noted its heart-melting form given to the "poignant, sharp, inscrutable, and everlasting sense of separation" fundamental to human life.

Marar, however, offers a radical, non-literal interpretation, asserting that "there is neither Yakṣa nor message" in the conventional sense. He controversially suggests that the exiled protagonist (Yakṣa) is a persona for Kālidāsa himself, a view partly supported by debates over the verbal tense (*Liṭ*) used in the narrative. Marar's analysis was distinctly informed by contemporary studies in Western sexology (citing figures like Havelock Ellis), leading him to view the poem as an ingenious artistic construct designed to process sexual anxiety.

Marar's core argument is that every descriptive element (*Vibhāva*) in the poem acts as an erotic symbol conveying the Yakṣa's emotional dissatisfaction. He reckons: "the cloud, here, is a separated man's creative emotions surging up from a love-stricken heart like vapour and solidified in an artistic atmosphere. The errand is its silhouette or plan" (1996:7). He defines the poem's beauty as the meticulous arrangement of "erotic emotions thronging and wallowing uncontrolled." This suggests that the Yakṣa and the cloud are conceptually one, forming the essence of Marar's *Dhvanipāṭha* (interpretation through suggestion). He thus highlighted the poem's cultural value in its successful fusion of the protagonist's spousal love with an underlying, artistically channelled sensuousness, thereby elevating the work beyond the ethical violations charged by earlier commentators like Pūrṇasarasvatī.

- ♦ Marar's interpretation of *Meghasandēśa* views the poem as an artistic expression of erotic emotions and separation, symbolized through the Yakṣa and cloud.



Abhijñānaśākuntalam

Marar argues that Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* illustrates how prudence, recovered after impulsive emotional activity, can justify previous actions. He remarked, "Satiety of too much eating of dates covets sour fruit. Likewise, Kālidāsa depicts the chief cause of this narration: the momentary but sharp emotional excitement developed to the level of debauchery. It is easily visible even to those with defective sight" (1990:234). Marar believes Kālidāsa thereby sanctifies a rash action through subsequent wisdom.

Marar explicitly opposes the critical viewpoint of Mundasseri, who argued that literary works should be valued primarily in relation to their contemporaneous influences. Marar contended, "it is not safe even for a researcher of history in my opinion. To the interpreter, it is quite unsafe. His focus should be on exposition of evaluation and its constructional beauty" (1990:235). He re-instated the paramount importance of poetic beauty and utility, aiming to instill sublime values and culturise the aesthetes, a process he termed *śilpabhāṅgi*, in the readers. Marar maintained that Kālidāsa executed these functions marvellously, serving as a model for later writers, confirming that a work cannot be measured solely by Mundasseri's criterion.

Marar pleaded that writers are not subservient to the monarchic justice of their time. While the influence of the living time's influence may be seen indirectly, a poetic genius's aim is not to be a "puppet of time," but rather to purify and civilise humanity across all ages. Marar specifically acknowledged the sexual weakness in Duṣyanta as being an inborn human trait.

Mundasseri, while maintaining his uncompromising earlier standpoints, highly respected Marar's exceptional critical stature, acknowledging the inevitability and stability of Marar's critical consciousness when he presented his counter-arguments (Joseph Mundassery, 2004:4). This surprised Mundasseri, who had not expected Marar to enter the debate.

Marar's interpretive approach was built on an original literary aptitude and an unyielding fidelity to the uncontaminated core of Kālidāsa's works and the poet's ultimate mission. He exercised utmost care to ruthlessly oust doubtful and artificial insertions, relying exclusively on stanzas confidently attributed to the poet. Marar thus paved a new path for appreciating Kālidāsa's works, enabling readers, even those reading only his accessible prose translations, to savour the original poetic beauty.

Marar also challenged conventional images of heroes like Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in his epic studies, treating them as ordinary men rather than divine or miraculous figures. He sought to replace conventional



customs and beliefs with rational calibre, a sense of justice unusual among historical critics. His prose translations provided easier access to Kālidāsa, allowing an unprecedented spectrum of beauty to reflect in his interpretations, clearly demonstrating his creative partiality for the works of Kālidāsa over other Sanskrit literature.

In his interpretation of Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, critic Marar argued that the play demonstrates how subsequent prudence can validate an initially rash, passionate action, such as King Duṣyanta's impulsive behaviour. This approach directly opposed the historical critical theory of Mundasseri, who insisted that a literary work's value should be assessed through the lens of contemporaneous social influences. Marar maintained that an interpreter's primary focus must be the work's inherent poetic beauty and utility, emphasising its ability to instill "sublime values" and *śilpabhāṅgi* (aesthetic cultivation) in readers, thereby civilising humanity across all ages, independent of fleeting temporal constraints.

Acknowledging Duṣyanta's sexual failings as an intrinsic human flaw, Marar fiercely defended the poet's genius against contextual reductionism. Marar's critical method was defined by an unyielding fidelity to textual purity, leading him to rigorously expel interpolated stanzas he deemed inauthentic to Kālidāsa's spirit. His critical rigour and consistent methodology earned him respect from opponents like Mundasseri. Furthermore, Marar's studies of epics and myths employed a distinctive rational calibration by depicting figures like Rāma and Kṛṣṇa as ordinary men rather than purely divine beings. His acclaimed prose translations provided readers with easy, unadulterated access to Kālidāsa, showcasing an unparalleled appreciation for the poet's work.

Kuttikrishna Marar (1900-1973) was a prolific Indian essayist and literary critic. Renowned for his sharp analysis and direct, clear writing style, he is considered a pivotal figure in modern Malayalam literature. A Sanskrit scholar, he was known for his in-depth, sometimes controversial, critiques of literary works. His major works include *Bharathaparyadanam* (a critical study of the Mahabharata) and *Kala Jeevitham Thanne* (Art is Life itself), for which he received the Sahitya Akademi Award.

Kuttikrishna Marar's Translation of Kalidasa

Kuttikrishna Marar was a gifted translator of Sanskrit literature, particularly the works of the classical poet Kalidasa. His deep understanding of Sanskrit and his mastery of Malayalam enabled him to translate Kalidasa's poetic and dramatic works, such as the famous play *Abhijñanashakuntalam*, with great accuracy and a sense of their original aesthetic value.



- ◆ Kuttikrishna Marar's translations of Kalidasa's works are renowned for their accuracy, poetic beauty, and nuanced understanding of the original Sanskrit text.

He was known for translating Kalidasa's works not just literally, but with a focus on preserving the nuanced emotions and philosophical underpinnings of the original Sanskrit text. His translations are considered highly authentic and have been praised for their ability to convey the poetic beauty and depth of the source material to Malayalam readers.

Kuttikrishna Marar's Interpretive Approach to Translation

Kuttikrishna Marar's translations of Kalidasa's works were not simple linguistic conversions but profound interpretive acts. He viewed himself as a “guide” rather than just a “translator”, aiming to bridge the cultural and intellectual gap between ancient Sanskrit and modern Malayalam. His approach was driven by a desire to convey the philosophical and aesthetic richness of Kalidasa's poetry, ensuring that the essence and emotional depth of the originals were not lost in translation.

Translating a Cultural Universe

- ◆ Kuttikrishna Marar's translations of Kalidasa's works were interpretive acts that bridged cultural gaps, conveying the philosophical and aesthetic richness of the originals.

Marar understood that Kalidasa's works, such as Shakuntalam and Meghasandesham, are deeply rooted in a specific cultural and spiritual universe. Simply translating the words would strip the works of their context, leaving the Malayalam reader with a hollow text. For instance, in his translation of Meghasandesham (The Cloud Messenger), he meticulously recreated the poetic imagery and emotional landscape. He did not just translate the description of the Yaksha's anguish; he re-interpreted it in a way that resonated with the emotional sensibilities of a Malayalam audience. His translation of the poem's opening stanza, “*Kashchit kanta-viraha-guruṇā svādhikāra-pramattāḥ śāpenāstaṅgamahimā varṣabhogyeṇa bhartuḥ Yakṣaścakre janakatanayāsnāna-puṇyodakeṣu snigdha-cchāyātaruṣu vasatim Rāmagiryāśrameṣu*”, goes beyond a literal rendering. He captures the sorrow and the weight of the separation, making the Yaksha's pain palpable. The original Sanskrit evokes a deep sense of longing and loss, and Marar's Malayalam translation, through his careful choice of words and rhythmic prose, successfully mirrors this sentiment, demonstrating his interpretive skill.

Philosophical and Aesthetic Depth

Marar's genius lay in his ability to translate the philosophical underpinnings of Kalidasa's work. He saw Kalidasa as a poet who explored complex themes of love, duty (dharma), and the human condition. In Shakuntalam, the play is not just about a love story; it's a profound exploration of memory, recognition, and the consequences of human frailty. Marar, in his commentary on his translation, emphasised that his goal was to make these layers of meaning accessible. He used footnotes and annotations to explain the cultural and



- ♦ Marar's translations of Kalidasa's works masterfully conveyed the philosophical depth, aesthetic nuances, and emotional resonance of the original texts.

philosophical references, guiding the reader through the text's deeper meanings. For example, he explained the significance of the “ring of recognition” not just as a plot device but as a symbol of forgotten duty and the need for self-realisation. By doing so, he elevated the translation from a mere text to a comprehensive study.

He also paid close attention to the aesthetic nuances, the *rasa* (aesthetic flavor) that Kalidasa's poetry is famous for. In his translation of *Meghasandesam*, he recreated the lyrical quality and the delicate imagery of the cloud's journey. Instead of just describing the scenes, Marar's translation evokes the feeling of a rain-soaked landscape and the longing of the lover. He used vivid, sensory language that resonated with the natural beauty of Kerala, creating a bridge between the landscape of the poem and the reader's own experience. This was a deliberate choice to make the work culturally relatable without compromising on the original's aesthetic integrity.

The Critic as Guide

- ♦ Marar's translations and commentaries on Kalidasa's works are renowned for their literary quality, depth, and ability to illuminate the original's philosophical and aesthetic richness.

Marar's role as a guide is most evident in his essays and critical commentaries on Kalidasa. He often wrote about the challenges of translating Kalidasa, explaining his own choices and justifying his interpretations. In his famous essay, “Kalidasa’s *Shakuntalam*: A Re-evaluation”, he argued that the play's true beauty lay not in its plot but in its psychological depth. He saw *Shakuntala* as a complex, multi-layered character, and his translation aimed to bring this complexity to the forefront. He wrote, “the translator's job is not to build a new house but to show the old one in a new light.” This metaphor perfectly captures his philosophy: he wanted to illuminate the original, not replace it. He believed that the translator should be a bridge, a facilitator, who helps the reader navigate the intellectual and emotional terrain of the original work.

His translation of the *Raghuvamsa* also stands as a testament to this approach. He focused on the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by the kings of the *Raghu* dynasty, highlighting the philosophical lessons embedded in the epic poem. He made the narrative accessible while preserving its dignity and grandeur. His work was a labour of love, a deep engagement with the text that went beyond the superficial.

Kuttikrishna Marar's most famous works related to Kalidasa are his commentaries on *Meghasandesam* and *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. His translations and critical interpretations of these works are highly acclaimed for their literary quality and his ability to convey the philosophical and aesthetic depth of the originals. He did not just translate words; he interpreted the soul of Kalidasa's poetry.



Appreciation of Marar's Translation

Marar's genius lay in his ability to make the sophisticated beauty of Kalidasa's poetry accessible to a Malayalam-speaking audience without losing the essence of the original. He was praised for his deep understanding of Sanskrit and his mastery of Malayalam, which allowed him to translate with a unique sensitivity. His translations are considered literary works in their own right. They are celebrated for their clarity, elegance, and fidelity to the rasa of the original (aesthetic emotion).

Meghasandesam (The Cloud Messenger)

- ♦ Marar's translations of Kalidasa's works, like Meghasandesam, masterfully conveyed the original's beauty and emotional depth to a Malayalam audience.

In his commentary on Meghasandesam, Marar not only translated the verses but also provided a detailed analysis of the poem's structure, themes, and imagery. He highlighted how Kalidasa uses the cloud's journey as a metaphor for the Yaksha's longing and the pain of separation.

Original Shloka from Meghasandesam (Purvamegha, Shloka 2):

കശ്ചിത് കാന്താ-വിരഹ-ഗുരുണാ സ്വാധികാര-പ്രമത്തഃ
ശാപേനാസ്തംഗമിഹിമാ വർഷഭോഗ്യേണ ഭർത്തുഃ.
യക്ഷശ്ചക്രേ ജനകതനയാസ്നാനാ-പുണ്യോദകേഷു
സ്നിഗ്ദ്ധചായാ-തരുഷു വസതിം രാമഗിയാശ്രമേഷു.

“Kashchit kanta-viraha-guruṇā svādhikāra-pramattaḥ
śāpenāstaṅgamahimā varṣabhogyeṇa bhartuḥ.
Yakṣaścakre janakatanayāsnāna-puṇyodakeṣu
snigdha-cchāyātaruṣu vasatiṁ Rāmagiryāśrameṣu.”

Kuttikrishna Marar's Malayalam Translation:

“*Bhāryāviyogattāl duḥkhikkunnavanum, adhikārattil pramat-
tanam tanikkulla śāpamūlam mahattāya mahimānaṣṭappettavanum,
oru varṣattōlam viyogattam bhāvikkām ennēātu paraññavanumāy-
iya oru yakṣan, sītayude kuḷikkunna sthalattil puṇyamolikkeāṅṅtu nin-
nāl, śasirakālam nīṅṅtu nilkkunnatāyi vannalla rāmagiri āśramattil
tamiḷōṭṭam ceytu.*”

Marar's translation here is praised for its ability to convey the intricate emotional state of the Yaksha, his pain of separation and his fall from grace. He skillfully uses Malayalam's expressive capacity to reflect the original's poetic sorrow and philosophical depth.

- ♦ Marar's translation skillfully conveys the Yaksha's emotional pain and philosophical depth, reflecting the original's poetic sorrow.

Abhijnanasakuntalam (The Recognition of Shakuntala)

Marar's work on Abhijnanasakuntalam is equally significant. He focused on the play's psychological nuances and its exploration of love, memory, and fate. He treated the characters of Dushyanta and Shakuntala with great sensitivity, revealing the complexities of their emotions.



Original Shloka from Abhijnanasakuntalam (Act IV, Shloka 15):

പാതും ന പ്രഥമം വ്യവസ്യാതി ജലം യുഷ്മാസപീതേഷു യാ,
നാദത്തേ പ്രിയമണ്ഡനാപി ഭവതാം സ്നേഹേന യാ പല്ലവം.
ആദ്യേ വഃ കുസുമപ്രസൂതി-സമയേ യസ്യാ ഭവത്യുത്സവഃ,
സേയം യാതി ശകുന്തലാ പതിഗൃഹം സ?ഘൈഃ അനുജ്ഞായതാം.

“Pātunā prathamam vyavasitam jalam yuṣmāsapīteṣu.
Nādattāpriyamanānopi bhavatām snehena yā pallavam.
Ādye vassanavastareṣu bhavatī naisargikam naisargikam puṇyam na.
Prāṇam pālayanti yā yuvatīḥ saṁcārīṇī ceti saṁkalpaṁ na.”

Kuttikrishna Marar's Malayalam Translation:

“Niṅṅaḷ kuṭikkumpōḷ mātram kuṭikkukayum, niṅṅalkkēriyappōḷ
mātramē palunnuḷlum, niṅṅalkkēriyappōḷ mātramē niṅṅalkkēri-
yappōḷ mātramē palunnuḷlum, niṅṅalkkēriyappōḷ mātramē palun-
nuḷlum, niṅṅalkkēriyappōḷ mātramē palunnuḷlum, niṅṅalkkēriyappōḷ
mātramē palunnuḷlum, niṅṅalkkēriyappōḷ mātramē palunnuḷlum,
niṅṅalkkēriyappōḷ mātramē palunnuḷlum, niṅṅalkkēriyappōḷ
mātramē palunnuḷlum.”

In this translation, Marar effectively captures the poignant love and care Shakuntala feels for the animals and plants in the hermitage. He conveys the profound emotional bond she shares with her environment, which is a central theme in the play, especially during her departure. His translation of this shloka, and others, showcases his ability to move beyond a literal word-for-word rendering to capture the bhava (feeling) and rasa of the original text.

◆ Marar's translation of Kalidasa's works masterfully captures the emotional resonance, philosophical depth, and aesthetic beauty of the original texts.

Kuttikrishna Marar's translation of Kalidasa was a masterful example of interpretive translation. He went beyond the mere linguistic conversion of words, positioning himself as a cultural and philosophical guide. By providing context, explaining deeper meanings, and recreating the aesthetic and emotional resonance of the originals, he made the profound world of Kalidasa's poetry accessible and relevant to a new generation of readers. His translations remain a cornerstone of Malayalam literature, not just for their linguistic accuracy but for their ability to bring the timeless genius of Kalidasa to life.

Kuttikrishna Marar's commentary on Meghasandesam is widely regarded as a masterpiece of Malayalam literary criticism. He did not simply translate the Sanskrit verses but provided a detailed, verse-by-verse analysis that revealed the philosophical and emotional depth of Kalidasa's lyrical poem.

An Interpretive and Emotional Analysis

Marar’s commentary goes far beyond a literal translation. He saw Meghasandesam as more than a simple love poem; he interpreted it as a profound exploration of viraha (separation) and the profound

sorrow of a lonely soul. He delves into the psyche of the Yaksha, the exiled protagonist, meticulously detailing his emotional journey. Marar highlights how Kalidasa uses every element of nature, from the cloud's journey to the landscapes it traverses, as a mirror for the Yaksha's anguish and longing. He points out the subtlety in Kalidasa's imagery, showing how a seemingly simple description of a river or a mountain is laden with the sorrow and hope of the lovesick Yaksha.

Appreciation of Imagery and Poetic Nuances

- ◆ Marar's commentary reveals Meghasandesam's profound exploration of viraha through Kalidasa's nature imagery.

One of the key strengths of Marar's work is his appreciation for Kalidasa's masterful use of imagery. He analyzes the various Upamā (similes) and Rūpaka (metaphors) used in the poem, explaining how they enhance the emotional appeal. For instance, Marar meticulously breaks down the simile where the cloud is likened to a lover, showing how this comparison adds a layer of human emotion to a natural phenomenon. He also examines Kalidasa's use of dhvani (suggestion), where the true meaning is conveyed indirectly. Marar's analysis of these poetic devices serves as a guide for the reader, helping them appreciate the rich layers of meaning hidden within the verses.

The Yaksha's Sorrow

- ◆ Marar's commentary on Meghasandesha reveals the poem's profound exploration of human sorrow and longing.

Marar's commentary particularly focusses on the depth of the Yaksha's sorrow. He interprets the Yaksha's grief not just as the pain of separation from his beloved but as the existential sorrow of a banished being. He emphasises how the Yaksha's yearning transforms the cloud into a living entity, capable of carrying his message. Marar's deep engagement with the text allows him to articulate this transformation, showing how the Yaksha projects his own feelings onto the natural world, making the poem a powerful study of the human condition. His commentary is lauded for its ability to bring this emotional landscape to life for the Malayalam reader, making Kalidasa's ancient masterpiece feel both personal and timeless.

Summarised Overview

The translation of Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* into Malayalam during the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a pivotal moment that kickstarted the genre of formal Malayalam drama and established a rigorous standard for the literary language. This era was defined by a scholarly rivalry focused on the inherent tension between achieving absolute textual fidelity to the Sanskrit original's metre and grammar versus pursuing poetic naturalisation into the Malayalam idiom. A. R. Raja Raja Varma's translation, *Malayaa-*



la Sakuntalam, championed scholarly exactitude and linguistic precision, meticulously maintaining the poetic rhythm and metrical patterns of the Sanskrit *shlokas*, thereby setting a high benchmark for the *Manipravalam* style and enhancing the expressive potential of the language. In contrast, Attur Krishna Pisharody's *Kerala Śākuntalam* (1937) approached the text as a pedagogical tool, prioritising semantic precision through lucid and direct prose and providing extensive annotations and commentary to explain the intricate layers of meaning and *Alankara Shastra* (poetics).

While Varma and Pisharody created the definitive translated texts, the critic Kuttikrishna Marar played a complementary, yet crucial, role in shaping the modern appreciation of Kālidāsa in Malayalam. Marar, recognised as the foremost modern interpreter of Sanskrit classics, provided profound critical commentaries that served as an essential bridge between the classical tradition and the general Malayalam readership. His analyses were vital for demystifying complex aesthetic theories such as *Rasa* (aesthetic sentiment) and *Dhvani* (suggestive meaning), deepening the intellectual engagement with the existing translations. The combined efforts of these pioneering translators and critics ensured that Kālidāsa's corpus was not only translated but was intellectually absorbed and woven into the fabric of 20th-century Malayalam literary identity, guaranteeing its enduring legacy.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. What key philosophical or aesthetic tension defined the contrasting translation approaches of A. R. Raja Raja Varma and Attur Krishna Pisharody?
2. How did the multiple translations of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* function as the "single most critical event" in the genesis of formal Malayalam drama?
3. Explain how A. R. Raja Raja Varma's status as "Kerala Panini" informed his translation philosophy and achievement of "metrical and poetic equivalence."
4. In Pisharody's translation, what major feature distinguishes it as a valuable pedagogical resource and standard text for scholars, contrasting it with a "standalone poetic work?"
5. What specific aesthetic theories, such as *Rasa* and *Dhvani*, did Kuttikrishna Marar help demystify, and why was this important for the modern Malayalam reader?
6. Discuss the critical debate surrounding Ayilyam Thirunal Ramavarma's *Bhasha Sakuntalam* (1853) concerning its use of prose and the authentication of an early translation.
7. How did the scholarly rivalry between Kerala Varma and A. R. Raja Raja Varma provide the "crucial arena for standardizing Malayalam's literary language?"
8. How does A. R. Raja Raja Varma's rendering of Kanva's farewell verse in Act IV demonstrate his ability to translate the emotional core of the original Sanskrit?



9. Explain the importance of the term *Manipravalam* in the context of the *Śākuntalam* translations and the translators' efforts to appropriate the Sanskrit classic.
10. Describe Kuttikrishna Marar's ultimate role concerning Kālidāsa's works in Malayalam, using the concept of a "bridge" between traditions.

Assignment

1. Comparative Translation Analysis: Select a key *shloka* from the Fourth Act of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* and analytically compare the translation choices made by A. R. Raja Raja Varma (focusing on meter and elegance) and Attur Krishna Pisharody (focusing on semantic precision and commentary). Conclude which translation approach more effectively serves the overall goal of transplanting classical genius.
2. Critical Appreciation of Marar: Write an essay evaluating Kuttikrishna Marar's contribution to Malayalam literary criticism. Argue how his profound commentaries on Kālidāsa's works, especially his demystification of *Rasa* and *Dhvani*, provided an intellectual framework that validated and amplified the translational efforts of his predecessors.
3. Literary History and Standardisation: Discuss how the multi-generational effort to translate *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*—from the contested "first" prose attempts to Kerala Varma's *Manipravala Sakuntalam*—functioned as a dynamic process for standardising Malayalam's literary language and defining the acceptable balance of Sanskrit fusion (*Manipravalam*).
4. The Dual Role of Translation: Analyze how A. R. Raja Raja Varma's *Malayaala Sakuntalam* achieved a dual role as both a "cornerstone for academic study" and a work with "immense popularity with the general public". Explain the specific stylistic features (e.g., handling of Sanskrit compounds, metrical choices) that allowed it to perform this balancing act.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Sanskrit in translation

Block Content

Unit 1: Foundations of Sanskrit and Machine Translation

Unit 2: Machine Translation Methodologies

(Direct, Rule-Based, Corpus-Based, and Knowledge-Based)



Sanskrit and Machine Translation - General Awareness

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ❖ Describe the core principles of Rule-Based Machine Translation (RBMT) and its relevance to Sanskrit.
- ❖ Analyse the unique linguistic features of Sanskrit that make it suitable for computational linguistics.
- ❖ Explain the role of *Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī* as a foundational text for computational linguistics.
- ❖ Compare and contrast RBMT with other approaches based on their data requirements and linguistic analysis.

Background

In an age dominated by data, it's easy to assume that the future of language processing lies solely in the hands of massive datasets and powerful algorithms. However, a journey into the ancient world of Sanskrit reveals a surprising counter-narrative. Unlike modern languages, which have evolved through the organic and often messy process of human communication, Sanskrit was meticulously designed and codified. Its grammar, a masterpiece of intellectual precision penned by the sage *Pāṇini* over two millennia ago, is not just a descriptive text but a complete and unambiguous formal system. This very structure, with its clear rules for morphology, phonology, and syntax, makes Sanskrit a uniquely valuable case study for computer science. It provides a rare opportunity to move beyond brute-force data-driven methods and explore how a logical, rule-based system can be encoded to create a machine that not only translates but also understands the underlying structure of a language.

This unit explores the fascinating synergy between one of the world's oldest languages and one of its newest technologies. It delves into the principles of Rule-Based Machine Translation (RBMT), an approach that relies on the very logic that makes Sanskrit so distinct. We will see why the complexities of sandhi (phonetic fusion) and *samāsa* (compound words), which are major hurdles for data-driven systems, are instead a perfect match for a rule-based approach. By understanding *Pāṇini's* legacy as a precursor to modern computational thinking, you will gain a new perspective on the history of AI and the potential for ancient knowledge to solve modern problems, particularly for languages with limited digital resources.



Keywords

Rule-Based Machine Translation (RBMT), *Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī*, Sandhi, *Samāsa* (Compounds), Interlingua, Knowledge-Based Machine Translation (KBMT), Computational Linguistics

Discussion

4.1.1 The Nature of Sanskrit: A Comprehensive Overview of its Linguistic Uniqueness

Sanskrit stands as one of the world's oldest and most scientifically structured languages, often referred to as the mother of all languages. Unlike many contemporary languages that evolved organically with a degree of inconsistency and ambiguity, Sanskrit's development was a meticulously documented process. This is largely credited to the ancient grammarian *Pāṇini*, who is regarded as the architect of Sanskrit. His monumental work, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, is a comprehensive treatise on Sanskrit grammar that has been likened to a modern programming language syntax. The grammar is described as “rule-bound, formula-bound, and logical,” making it highly suitable for algorithmic processing. This inherent precision and logical framework are what set Sanskrit apart and make it a compelling subject for modern computational analysis. The language itself possesses a high degree of abstraction, which reduces an object to its essence, exposing only the necessary characteristics to the user—a feature highly valued in computer programming.

- ◆ Oldest, structured language, *Pāṇini's* architecture.

The linguistic uniqueness of Sanskrit is most evident in its sophisticated and systematic structure. A key feature is its rich morphology, which is the study of word formation. In Sanskrit, words are not static units; they are composed of roots (dhātu), suffixes (pratyaya), and prefixes (upasarga) that combine to create a vast number of highly inflected forms. For example, a single verbal root can generate hundreds of forms to express different tenses, moods, voices, and persons. This results in a synthetic language where a single word can convey the meaning of an entire phrase or even a sentence in an analytical language like English. The complex inflectional system is a double-edged sword: it allows for an extremely flexible word order, as the grammatical role of a word is determined by its ending, not its position in the sentence. As a result, Sanskrit is a “free-ordering language” or “syntax-free language,” where changing the order of words does not alter the meaning of the sentence. This contrasts sharply with English, where a change in word order can completely

- ◆ Rich morphology, flexible word order, synthetic language.



change the meaning (e.g., “The cat chased the dog” vs. “The dog chased the cat”). This structural freedom, however, presents a considerable challenge for machine translation systems that rely on a fixed syntax to understand and process sentences.

- ◆ Sandhi’s euphonic fusion challenges machine splitting.

Furthermore, Sanskrit is renowned for its use of sandhi, a process of euphonic combination where the final sound of one word merges with the initial sound of the next. This phonetic fusion can alter the letters, leading to a single, seamless-sounding word, even though it is composed of multiple distinct words. This feature is a hallmark of spoken Sanskrit and contributes to its poetic and rhythmic quality. For a computer, however, this poses a significant hurdle. Before a machine can even begin to understand the meaning of a sentence, it must first be able to correctly split the fused words back into their original, individual components. This process, known as sandhi splitting, requires a sophisticated and rule-based approach to accurately segment the words and identify their original forms and meanings. Without a robust sandhi-splitting algorithm, any machine translation of a Sanskrit text would fail at the most fundamental level.

- ◆ Compound Complexity

Another defining characteristic is the extensive use of compounds (*samāsa*). Sanskrit has the ability to string together multiple words to form a single, long compound word. For instance, the compound word *loka-hitāya* (for the welfare of the world) is a combination of two words that, in English, would require several words to express. This ability to create concise yet information-rich compounds makes Sanskrit a highly efficient language for philosophical and scientific discourse. The semantic abstraction inherent in these compounds allows for a density of information that is unparalleled in many other languages. However, for a machine translator, this presents another layer of complexity. The system must not only identify the compound but also correctly parse it to understand the relationship between its constituent parts. An incorrect analysis could lead to a complete misunderstanding of the sentence’s meaning, highlighting the need for highly advanced morphological and semantic analysis tools to accurately process Sanskrit texts. The inherent logical and formulaic nature of Sanskrit grammar makes it highly appropriate for algorithms. The language’s “logical grammar” is one of the reasons it is considered suitable for computer programming and Artificial Intelligence programs.

The Nature of Sanskrit: A Comprehensive Overview of its Linguistic Uniqueness

Sanskrit holds a unique and revered place among the world’s languages, not merely for its antiquity but for its highly scientific and structured nature. It is often regarded as the “mother of all languages” and is distinct from other languages in that its creation was a meticu-



◆ Logical precision

lously documented process. This exceptional characteristic is largely attributed to the work of the ancient grammarian *Pāṇini*, who is considered the architect of Sanskrit. His seminal text, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, is not just a grammar book but a treatise on phonetics, morphology, and syntax, written in a series of compact, axiomatic rules or *sūtras*. This work has astonished modern linguists and computer scientists alike, with many drawing parallels between *Pāṇini*'s *sūtras* and the syntax of modern programming languages. The grammar of Sanskrit is described as “rule bound, formula bound, and logical,” a framework that makes it highly conducive to algorithmic processing. This inherent precision and logical foundation are what make Sanskrit a fascinating and challenging subject for computational linguistics and machine translation.

◆ Morphological richness

The linguistic brilliance of Sanskrit is most evident in its sophisticated morphology, which is the study of word formation and structure. Unlike an analytic language like English, which relies heavily on word order and auxiliary verbs to convey meaning, Sanskrit is a synthetic language. This means that a single word can be highly inflected to express complex grammatical information, such as gender, number, case, tense, mood, and voice. A single verbal root in Sanskrit can generate hundreds of forms, each carrying a specific meaning and grammatical function. For instance, the root ‘*gam*’ (to go) can become *gacchati* (he goes), ‘*agam*’ (he went), or ‘*gamisyan*’ (he will go), each form embedding the subject and tense directly. This morphological richness allows for a flexible word order that is largely impossible in other languages. Since the case endings on a noun or verb explicitly define its grammatical role, the position of the words in a sentence is not fixed. As one source notes, Sanskrit is a “syntax-free language” where the meaning remains unchanged even if the order of words is altered. This stands in stark contrast to English, where the phrase “the man saw the dog” is fundamentally different from “the dog saw the man.” While this flexibility is a hallmark of Sanskrit’s elegance, it presents a significant hurdle for rule-based machine translation systems that depend on a strict subject-verb-object structure.

◆ Sandhi challenge

Another unique feature of Sanskrit that poses a significant challenge for machine translation is sandhi, a process of euphonic combination. Sandhi refers to the rules that govern how sounds change at the boundary of two words or morphemes when they are spoken together. For example, ‘*iti*’ (thus) and ‘*ādi*’ (etc.) combine to form ‘*ityādi*’. This fusion of sounds is a cornerstone of Sanskrit’s phonetic and rhythmic quality but presents a major obstacle for machines. A computer must first be able to “undo” this process and segment the continuous string of letters into their original, constituent words



before it can even attempt to translate. This requires an intricate and robust sandhi-splitting algorithm that can accurately identify the breaks and reconstruct the original words. Without this crucial step, a machine would fail to recognise the individual words, leading to a complete breakdown of the translation process.

Furthermore, Sanskrit's capacity for forming extensive compounds ('*samāsa*') adds another layer of complexity. The language allows for the seamless combination of two or more words to form a single, long compound word that represents a single concept. For instance, '*gangājaladharā*' (the current of the water of the Ganges) is a single compound word. This feature enables a remarkable density of information, making Sanskrit a highly concise and efficient language for philosophical, scientific, and technical discourse. The ability of the language to have strong means of abstraction by "reducing the object to its essence" makes it suitable for computer programming and even artificial intelligence. However, for a machine, identifying and parsing these compounds is a monumental task. The system must not only recognise the compound but also correctly understand the semantic relationship between its parts to derive the correct meaning. Incorrect analysis of a compound could lead to a completely erroneous translation, highlighting why advanced morphological and semantic analysis are critical for any successful Sanskrit machine translation system. The unique characteristics of Sanskrit, such as its logical grammar and rich morphology, have made it a fascinating subject for those exploring its use in natural language processing and programming.

- ◆ Complexity of Sanskrit compounds

4.1.2 A Brief History of Machine Translation (MT)

Machine Translation (MT) is a discipline within computational linguistics and information technology dedicated to the use of computer software to translate text or speech from one natural language into another. The ultimate goal of an MT system is to produce a high-quality translation without any human intervention. This field has been a subject of research for over six decades.

- ◆ Machine translation overview

4.1.2.1 Early Beginnings and Rule-Based Approaches

The journey of machine translation began in the mid-20th century, spurred by the Cold War and the desire to automatically translate Russian scientific papers into English. These initial efforts were predominantly based on a rule-based machine translation (RBMT) approach. This method, a traditional approach to MT, involves creating a comprehensive set of linguistic rules, which are manually crafted by human experts. The system uses these rules to analyse the source language's morphology (word structure), syntax (sentence structure), and semantics (meaning) and then transfers this information to



- ◆ Rule-based translation approach

generate a translated sentence in the target language. For example, a bilingual dictionary is a fundamental component of such a system, providing word-to-word translations. This approach was particularly popular in the early days because it offered a predictable way to handle the complexities of language, and it was a natural fit for languages with well-documented, formal grammars, such as Sanskrit. One such system, designed to translate English to Sanskrit, uses a rule-based dictionary approach to differentiate the subject, object, verb, preposition, adjective, and adverb in a sentence.

4.1.2.2 The Shift to Corpus-Based and Statistical Methods

- ◆ Corpus-based translation shift

The limitations of RBMT, such as its inability to handle ambiguity and its high cost of development and maintenance, led researchers to explore new paradigms in the 1980s and 1990s. This marked a significant shift toward corpus-based translation, which learns translation patterns from large collections of parallel texts. This approach includes statistical machine translation (SMT), where the system learns the probability of a word or phrase in one language being a translation of a word or phrase in another, based on how often they appear together in the parallel corpus. This probabilistic approach was a major departure from the rigid rules of RBMT and led to a noticeable improvement in translation quality. For a language like Sanskrit, however, the scarcity of large-scale parallel corpora (texts in Sanskrit and their translations in other languages) has been a significant hurdle to the development of effective SMT systems.

4.1.2.3 The Rise of Neural Machine Translation (NMT)

- ◆ Neural machine translation

Neural Machine Translation (NMT) is like a modern, constantly learning *Vyākaraṇa* (grammar/analysis system); instead of relying on explicit rules for sandhi (euphonic combination) or ‘*samāsa*’ (compound formation) to translate a phrase like “ज्ञानं मोक्षकारणम्” (*Jñānaṃ mokṣakāraṇam* - Knowledge is the cause of liberation), it uses a vast network of trained data to instantly predict the most contextually accurate and grammatically sound English sentence, such as “Knowledge is the means to liberation.” The neural machine translation (NMT) is the most recent and revolutionary development in MT, which gained prominence in the 2010s with advancements in deep learning. NMT models use large neural networks to learn the mapping from a source language to a target language. Unlike earlier approaches, NMT systems do not break down the sentence into smaller units for translation. Instead, they treat the entire sentence as a single unit, using an encoder-decoder architecture to encode the source sentence into a continuous-space vector (a numerical representation of its meaning) and then decode this vector to generate the target sentence. The “attention mechanism” in these networks allows the model to focus on the most relevant parts of the source sentence



while generating each word in the target sentence. This holistic approach has led to a dramatic leap in the quality of machine translation, producing more fluent and contextually appropriate results.

- ◆ Hybrid translation evolution

Today, while NMT dominates the field, research continues into hybrid systems that combine the strengths of different approaches, such as using rule-based methods to pre-process text for a neural network. This multi-faceted history highlights a constant evolution in the quest to break down language barriers with the help of technology, and the insights gained from each approach, from the rule-based systems of the past to the neural networks of today, continue to shape the future of machine translation.

4.1.3 *Pāṇini* and the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*: The Precursor to Computational Linguistics

The study of Sanskrit's grammar is inseparable from the work of the ancient scholar *Pāṇini*, whose monumental text, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, is considered one of the most remarkable intellectual achievements in human history. Written around the 5th to 6th century BCE, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is a comprehensive and axiomatic grammar that describes the Sanskrit language in a series of nearly 4,000 sūtras or rules. This work is not merely a descriptive grammar; it is a meticulously structured system that has been compared to the syntax of a modern computer programming language. *Pāṇini*'s genius lay in his ability to codify the entire language into a set of logical and interlocking rules that can be applied algorithmically. The *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is so precise and self-contained that it could, in theory, be used to generate every grammatically correct sentence in the language, a feat that has only been achieved for a handful of other languages in the age of computers.

- ◆ Panini's grammatical genius

Pāṇini's work is significant for computational linguistics because it demonstrates that a natural language can be represented in a formal, rule-based system. His grammar is not simply a list of exceptions and irregular forms, but a compact and elegant set of generative rules. For example, his rules for sandhi (phonetic fusion) are so precise that a machine can be programmed to apply them without ambiguity. Similarly, his system for generating verb conjugations and noun declensions from a limited set of roots and suffixes is a perfect example of a rule-based algorithm. This is why some scholars argue that *Pāṇini* was, in essence, an early pioneer of what we now call Natural Language Processing (NLP). The structure of his grammar, which is logical and formulaic, is a key reason why Sanskrit is considered a suitable language for computer programming and for developing artificial intelligence programmes.

- ◆ Rule-based NLP foundation



- ♦ Panini's computational influence

The influence of *Pāṇini*'s work extends far beyond Sanskrit studies. The formal, generative nature of his grammar influenced linguists like Noam Chomsky, who, in the 20th century, developed his theories of generative grammar, a cornerstone of modern theoretical linguistics. Moreover, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* has been studied by computer scientists who see in its structure a model for creating efficient and unambiguous computational languages. Sanskrit, as codified by *Pāṇini*, has a “logical grammar” that is highly appropriate for algorithms. The structure of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* itself, with its short rules and metarules, is a testament to the power of abstraction and logical representation—concepts that are fundamental to computer science. The work's ability to reduce a language to its essence is a form of abstraction that is highly valued in programming. This is why Sanskrit is considered an ideal candidate for developing computer programmes, a point highlighted by various scholars, including those at NASA.

4.1.4 Current State of Sanskrit Machine Translation

- ♦ Sanskrit MT challenges

The field of Sanskrit machine translation (MT) is a dynamic and evolving area of research that sits at the intersection of traditional linguistics and modern computational science. While Sanskrit's ancient grammatical structure, as codified by *Pāṇini*, makes it a theoretically ideal candidate for rule-based processing, the reality of creating effective MT systems presents several significant challenges. The current landscape is a mix of traditional and modern approaches, with researchers attempting to leverage the strengths of each.

- ♦ Corpus scarcity challenge

One of the most persistent challenges in Sanskrit MT is the scarcity of high-quality, large-scale parallel corpora. A parallel corpus is a collection of texts in one language (Sanskrit) and their human-translated equivalents in another language (e.g., English, Hindi). These corpora are the lifeblood of modern statistical and neural machine translation systems, which learn translation patterns from vast amounts of data. The lack of such resources is a major hurdle. Without a substantial corpus, it is extremely difficult to train a neural network to achieve a high degree of accuracy and fluency. The historical focus on the preservation and study of individual texts rather than large-scale, multilingual documentation has contributed to this data scarcity.

- ♦ Early Sanskrit MT systems

Despite this, several projects and systems have emerged, each with its own approach. Early efforts, such as the *Anusaaraka* system developed at IIT-Hyderabad, focused on a transfer-based approach, which aims to translate the meaning of a sentence by building an intermediate representation. This system, like many other early projects, demonstrated the feasibility of using computational methods for Sanskrit but also highlighted the immense difficulty of capturing the



Simple Example: English to Sanskrit NMT

Input English Sentence (Source):

The students read a book.

How the NMT System Translates It:

1. Encoding (Understanding the Context): The NMT system first converts the entire English sentence into a single, compact vector (a list of numbers), often called the “thought vector.” It doesn’t translate word by word; it captures the whole meaning and grammatical relationship of the sentence: who is doing what to whom.
 - ♦ It recognises that “students” is plural, the subject, and the action “read” is in the past tense, directed at the object “book.”
 - ♦ Analogy: The system reads the English sentence and creates a single mental concept of the event.
2. Attention Mechanism (Focusing on Key Parts): As the NMT system begins to generate the Sanskrit output, it doesn’t just rely on the overall “thought vector.” At each step, the Attention Mechanism automatically highlights the most relevant English word(s) to guide the current Sanskrit word selection.
 - ♦ When translating the Sanskrit equivalent for “read” (e.g., *a-paṭh-an*), the system pays special attention to the English word “students” to ensure the verb ending matches the plural subject, a key feature of Sanskrit grammar.
3. Decoding (Generating the Output): The system then generates the target Sanskrit sentence, predicting one word after the next, based on the thought vector and the attention weights. Due to Sanskrit’s flexible word order (influenced by case endings, or vibhakti), the system finds the most natural arrangement:

Step	Predicted Sanskrit Word	Focus (English Word with High Attention)
1	छात्राः (<i>Chātrāḥ</i> - students, Nom. Plural)	The students
2	पुस्तकम् (<i>Pustakam</i> - book, Acc. Singular)	a book
3	अपठन् (<i>Apāṭhan</i> - read, Past Tense Plural)	read

Output Sanskrit Sentence (Target):

छात्राः पुस्तकम् अपठन् (*Chātrāḥ pustakam apāṭhan*)

Key Takeaway:

The system’s power lies in its ability to handle complex grammatical features like Sanskrit’s case endings (like the -am in *pustakam*) and verb conjugation (like the -an in *apāṭhan*) simultaneously and coherently, because it processes the meaning of the entire sequence rather than following rigid, predefined vocabulary and grammar tables.



nuances of the language. More recent research, as described in one of the provided documents, explores a rule-based dictionary approach for English to Sanskrit translation. These systems, while effective for well-structured sentences, can struggle with the complexities of sandhi and the myriad of possible word forms.

- ◆ Nascent Sanskrit NMT

The application of neural machine translation (NMT) to Sanskrit is still in its nascent stages. While NMT has revolutionised translation for resource-rich languages like English and Spanish, its success hinges on the availability of large datasets. Researchers are now exploring various strategies to overcome this, including using transfer learning (where a model trained on a similar language is adapted for Sanskrit) and generating synthetic data. Projects are underway to build comprehensive morphological analysers and parsers, which are critical for pre-processing Sanskrit text before it can be fed into a neural network. These tools are designed to handle the complexities of sandhi and compounds, effectively turning a difficult task for a machine into a more manageable one.

- ◆ Hybrid MT approach

The future of Sanskrit MT lies in a hybrid approach that combines the best of both worlds. Rule-based systems, with their ability to handle the systematic grammar of *Pāṇini*, can be used to pre-process the text, segmenting words and identifying their grammatical roles. The output of this stage can then be used to train a neural network, which can handle the more subtle aspects of language, such as context and fluency. This synergistic approach promises to unlock the full potential of machine translation for Sanskrit, allowing for the preservation and wider dissemination of its vast literary and scientific heritage.

- ◆ Panini's linguistic legacy

4.1.5 The Role of Sanskrit in the History of Linguistics

The influence of Sanskrit on the history of linguistics is profound and multifaceted, primarily due to the groundbreaking work of the ancient grammarian *Pāṇini*. His text, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, written around the 5th to 6th century BCE, is not merely a descriptive grammar but a comprehensive and formalised system that has been described as a precursor to modern computational linguistics. *Pāṇini*'s genius lay in his ability to codify the entire language into a set of nearly 4,000 sūtras (aphoristic rules) that are logical, algorithmic, and self-contained. This structured approach, which is entirely rule-bound, stands in stark contrast to the more descriptive grammars of other ancient languages. The *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is so precise that a computer could theoretically apply its rules to generate every single grammatically correct sentence in the language.

Pāṇini's work is considered a cornerstone of formal linguistics and has had a lasting impact. The formal, generative nature of his gram-



- ◆ Foundation for generative grammar

mar, which uses a system of rules to generate linguistic structures, was a major influence on the 20th-century linguist Noam Chomsky, who developed his theory of generative grammar. Chomsky's work is regarded as a cornerstone of modern theoretical linguistics, and the intellectual debt to *Pāṇini*'s formal approach is clear. The *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, with its short, concise rules and metarules, is a testament to the power of abstraction and logical representation. These are concepts that are fundamental to modern computer science and artificial intelligence. The ability of *Pāṇini*'s grammar to "reduce the object to its essence" makes it highly suitable for computer programming.

- ◆ Sanskrit as formal language

The idea that Sanskrit, as codified by *Pāṇini*, is a "formal language" has gained traction in recent decades. A formal language is a set of strings of symbols generated according to a set of rules, much like the rules of a programming language. *Pāṇini*'s grammar, with its precise rules for sandhi, morphology, and syntax, fits this definition remarkably well. The "logical grammar" of Sanskrit is highly suitable for an algorithm. This inherent structure has led scholars to explore the use of Sanskrit not just as a natural language to be processed by a computer but as a potential programming language in its own right. The clarity and logic of its rules make it an ideal candidate for a computer to understand and execute.

- ◆ Computational rules example

A practical example of *Pāṇini*'s computational genius can be seen in his rules for sandhi. While this poses a major challenge for machine translation, *Pāṇini*'s rules are so precise that they can be directly implemented in a computer program to split a fused word back into its original components. Similarly, his system for deriving verbal forms from a root and a series of suffixes is a perfect example of a generative algorithm that a computer can easily follow. This makes *Pāṇini*'s *Aṣṭādhyāyī* a critical foundation for any rule-based or hybrid machine translation system for Sanskrit. It provides a pre-existing blueprint for systematically and logically handling the complexities of the language, which is a significant advantage over languages that lack such formalised grammar. Table: A comprehensive chart showing the rules for Sanskrit vowel and consonant Sandhi.

4.1.6 Challenges and Opportunities in Sanskrit Machine Translation

- ◆ Sanskrit MT challenges

The field of Sanskrit machine translation (MT), while theoretically promising due to the language's logical and rule-based grammar, faces several significant challenges that have hindered its development. At the same time, these challenges present unique opportunities for research and innovation.



Vowel Sandhi

Final Vowels							Initial Vowels	Sandhi Rules
Simple Vowels			Complex Vowels					
a/ā	ī	ū	ṛ	e	o	ai	au	
ā	ya	va	ra	e'	o'	āa	āva	a
ā	yā	vā	rā	aā		āā	āvā	ā
e	ī	vī	rī	aī		āī	āvī	ī
o	yū	vū	rū	aū		āū	āvū	ū
ar	yṛ	vṛ	ṛ	aṛ		āṛ	āvṛ	ṛ
ai	ye	ve	re	ae		āe	āve	e
	yai	vai	rai	ai		āai	āvai	ai
au	yo	vo	ro	ao		āo	āvo	o
	yau	vau	rau	au		āau	āvau	au

- homorganic simple vowels → long
- a/ā + other simple vowel → guṇa of latter
- a/ā + guṇa / vṛddhi → vṛddhi of latter
- non-a/ā simple vowel → its semivowel // dissimilar vowel

- e / o absorb following a
- e / o → a // any non-a vowel
- ai → ā // any vowel
- au → āv // any vowel

Consonant Sandhi

Permitted Final Letters										Initial Letters	Sandhi Rules	
k	ṭ	p	ñ	m	t	n	ḥ	āḥ	aḥ			
k	ṭ	p	ñ	m	t	n	ḥ	āḥ	aḥ	k / kh	Unvoiced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> m → ṃ // any consonant t → homorganic stop // stop of sibilant varga / ś ś → ch after t or n n → ṃ + homorganic sibilant // -V s.s.v. n → homorganic nasal // +V s.s.v. or ś ḥ → homorganic sibilant // -V s.s.v.
					c	ṃś	ś	ās	aś	c / ch		
					ṭ	ṃṣ	ṣ	ās	aṣ	ṭ / ṭh		
					t	ṃs	s	ās	as	t / th		
					t	n				p / ph		
					c(ch)	ñ(ch)	ḥ	āḥ	aḥ	ś		
t	n				ṣ / s							
g	ḍ	b	ñ	ṃ	d	n				g / gh	Voiced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -V stop → +V // +V stop → own nasal // any nasal ḥ → homorganic stop after non-nasal stop nasal doubled after short vowel // any vowel m → ṃ // any consonant t → homorganic stop // stop of sibilant varga / ś t → l // l n → homorganic nasal // +V s.s.v. or ś n → ṃl // l ḥ (after any vowel but a/ā) → r // +V ḥ (→ r) → ø // r, lengthens preceding short vowel āḥ → ā // +V aḥ → o // +V; following 'a' is elided, signaled by s → a // any vowel but 'a'
					[c→]j	ñ			j / jh			
					[ṭ→]ḍ	ṇ			ḍ / ḍh			
					d	r			d / dh			
					d				b / bh			
					n	n			n / m			
d				y / v								
ñ	ṇ	m			r				l			
g	ḍ	b			l	ṃl			h			
g(gh)	ḍ(dh)	b(bh)			d(dh)	n	r		o / a*	vowels		
g	ḍ	b	ñ/ññ*	m	d	n/nn*			o / a*	vowels		
k	ṭ	p	ñ		t	n	ḥ	āḥ	aḥ	zero		

Table: A comprehensive chart showing the rules for Sanskrit vowel and consonant Sandhi.

The Problem of Scarcity

The most critical challenge is the profound lack of large-scale parallel corpora. A parallel corpus is a dataset of texts in one language (Sanskrit) and their human-translated equivalents in a target language (e.g., English, Hindi). These datasets form the foundation of modern statistical and neural machine translation (NMT) systems,



- ◆ Parallel corpus scarcity

which learn translation patterns by analysing massive amounts of paired sentences. Unlike languages such as English or French, which have billions of words in parallel corpora, Sanskrit has a very limited number of professionally translated and digitised texts. This data scarcity makes it exceptionally difficult to train a high-performing NMT model. The absence of a large corpus also means that researchers must rely on smaller, often manually curated datasets, which can lead to models that overfit to specific text types and fail to generalise to new material. This is a major hurdle that must be overcome for the field to advance.

Morphological Analysis and Generation

Sanskrit's rich and complex morphology is both a blessing and a curse for machine translation. On one hand, the systematic nature of its word formation is a perfect fit for rule-based systems. On the other hand, the sheer number of possible inflected forms for a single word presents a major computational challenge. A system must be able to accurately parse a Sanskrit word to determine its root, prefixes, and suffixes to understand its grammatical function and meaning. For example, a single verb root can generate hundreds of forms depending on its tense, mood, voice, and person. The process is further complicated by sandhi (phonetic fusion) and compounds (*samāsa*), which require sophisticated algorithms to correctly segment the text into its constituent words. Without a robust morphological analyser and generator, any MT system would fail to accurately understand and produce Sanskrit text. Researchers are actively working on creating these tools, often using a combination of traditional rule-based methods and modern machine learning techniques.

- ◆ Morphological complexity challenge

Potential Applications and the Path Forward

Despite these challenges, the development of effective Sanskrit MT systems holds immense potential. One of the most important applications is the preservation and dissemination of ancient knowledge. A vast body of Sanskrit literature, including philosophical, scientific, mathematical, and medical texts, remains untranslated or is only accessible to a limited number of scholars. Machine translation could unlock this knowledge for a global audience, making it a powerful tool for education and research.

- ◆ Preservation through MT

Furthermore, the logical and unambiguous structure of Sanskrit grammar, as codified by *Pāṇini*, makes it an ideal language for developing tools for other Indian languages. Since many Indian languages share roots and grammatical structures with Sanskrit, an MT system developed for Sanskrit could be adapted for other languages, creating a ripple effect of progress.

- ◆ Sanskrit as template



The path forward for Sanskrit MT lies in a hybrid approach. This would involve combining the strengths of different methods:

1. **Rule-Based Pre-processing:** Using rule-based systems to handle the systematic aspects of Sanskrit grammar, such as sandhi splitting, morphological analysis, and compound parsing.
2. **Neural Translation:** Feeding the processed and “cleaned” text into a modern NMT system, which can then leverage its ability to learn complex patterns and produce fluent, contextually appropriate translations.
3. **Corpus Creation:** A concerted global effort to digitise and annotate existing Sanskrit texts and their translations is essential. Crowdsourcing projects and academic collaborations could help build the large-scale parallel corpora needed to train robust NMT models.

◆ Hybrid approach strategy

This combined approach, supported by a growing community of linguists, computer scientists, and scholars, holds the key to overcoming the current challenges and realising the full potential of Sanskrit machine translation.

Sanskrit as a Programming Language and for Artificial Intelligence

◆ Sanskrit for computing

The unique and logical structure of Sanskrit has led many scholars to argue that it is not only a natural language but also a highly suitable language for computer programming and artificial intelligence (AI). The grammar of Sanskrit is described as “rule-bound, formula-bound, and logical,” making it an ideal fit for an algorithm. This is primarily due to the work of the ancient grammarian *Pāṇini*, who is considered the creator of Sanskrit. *Pāṇini*’s treatise, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, laid out the syntax and structure of the language in a precise and compact manner, which can be correlated with the syntax of modern programming languages.

◆ Abstraction and conciseness

A key reason for Sanskrit’s suitability is its strong means of abstraction. In programming, abstraction is the process of reducing an object to its essence, exposing only the necessary characteristics. The ability to convey information in a concise manner is highly valued in computer programming. The inherent perfection of Sanskrit’s structure, morphology, and semantics, which have remained unchanged for thousands of years, is also cited as a reason for its suitability for AI programs.

Machine Translation Approaches

The field of machine translation has evolved significantly over the last six decades, with researchers employing various techniques to bridge language barriers. The different approaches can be visualised



in the following diagram:

♦ Evolution of MT approaches

- **Direct Translation:** The simplest approach, where the system translates words directly from the source to the target language with minimal analysis.
- **Rule-Based Translation:** This approach uses a set of linguistic rules, manually crafted by human experts, to analyse the source language and generate a translation in the target language. This method is particularly suitable for languages with well-documented and formal grammars, like Sanskrit.
- **Corpus-Based Translation:** This method learns translation patterns from large collections of parallel texts. It includes two main sub-types:
 - ♦ **Example-Based Translation:** The system translates by analogy, finding the closest match in a bilingual corpus and using its translation as a template.
 - ♦ **Statistical Machine Translation (SMT):** The system learns the probability of a word or phrase in one language being a translation of a word or phrase in another, based on their frequency in a parallel corpus.
- **Knowledge-Based Translation:** This is a more complex approach that aims to translate the meaning of a sentence by first creating an intermediate, language-independent representation of the source text, which is then used to generate a translation in the target language.

♦ Sanskrit-Malayalam translation

Sanskrit to Malayalam Translation: A Historical Perspective

The tradition of translation from Sanskrit into Malayalam, a language with historical and linguistic ties to Sanskrit, is rich and well-documented. Before the advent of modern publishing, a significant number of Sanskrit works were translated by poets and scholars, though many of these works have since been lost. The advent of printing technology and the rise of a modern period in the late 19th and early 20th centuries revitalised this tradition.

The following table illustrates the number of translations of well-known Sanskrit texts into Malayalam, highlighting the popularity of this literary exchange.



Sanskrit Work	Number of Translations
Abhijñānaśākuntalam (Kalidasa)	20
Raghuvamsa (Kalidasa)	17
Meghadūta (Kalidasa)	17
Kumārasambhava (Kalidasa)	8
Pañcatantra (Vishnusharma)	5
Bhagavadgītā	Numerous

- ◆ Sanskrit-Malayalam translations

Beyond poetry and drama, important scholarly works were also translated. A notable example is the *Bhāṣākauṭalīya*, a Malayalam translation of Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* from the 12th-13th century, which is considered a key example of early Malayalam prose. This historical context demonstrates a long-standing need and tradition of translation, which modern machine translation systems aim to continue and accelerate.

Summarised Overview

This unit introduces the concept of Rule-Based Machine Translation (RBMT) and its specific application to Sanskrit. RBMT is a translation paradigm that relies on hand-crafted linguistic rules, dictionaries, and grammatical structures to translate text from a source language to a target language. The unit highlights how this approach is particularly well-suited for Sanskrit due to its highly structured and logical grammar, which was formalised in the ancient text, *Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī*. This formal grammar, which includes rules for complex linguistic phenomena like sandhi and compounds, provides a perfect blueprint for a rule-based system, allowing a machine to systematically deconstruct and reconstruct sentences based on a set of explicit instructions rather than statistical probabilities.

The unit also provides a comparative analysis, differentiating RBMT from other modern approaches. Unlike Corpus-Based Machine Translation (CBMT), which includes Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) and Neural Machine Translation (NMT), RBMT does not require a large, parallel corpus of translated texts. This makes it a highly relevant and promising approach for Sanskrit, a language that is considered "low-resource" in the digital age due to the scarcity of such data. By leveraging the inherent logic and structure of Sanskrit itself, RBMT offers a viable path to creating accurate and effective machine translation systems that can unlock the vast body of knowledge contained within this ancient language.



Self-Assessment Questions

1. What is the main principle of Rule-Based Machine Translation?
2. How is *Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī* relevant to computational linguistics?
3. Name two key linguistic challenges in Sanskrit that RBMT is well-suited to handle?
4. What is the main difference in data requirements between RBMT and SMT?
5. Why is the interlingua approach considered a type of Knowledge-Based MT?
6. Explain how a rule-based system would handle a sentence with sandhi.
7. What is the primary advantage of RBMT for low-resource languages like Sanskrit?
8. How does the concept of a “knowledge base” apply to a KBMT system?
9. Describe the role of the “transfer” stage in an interlingua-based system.
10. What is a “hybrid system” and why is it considered the future of Sanskrit MT?

Assignment

1. Design a simple RBMT system for translating English sentences with a specific verb tense to Sanskrit.
2. Research and present on the concept of sandhi-splitting algorithms.
3. Write a short paper analysing why SMT is not a complete solution for Sanskrit.
4. Compare the complexity of a KBMT system to an RBMT system.
5. Create a diagram illustrating the process of a hybrid MT system for Sanskrit.
6. Investigate and write a report on the use of Sanskrit in modern programming languages.

Suggested Reading

1. Briggs, Rick. “Knowledge Representation in Sanskrit and Artificial Intelligence.” *AI Magazine*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1985.
2. Jakobson, Roman. “On the Linguistic Aspects of Translation.” *On Translation*, edited by Reuben A. Brower, Harvard University Press, 1959, pp. 232–39.
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4. *Pāṇini. Aṣṭādhyāyī.*
5. Mishra, Sampadananda. “*Pāṇini’s Aṣṭādhyāyī: A 2500-Year-Old Blueprint for Computational Linguistics.*” *Medium*, 2025.

Reference

1. Purohit, Er. Kapila, and Dr. Kedar Dutt Purohit. “SANSKRIT LANGUAGE AS IN PROGRAMMING (NLP).” *International Journal for Research Trends and Innovation*, vol. 10, no. 4, Apr. 2025.
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3. Shukla, Pragya, and Akanksha Shukla. “English Speech to Sanskrit Speech (ESSS) using Rule-Based Translation.” *International Journal of Computer Applications*, vol. 92, no. 10, Apr. 2014.
4. Raulji, Jaideepsinh K., and Jatinderkumar R. Saini. “Sanskrit Machine Translation Systems: A Comparative Analysis.” *International Journal of Computer Applications*, vol. 136, no. 1, Feb. 2016.
5. Rathod, Sarita G. “Machine Translation of Natural Language using Different Approaches: ETSTS (English to Sanskrit Translator and Synthesizer).” *International Journal of Computer Applications*, vol. 102, no. 15, Sep. 2014.
6. Briggs, Rick. “Knowledge Representation in Sanskrit and Artificial Intelligence.” *AI Magazine*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1985.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU





Machine Translation Methodologies (Direct, Rule-Based, Corpus-Based, and Knowledge-Based)

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ❖ Explain the role of a parallel corpus in corpus-based machine translation.
- ❖ Differentiate between Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) and Neural Machine Translation (NMT).
- ❖ Discuss the challenges of applying corpus-based approaches to Sanskrit.
- ❖ Analyse the concept of a hybrid MT system and its potential for Sanskrit.

Background

Imagine four distinct paths to the same destination: translation. The first is a simple, word-for-word journey, like using a basic phrasebook. This is the direct approach, a straightforward but often clumsy method that works for simple phrases but quickly falls apart when faced with the complexities of human language. It is the linguistic equivalent of painting by numbers, producing a recognisable but lifeless result.

The second path is a meticulously planned expedition, guided by an intricate map of rules and grammar. This is the Rule-Based approach, where a system follows a set of explicit instructions to analyse a sentence's structure and then generate its translation. For a language like Sanskrit, with its famously logical and precise grammar, this is an elegant and powerful route. It is the path of a master chess player, with every move calculated and every rule understood.

The third path is not a single road but a vast, interconnected web of past journeys. This is the Corpus-Based approach, which includes both statistical and neural methods. Here, the system learns to navigate the landscape of language by studying millions of previously translated sentences. It doesn't rely on pre-programmed rules but rather on patterns and probabilities it has inferred from the data. It is a journey guided not by a map but by a collective memory of every traveller who has gone before.

Finally, there is the most ambitious journey of all: one that seeks to understand the very essence of the destination before starting the trip. This is the Knowledge-Based approach, also known as the interlingua method. It involves first extracting the universal, language-independent meaning of a text and then generating the translation from that abstract repre-



sentation. It is the linguistic equivalent of a mind-reader, grasping the core thought before expressing it in a new form. This is a theoretically perfect but incredibly difficult journey, requiring a universal understanding that has, to date, remained elusive.

Keywords

Corpus-Based Machine Translation (CBMT), Parallel Corpus, Statistical Machine Translation (SMT), Neural Machine Translation (NMT), Encoder-Decoder Architecture, Attention Mechanism, Hybrid System

Discussion

4.2.1 The Fundamental Approaches to Machine Translation

Machine Translation (MT) is a fascinating and complex field that seeks to automate the process of translating from one human language to another. The core challenge is not simply replacing words but capturing the meaning, nuance, and grammatical structure of the source language and accurately recreating them in the target language. Over the decades, researchers have developed various fundamental approaches to tackle this problem, each with its own methodology, strengths, and weaknesses. These approaches can be broadly categorised into three main paradigms: direct translation, rule-based translation, and corpus-based translation. A fourth, more conceptual approach is knowledge-based translation, which attempts to move beyond a linguistic framework to a semantic one. It is important for a student of Sanskrit to understand these different models, as the choice of approach can dramatically affect the quality and feasibility of a Sanskrit MT system.

- ◆ Fundamental MT approaches

- ◆ Direct translation method

The simplest and earliest approach is Direct Translation. As the name suggests, this method involves a straightforward word-for-word translation. A system using this approach would utilise a simple dictionary to find the corresponding word in the target language and then substitute it directly. For example, to translate the English sentence “The cat chased the mouse,” a direct translation system would look up each word and, if a corresponding word exists in the target language, replace it. It would not perform any analysis of the sentence’s grammatical structure, nor would it consider the context of the words.



The Failure of Direct Translation (English to Sanskrit)

English Sentence:

“The cat chased the mouse.”

Direct Word Lookup

English Word	Sanskrit Equivalent (Example Root/Noun)	Form Used	Role in Sanskrit
The	(No equivalent)	(Ignored)	(Ignored)
cat	मार्जार (Mārjāra)	मार्जार (N/A Case)	Base noun
chased	अनुधाव् (anudhāv)	अनुधावित (Past Participle)	Base verb form
the	(No equivalent)	(Ignored)	(Ignored)
mouse	मूषक (Mūṣaka)	मूषक (N/A Case)	Base noun

The Resulting “Sentence” (In Literal Word Order):

मार्जार अनुधावित मूषक

The Problems Explained

1. Missing Grammar (Case Endings/Vibhakti): The biggest failure is the absence of case endings (Vibhakti). Sanskrit is a highly inflected language, meaning word order is flexible, but the grammatical function (subject, object, etc.) is marked by a suffix.
 - The “cat” (subject) needs the Nominative case (मार्जारः).
 - The “mouse” (object) needs the Accusative case (मूषकम्).
 - The direct translation treats them as raw dictionary entries.
2. Incorrect Verb Form and Tense: The verb “chased” is an action. Sanskrit requires the finite verb to agree with the subject’s person and number, and to be conjugated for tense (e.g., the simple past tense *Lañ*). The direct lookup returns a non-finite form like a simple past participle, which cannot stand alone as the main verb.
 - The correct verb would be: अनुधावत् (anuadhāvat - ‘chased’, 3rd person singular past).
3. Missing “The”: English articles (“the,” “a”) do not exist in Sanskrit, so the system correctly drops them, but this is a minor detail compared to the grammatical collapse.



The Actual Correct Sanskrit Sentence:

मार्जारः मूषकम् अनुधावत् ।

- ◆ Direct translation failure

This method is incredibly easy to implement but is also highly inaccurate and is not used for any serious MT applications today. It fails spectacularly when dealing with languages that have different sentence structures, word orders, or grammatical complexities, such as the highly inflected nature of Sanskrit. A direct translation of a simple Sanskrit phrase would almost certainly be unintelligible due to the intricate morphology of the language.

- ◆ Rule-based MT approach

Following the initial, simplistic direct translation attempts, the field moved towards more sophisticated methods. This led to the development of Rule-Based Machine Translation (RBMT). This approach, which was dominant for several decades, operates on a set of linguistic rules meticulously crafted by human experts. The system uses these rules to perform a detailed analysis of the source language, including its morphology (how words are formed), syntax (how words are arranged in a sentence), and semantics (the meaning of words). Once this analysis is complete, the system transfers the information to the target language and then generates the translated sentence according to the target language's grammatical rules. The success of an RBMT system is entirely dependent on the quality and completeness of its rule set. While this approach can produce highly accurate and consistent translations for specific domains or types of text, it is extremely time-consuming and expensive to develop. Building the comprehensive linguistic rules and dictionaries required for a large-scale system is a monumental task. The approach is particularly suited to languages with a well-documented and consistent grammar, such as Sanskrit, as it can directly leverage the detailed rules of *Pāṇini* to handle the complexities of the language.

- ◆ Corpus-based MT approach

The advent of powerful computers and the availability of large text collections in the 1980s and 1990s led to a paradigm shift from rule-based to Corpus-Based Machine Translation. This approach does away with the need for manually creating complex linguistic rules. Instead, it learns translation patterns and rules directly from a massive collection of parallel texts (a corpus), where each sentence in the source language is paired with its human-translated equivalent in the target language. The most prominent example of this is Statistical Machine Translation (SMT), which uses probabilistic models to determine the most likely translation. SMT systems learn the probability that a word or phrase in one language corresponds to a word or phrase in another language by counting their occurrences in the corpus. This data-driven approach is far more scalable than RBMT and can handle a much wider range of text types. However,



its effectiveness is entirely dependent on the size and quality of the parallel corpus. For a language like Sanskrit, where such corpora are scarce, this presents a significant hurdle. This approach, while a major leap forward, was eventually surpassed by the advent of deep learning and neural networks, which form the basis of the next major paradigm.

4.2.2 Rule-Based Machine Translation (RBMT)

The limitations of early, simplistic direct translation methods led to a major shift in the field of machine translation with the rise of the Rule-Based Machine Translation (RBMT) paradigm. RBMT represents a more sophisticated and traditional approach to automated translation, which was the dominant methodology for decades until the advent of statistical and neural methods. At its core, RBMT is a knowledge-intensive approach that relies on a comprehensive set of linguistic rules meticulously crafted by human experts. These systems are designed to mimic the process of human translation by performing a deep analysis of the source language before generating a translation in the target language. This method is particularly well-suited for languages with well-documented, formal, and consistent grammars, which is a key reason for its relevance to Sanskrit.

- ◆ Rule-based MT evolution

Rule-Based Machine Translation System

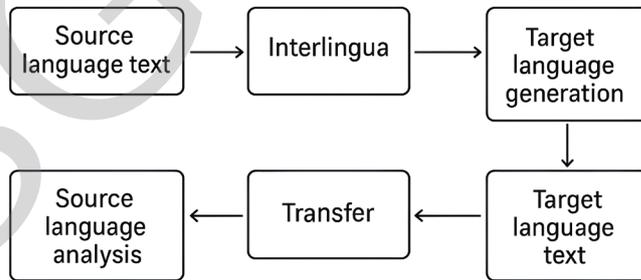


Fig: Rule-Based Machine Translation System

The process of RBMT can be broken down into three distinct stages, which can be visualised as a pipeline:

1. **Analysis:** The system first analyses the source sentence to understand its linguistic structure. This is the most critical and complex part of the process. It involves:
 - **Morphological Analysis:** Identifying the root words, prefixes, and suffixes to determine the grammatical properties of each word (e.g., tense, case, gender, number). For a Sanskrit sentence, this step would involve splitting sandhi and pars-

◆ RBMT process stages

ing complex compounds (*samāsa*) to identify the constituent words and their original forms.

- **Syntactic Analysis (Parsing):** Constructing a syntactic tree of the sentence to understand the relationships between the words. This identifies the subject, object, verb, and other grammatical components. For instance, in the English sentence “The quick fox jumps over the lazy dog,” the parser would identify “fox” as the subject and “jumps” as the verb.
- **Semantic Analysis (Lexical Transfer):** Resolving ambiguity and determining the correct meaning of words in context. The system uses a bilingual dictionary and a set of rules to select the appropriate translation for each word or phrase.

2. **Transfer:** Once the source sentence has been fully analysed and its linguistic structure is represented in an intermediate format, the system transfers this structure to the target language. This is not a simple word substitution; it involves transforming the syntactic and semantic structure to conform to the rules of the target language. For example, if the source language is Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) and the target language is Subject-Verb-Object (SVO), the system would reorder the elements of the sentence accordingly.
3. **Generation:** In the final stage, the system generates a well-formed sentence in the target language. This involves applying the morphological and syntactic rules of the target language to the transferred structure. The system selects the correct inflections, articles, and word order to produce a grammatically correct and fluent translation.

4.2.2.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of RBMT

Strengths:

- **Linguistic Accuracy:** RBMT systems, when properly developed, can produce highly accurate and grammatically correct translations. Their reliance on explicit linguistic rules ensures consistency and predictability.
- **Suitability for Formal Languages:** This approach is particularly effective for languages with well-defined and logical grammars. Sanskrit, with its meticulous and rule-bound grammar codified by *Pāṇini*, is an ideal candidate for RBMT. The system can be directly programmed with *Pāṇinian* rules for morphology, sandhi, and syntax, which significantly reduces the ambiguity that plagues other translation approaches.



Input English Sentence:

“The sage sees the mountain.”

1. Analysis Stage (Source: English)

The system first reads the English sentence to determine the meaning and grammatical structure.

a. Syntactic and Semantic Analysis

The system identifies the core elements and their function:

- Subject (Doer): “The sage” → Sage (Sanskrit: मुनि - muni)
- Verb (Action): “sees” → To see (Present Tense) (Sanskrit: दृश् - *drś* or पश्य - *paśya*)
- Object (Receiver of action): “the mountain” → Mountain (Sanskrit: गिरि - giri)

2. Transfer Stage (Restructuring)

The system applies the rules of Sanskrit grammar to the identified roles. This step involves selecting the correct case endings (Vibhakti) and conjugating the verb.

English Role	Sanskrit Case Required	Sanskrit Stem + Case Rule
Sage (Subject)	Nominative (प्रथमा)	मुनि + Nom. Sg. → मुनिः (muniḥ)
Mountain (Object)	Accusative (द्वितीया)	गिरि + Acc. Sg. → गिरिम् (girim)
Sees (Verb)	Present Tense, 3rd Person Sg.	पश्य + Present Tense 3rd Sg. → पश्यति (paśyati)

3. Generation Stage (Target: Sanskrit)

The final step arranges the correctly inflected words into the conventional Sanskrit Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) word order to create a fluent and grammatically correct output.

Final Sanskrit Sentence:

मुनिः गिरिम् पश्यति ।

(Muniḥ girim paśyati.)

(Literal Meaning): The sage (Nom.) → the mountain (Acc.) → sees (Pres. Tense).

This example highlights that RBMT must execute three separate tasks (Analysis, Transfer, Generation) to produce a valid translation in a highly inflected language like Sanskrit.



◆ RBMT strengths

- **Predictability and Transparency:** Unlike modern “black box” neural network models, the process in an RBMT system is transparent. When an error occurs, a human can easily trace the problem back to a specific rule, making debugging and maintenance more straightforward.
- **Handling of Low-Resource Languages:** For languages like Sanskrit, which lack large parallel corpora, RBMT is a viable alternative to data-hungry statistical and neural models. It can be developed with a smaller text base, provided there is sufficient linguistic expertise.

Weaknesses:

◆ RBMT weaknesses

- **High Development Cost:** The primary disadvantage of RBMT is the immense amount of time and resources required to build a comprehensive rule set. Human linguists and programmers must spend years meticulously creating and refining rules to cover all grammatical phenomena and exceptions.
- **Inability to Handle Ambiguity:** While good for formal grammar, RBMT can struggle with genuine ambiguity and the nuances of human language. A word that has multiple meanings in different contexts can be difficult to handle without a complex and often incomplete set of semantic rules.
- **Limited Coverage:** It is practically impossible to create rules for every possible sentence structure and idiom in a language. This means that RBMT systems often fail when encountering sentences that fall outside of their pre-defined rules, leading to a “brittle” system that breaks down easily.
- **Difficulty with Idioms and Metaphors:** Idiomatic expressions and metaphors cannot be translated literally, and a rule-based system requires a specific rule for each one, which is an impractical and endless task.

4.2.2.2 Illustrative Examples of RBMT for Sanskrit

To understand how an RBMT system would process a Sanskrit sentence, let’s consider more detailed examples, including the complexities of sandhi and compounds.

Example 1: A Simple Sentence

Consider the Sanskrit sentence: “*rāmaḥ paṭhati*” (Rama reads).

- Analysis:
 - ◆ Input: “*rāmaḥ paṭhati*”



◆ RBMT example:
simple sentence

- ◆ Morphological Analysis: The system first identifies the two words. It recognises that *rāmaḥ* is the nominative singular form of the noun *rāma*, and *paṭhati* is the third-person singular present tense form of the verbal root *paṭh* (to read).
- ◆ Syntactic Analysis: The system applies its rules to determine the grammatical roles. It knows that the nominative case (-aḥ ending) marks the subject, so it correctly identifies *rāmaḥ* as the subject and *paṭhati* as the verb. A dependency tree is created to represent this relationship.
- Transfer:
 - ◆ The system now holds a linguistic representation of the sentence. It notes that the structure is SOV (Subject-Verb) and that the English equivalent should be SVO (Subject-Verb). It also notes the grammatical attributes: a proper noun subject and a verb in the third-person singular, present tense.
- Generation:
 - ◆ The system applies English generation rules. It translates the subject *rāma* as “Rama.” It translates the verb root *paṭh* as “read” and applies the third-person singular present tense rule, adding an ‘s’ to produce “reads.” The final output is “Rama reads.”

Example 2: Handling Sandhi

Now, let’s look at a sentence with sandhi: “*balam asti*,” which combines to form “*balamasti*.”

The user sees the input: *balamasti*.

- Analysis:
 - ◆ Input: *balamasti*
 - ◆ Sandhi Splitting: The system’s first and most crucial rule-based step is to perform sandhi splitting. It applies its rules to recognise that the *asti* portion of the word is a distinct word (a form of the verb “to be”) and that *balam* is the preceding word. The word is correctly segmented into *balam* + *asti*.
 - ◆ Morphological Analysis: Now that the words are separate, the system can analyse them. It identifies *balam* as a noun in the nominative case (force, strength) and *asti* as the third-person singular present tense of the verb (to be).
 - ◆ Syntactic Analysis: The system determines *balam* is the subject and *asti* is the verb.

◆ RBMT example:
sandhi splitting



- Transfer & Generation:
 - ♦ The system transfers this structure into English. The subject “*balam*” is translated as “strength,” and the verb “*asti*” is translated as “*is*.”
 - ♦ The final English sentence generated is: “Strength is.”

This example demonstrates how a well-developed RBMT system can handle the complexities of Sanskrit by applying specific, pre-programmed rules before proceeding to translation.

Example 3: Handling Compounds (*Samāsa*)

Consider the compound word “*maharṣi*.” It is a combination of “*mahā*” (great) and “*ṛṣi*” (sage).

- Analysis:
 - ♦ Input: *maharṣi*
 - ♦ Compound Parsing: The system uses its rules to identify “*maharṣi*” as a compound and then correctly breaks it down into its constituent parts: “*mahā*” and “*ṛṣi*.” This is a complex rule that depends on a deep understanding of Sanskrit morphology.
 - ♦ Morphological and Semantic Analysis: It then looks up the meanings of the individual words. “*Mahā*” means “great,” and “*ṛṣi*” means “sage.”
- Transfer & Generation:
 - ♦ The system transfers the meaning of the components into English.
 - ♦ The final translation generated is: “great sage.”

♦ RBMT example: compound parsing

These examples highlight the central idea behind RBMT: the success of the system is entirely dependent on the quality and completeness of the linguistic knowledge encoded in its rules. For a language as structured as Sanskrit, this approach is both a natural fit and a powerful tool, provided the resources are available to build the extensive knowledge base required.

4.2.3 Corpus-Based Machine Translation: Statistical and Neural Approaches

The shift from manual rule creation to data-driven approaches marked a new era in machine translation. Corpus-Based Machine Translation (CBMT) represents a paradigm that learns translation patterns directly from large collections of parallel texts. This ap-



- ◆ Corpus-Based Machine Translation (CBMT)

- ◆ Statistical Machine Translation (SMT)

- ◆ Translation probability + fluency

proach bypasses the need for human linguists to manually write every rule, making it more scalable and adaptable to a wide range of text types. The most prominent examples of this approach are Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) and Neural Machine Translation (NMT).

4.2.3.1 Statistical Machine Translation (SMT)

SMT, which was the dominant MT paradigm in the 1990s and 2000s, operates on a simple principle: given a sentence in the source language, the system determines the most probable translation in the target language. The “statistical” part of the name refers to the fact that it uses probability models to make this determination. The core of an SMT system is built from a massive parallel corpus—a collection of texts where each sentence in the source language is paired with its human-translated equivalent in the target language.

An SMT system works by learning two main models from this corpus:

1. Translation Model: This model learns the probability of a word or phrase in the source language being a translation of a word or phrase in the target language. It answers the question: “How likely is it that ‘*grham*’ translates to ‘home’?”
2. Language Model: This model learns the probability of a sequence of words in the target language. It answers the question: “How likely is the phrase ‘goes home’ to appear in a grammatically correct English sentence?”

When a new sentence is given to the system, it uses these two models to find the translation that maximises the combined probability.

Example of SMT for Sanskrit:

Consider the Sanskrit sentence: “*rāmaḥ grham gacchati.*”

An SMT system would not perform a deep grammatical analysis like an RBMT system. Instead, it would use its statistical models to consider different possible translations and score them.

Possible English Translations	Translation Model Score	Language Model Score	Combined Score
Rama home goes.	Low (poor word alignment)	Low (ungrammatical)	Very Low
Rama goes home.	High (good word alignment)	High (grammatical)	Very High
Goes home Rama.	High (good word alignment)	Low (ungrammatical)	Low

The SMT system would choose “Rama goes home” as the best translation because its combined probability score is the highest.



- ◆ Probability guides translation

While SMT was a major step forward, its main weakness for a language like Sanskrit is its heavy reliance on large, high-quality parallel corpora. The scarcity of such resources for Sanskrit has made it a significant challenge to build effective SMT systems.

4.2.3.2 Neural Machine Translation (NMT)

Neural Machine Translation (NMT) represents the current state-of-the-art in the field and has largely replaced SMT. NMT models use large neural networks, particularly deep learning architectures, to translate entire sentences at once. They eliminate the separate translation and language models of SMT, instead learning the entire process in a single, end-to-end model.

The core of an NMT system is an encoder-decoder architecture:

- ◆ Encoder-decoder attention

- ◆ Encoder: The encoder is a neural network that reads the source sentence word by word and converts it into a single, continuous-space vector. This vector is a numerical representation of the sentence's meaning, capturing its syntax and semantics.
- ◆ Decoder: The decoder is another neural network that takes this vector and generates the translated sentence word by word in the target language.

A key innovation in NMT is the attention mechanism. This allows the decoder to “pay attention” to different parts of the source sentence as it generates each word of the translation. For example, when the decoder is generating the English word “reads,” the attention mechanism would focus on the Sanskrit word “*paṭhati*,” even if other words have already been processed.

Advantages of NMT:

- ◆ Fluency, context, flexibility

- ◆ Fluency: NMT systems produce more fluent and natural-sounding translations than SMT systems.
- ◆ Contextual Awareness: The encoder-decoder model can capture the context of an entire sentence, leading to better translations of ambiguous words and phrases.
- ◆ Flexibility: They are a single model, which makes them easier to train and deploy than a complex SMT pipeline.

For Sanskrit, the application of NMT is still in its nascent stages due to the same data scarcity issue that plagues SMT. However, researchers are exploring methods like transfer learning and multilingual models to leverage existing data from other languages and apply it to Sanskrit. The long-term goal is to combine the strengths of NMT with the linguistic insights from *Pāṇini*'s grammar to create a powerful hybrid system.



4.2.4 Knowledge-Based Machine Translation (KBMT)

- ◆ KBMT focuses on meaning.

Knowledge-Based Machine Translation (KBMT) represents a highly ambitious and conceptually different approach to automated translation. While rule-based systems focus on linguistic rules and corpus-based systems focus on statistical patterns, KBMT aims to translate the underlying meaning or semantics of a text, rather than its surface-level words or grammar. This is also referred to as the interlingua approach. The core idea is to create a language-independent representation of the source text's meaning. This abstract representation, or interlingua, then serves as a blueprint from which the translated sentence can be generated in the target language.

The process of KBMT can be broken down into three main stages:

- ◆ KBMT stages

1. **Analysis:** The system performs a deep linguistic and semantic analysis of the source text. The goal is to extract the core meaning and relationships between concepts, not just the words themselves. This stage is complex and requires a sophisticated knowledge base of the source language's vocabulary, grammar, and, most importantly, its semantic structure. The output of this stage is the interlingua—a representation of the text's meaning that is not tied to any specific human language.
2. **Transfer (Interlingua):** This is the central idea of KBMT. Once the meaning of the source text is represented in the interlingua, the system “transfers” this meaning to the target language. Because the interlingua is universal, this stage is not a translation in the traditional sense. It is more like a process of decoding the abstract meaning into a new linguistic format.
3. **Generation:** The final stage involves generating a grammatically correct and fluent sentence in the target language from the interlingua representation. This requires a comprehensive knowledge base of the target language's grammar and vocabulary. The system uses this knowledge to construct a sentence that accurately reflects the meaning of the interlingua.

The Relevance of KBMT to Sanskrit

- ◆ Structured, precise, translatable

KBMT, despite its complexity, is particularly relevant to Sanskrit for several reasons. Sanskrit is a highly structured and logical language with a rich tradition of philosophical and scientific discourse. The concepts expressed in Sanskrit are often abstract and precise, making them well-suited for representation in an interlingua. Rick Briggs, in his influential 1985 paper “Knowledge Representation in Sanskrit and Artificial Intelligence,” argued that *Pāṇini*'s grammar is a form of knowledge representation that is remarkably similar to the techniques used in AI. This suggests that the principles of KBMT,



which seek to translate meaning, are, in fact, a natural fit for a language like Sanskrit.

Challenges of KBMT:

- ◆ Knowledge, ambiguity, scalability

- ◆ **Knowledge Base Creation:** The primary challenge is building a universal, language-independent knowledge base that can represent all possible meanings. This is a monumental and ongoing task, as it requires a deep understanding of human knowledge and an ability to formalise it.
- ◆ **Ambiguity:** Even with a sophisticated knowledge base, handling ambiguity and subtle nuances of language remains a significant hurdle.
- ◆ **Scalability:** It is difficult to scale KBMT systems to cover all domains of human knowledge and language. Most successful KBMT systems are limited to very specific domains, such as medical or legal texts.

Hybrid Systems: The Future of Sanskrit Machine Translation

Given the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, the future of Sanskrit machine translation most likely lies in the development of hybrid systems. A hybrid system combines the best features of different methodologies to create a more robust and effective translator. For Sanskrit, such a system would likely involve:

- ◆ Hybrid MT solution

1. **Rule-Based Analysis:** Using the established and precise rules of *Pāṇinian* grammar to perform the initial analysis of a Sanskrit text. This would include essential tasks like sandhi splitting, morphological parsing, and compound analysis, which are well-suited for a rule-based approach.
2. **Neural or Statistical Translation:** The “cleaned” and segmented data from the rule-based front end would then be fed into a statistical or, more likely, a neural network model. This part of the system would be responsible for learning the broader translation patterns and producing a fluent and natural-sounding translation. The neural network, freed from the complexities of sandhi and morphology, could focus on the higher-level task of translation.

This hybrid approach would leverage the strengths of *Pāṇini*'s formal grammar to overcome the “low-resource” problem (lack of parallel corpora) that plagues statistical and neural models, while also taking advantage of the fluency and contextual awareness that NMT provides. This combination holds the key to finally creating a truly effective and scalable machine translation system for Sanskrit, allowing its vast body of knowledge to be shared with the world.



4.2.5 Corpus-Based Machine Translation: The Role of a Parallel Corpus

- ◆ Data-driven translation

Corpus-Based Machine Translation (CBMT), which includes both Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) and Neural Machine Translation (NMT), fundamentally shifts the approach to translation from a reliance on pre-defined linguistic rules to a dependence on vast amounts of data. The cornerstone of this paradigm is the parallel corpus, a digital collection of texts where each sentence or document in a source language is meticulously paired with its human-translated equivalent in a target language. This data acts as a de facto “training manual” for the machine, allowing it to learn translation patterns, grammatical structures, and word associations without explicit programming by a human linguist.

- ◆ Pattern learning translation

The concept is quite intuitive: by analysing a sufficient number of translated sentence pairs, a machine can begin to infer the probabilistic relationships between words and phrases in the two languages. For instance, if the Sanskrit word *rāmah* consistently appears alongside the English word Rama, the system learns to associate the two. More complex patterns can also be learned, such as how to translate grammatical cases or verb tenses. This is in stark contrast to monolingual corpora, which contain text in only one language. While a monolingual corpus is useful for building a language model (e.g., to determine the grammatical correctness of an English sentence), it is the parallel corpus that provides the crucial data needed for translation itself.

The following table, based on the principle of a parallel corpus, illustrates how a collection of texts would be organised for a machine translation system.

English Source Sentence	Sanskrit Target Translation
The sun is a star.	सूर्यः एकः तारा अस्ति ।
Rama goes to his home.	रामः स्वगृहं गच्छति ।
The boys read books.	बालकाः पुस्तकानि पठन्ति ।
The king gave a horse.	नृपः अश्वं अददात् ।
The sage is old.	मुनिः वृद्धः अस्ति ।

- ◆ Parallel corpus illustration

In this table, each row represents a single data point that a machine learning model would use to learn the translation. The model would analyse the relationship between the words in the English column and their counterparts in the Sanskrit column, building a statistical or neural representation of the translation process. The quality and size of this parallel corpus directly correlate with the performance of the



MT system. A larger, more diverse corpus leads to a more robust and accurate translation model.

◆ Data scarcity challenge

For a language like Sanskrit, the reliance on a parallel corpus poses a significant challenge. The lack of large-scale parallel corpora is a major hurdle for the development of effective SMT and NMT systems. Historically, Sanskrit texts were meticulously preserved in manuscripts, and translations were often undertaken for specific purposes rather than for building large, parallel datasets. This scarcity of digitised, paired texts means that a corpus-based approach alone is currently insufficient for building a comprehensive Sanskrit MT system. This is a primary reason why researchers are exploring hybrid approaches that can leverage the best of both rule-based and data-driven methods, combining the power of *Pāṇini*'s grammar with the learning capabilities of modern machine learning.

Statistical Machine Translation (SMT)

Within the CBMT paradigm, Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) was the dominant force for a period. SMT operates on the principle of probability, using statistical models to find the most probable translation of a given sentence. The system's "knowledge" comes entirely from a parallel corpus.

The process involves two primary models:

◆ Probability-based translation

1. Translation Model: This model learns the probability of a word or phrase in the source language aligning with a word or phrase in the target language. For example, it might learn that the English phrase "king" has a high probability of translating to the Sanskrit word *nīpāḥ*, but a much lower probability of translating to *vrkṣaḥ* (tree).
2. Language Model: This model ensures the grammatical correctness and fluency of the output sentence in the target language. It learns the probability of a sequence of words appearing together in a correct sentence. For example, it would assign a high probability to the English sequence "The king gave" and a very low probability to "The gave king."

When a new sentence is fed into the system, it searches for the translation that has the highest combined probability from both models.

An example of SMT in action:

Consider the English sentence: "The king gave a horse."

An SMT system would not perform a deep grammatical analysis. Instead, it would generate and score many possible Sanskrit translations.



Possible Sanskrit Translations	Translation Model Score	Language Model Score	Combined Score
नृपः अश्वं अददात् । (king horse gave)	High (correct word alignment)	High (grammatical Sanskrit)	Very High
अददात् नृपः अश्वं । (gave king horse)	High (correct word alignment)	High (also grammatical, as Sanskrit is free-ordering)	Very High
अश्वं नृपः अददात् । (horse king gave)	High (correct word alignment)	High (also grammatical)	Very High
वृक्षः अश्वं अददात् । (tree horse gave)	Very Low (wrong word choice)	High (grammatical)	Very Low
अददात् अश्वं नृपः । (gave horse king)	High (correct word alignment)	High (also grammatical)	Very High

- ◆ Corpus-dependant accuracy

As the example shows, SMT can correctly handle the free-ordering nature of Sanskrit, as it assigns high scores to all grammatically correct variations. However, its accuracy is heavily dependent on the size of the corpus. If the corpus lacks examples of a particular sentence structure or word pairing, the system's performance will suffer. This is the primary reason why SMT has not been a complete solution for Sanskrit, as the available parallel data is still quite limited.

4.2.6 Neural Machine Translation (NMT): The Modern Approach

Neural Machine Translation (NMT) represents the most significant breakthrough in machine translation in recent years and is the current state-of-the-art methodology. Unlike the previous paradigms that relied on either hand-crafted rules or statistical models to learn from parallel corpora, NMT uses large neural networks, particularly deep learning architectures, to translate entire sentences in an end-to-end process. This approach is designed to mimic the way the human brain processes and understands language, leading to much more fluid and contextually accurate translations.

The core of an NMT system is an encoder-decoder architecture. This model works by performing the following two steps:

1. **Encoding:** The encoder is a neural network that reads the source sentence (e.g., "Rama goes home") word by word. It processes the entire sentence and compresses its meaning into a single, continuous-space vector. This vector, often called a "thought vector," is a numerical representation of the sentence's meaning and contains all the semantic and syntactic information required for



- ◆ End-to-end translation

translation. The encoder captures the sentence as a whole rather than processing words in isolation.

2. **Decoding:** The decoder is another neural network that takes the thought vector from the encoder and generates the translated sentence in the target language (e.g., 'रामः गृहं गच्छति ।'). It does this by generating one word at a time, based on the information in the thought vector and the words it has already generated.

A key innovation that has made NMT so effective is the attention mechanism. This mechanism allows the decoder to “pay attention” to different parts of the source sentence as it generates each word of the translation. For example, when the decoder is generating the Sanskrit word *rāmaḥ* in the target sentence, the attention mechanism would focus on the English word “Rama” in the source sentence, even though it has already been processed by the encoder. This ensures that the system is not just relying on a single vector but can dynamically focus on the most relevant parts of the source text at each step of the translation.

- ◆ Encoder-decoder attention

NMT's Advantages and Challenges for Sanskrit

NMT has brought about a dramatic improvement in translation quality for many languages, especially those with abundant data. Its advantages include:

- ◆ Fluency, context, efficiency

- ◆ **Higher Fluency:** NMT systems produce translations that are much more fluent and natural-sounding than those from SMT or RBMT. They can capture linguistic nuances and generate text that feels like it was written by a human.
- ◆ **Better Contextual Understanding:** By processing the entire sentence at once, NMT models are better at resolving ambiguity and selecting the correct word based on the overall context.
- ◆ **Reduced Development Effort:** Unlike RBMT, which requires years of manual rule creation, NMT systems only need a large parallel corpus for training.

However, for a language like Sanskrit, NMT faces the same primary challenge as SMT: the scarcity of large-scale parallel corpora. As Sanskrit is a low-resource language in a digital context, training a robust NMT model from scratch is a significant hurdle. Without sufficient data, the model cannot learn the complex patterns of the language, and its performance will be limited. This is why researchers are actively exploring ways to overcome this data scarcity, such as using transfer learning, where a model trained on a similar language is adapted for Sanskrit, or by combining the rule-based approach of *Pāṇini* with the power of NMT. This hybrid approach is seen as the most promising path forward for Sanskrit machine translation.

- ◆ Data scarcity challenge



4.2.7 Knowledge-Based Machine Translation (KBMT) and Hybrid Systems

- ◆ Meaning-focused translation

Knowledge-Based Machine Translation (KBMT), also known as the interlingua approach, is a conceptually distinct and highly ambitious paradigm in machine translation. Unlike rule-based systems that translate a sentence's structure or corpus-based systems that translate its statistical patterns, KBMT aims to translate the underlying meaning or semantics of a text. The central idea is to create a language-independent representation of the source text's meaning. This abstract representation, or interlingua, then serves as a universal blueprint from which the translated sentence can be generated in any target language. This approach is highly relevant to Sanskrit due to its precise and logical nature, which some scholars argue is a form of knowledge representation itself.

The process of KBMT can be broken down into three main stages:

- ◆ Analysis
– Transfer –
Generation

1. **Analysis:** The system performs a deep linguistic and semantic analysis of the source text to extract its core meaning and the relationships between concepts. This stage requires a sophisticated knowledge base of the source language's vocabulary and semantic structure. The output is the interlingua a representation of the text's meaning that is not tied to any specific human language.
2. **Transfer (Interlingua):** Once the meaning is in the interlingua, it is "transferred" to the target language. Because the interlingua is a universal representation of meaning, this stage is more of a decoding process rather than a traditional translation, making it a very efficient and elegant solution for multilingual translation.
3. **Generation:** In the final stage, the system generates a grammatically correct and fluent sentence in the target language from the interlingua representation, using a comprehensive knowledge base of the target language's grammar and vocabulary.

Challenges of KBMT for Sanskrit

While theoretically a perfect fit for a language like Sanskrit, KBMT faces significant challenges:

- ◆ Major challenges

- **Knowledge Base Creation:** The primary hurdle is building a universal knowledge base that can represent all possible meanings. This is a monumental and ongoing task.
- **Ambiguity:** Handling ambiguity and nuanced meanings remains a significant challenge, as it is difficult to formalise all semantic rules.



- **Scalability:** It is hard to scale KBMT systems to cover all domains of human knowledge and language. Most successful KBMT systems are limited to specific, narrow domains.

Hybrid Systems: The Path Forward for Sanskrit MT

Given the distinct strengths and weaknesses of each MT approach, the future of Sanskrit machine translation most likely lies in the development of hybrid systems. A hybrid system combines the best features of different methodologies to create a more robust and effective translator. For Sanskrit, such a system would likely involve a synergistic combination of rule-based and data-driven methods. This approach is seen as the most promising path forward to overcome the unique challenges posed by the language, particularly the lack of large-scale parallel corpora.

◆ Hybrid systems, promising path

A practical hybrid model for Sanskrit MT would work in the following manner:

1. **Rule-Based Pre-processing:** Use the established and precise rules of *Pāṇinian* grammar to perform the initial analysis of a Sanskrit text. This stage is crucial for handling complex linguistic phenomena like sandhi splitting, morphological parsing, and compound analysis, which are well-suited for a rule-based approach. The output would be “cleaned” and segmented data.
2. **Neural or Statistical Translation:** The pre-processed data would then be fed into a statistical or, more likely, a neural network model. This part of the system would be responsible for learning the broader translation patterns and producing a fluent, natural-sounding translation. The neural network, freed from the low-level complexities of sandhi and morphology, could focus on the higher-level task of translation, such as selecting the most contextually appropriate phrasing.

This combined approach leverages the strengths of *Pāṇini*'s formal grammar to overcome the “low-resource” problem that plagues data-driven models, while also taking advantage of the fluency and contextual awareness that NMT provides. By combining the a priori knowledge of Sanskrit's structure with the powerful learning capabilities of modern machine learning, researchers can create a system that is both accurate and scalable, thereby unlocking the vast body of knowledge contained within Sanskrit literature for a global audience.

◆ Rule-based preprocessing, neural translation

4.2.8 Challenges and Opportunities in Sanskrit Machine Translation

The field of Sanskrit machine translation (MT) stands at a unique crossroads, facing significant challenges that stem from the lan-



- ◆ Challenges, opportunities, preservation

guage’s historical context while also possessing unique opportunities due to its unparalleled grammatical structure. The development of a robust and effective MT system for Sanskrit is not just a technical endeavour; it is a critical step towards preserving and disseminating a vast body of knowledge to a global audience.

4.2.8.1 The Challenge of Data Scarcity

- ◆ Data scarcity challenge

The most significant and pervasive challenge for Sanskrit MT is the lack of large-scale parallel corpora. Modern statistical and neural machine translation (NMT) systems are data-hungry, requiring millions of paired sentences to learn translation patterns effectively. For a language like Sanskrit, which was not part of the modern digital revolution, such resources are virtually non-existent. The available Sanskrit texts are often in various manuscripts, are not consistently digitised, and have not been professionally translated into large, machine-readable datasets. This means that a purely data-driven approach, while effective for other languages, is currently not a viable solution for Sanskrit. The performance of any system that relies solely on a corpus would be limited and would struggle to handle the complexities of the language.

4.2.8.2 The Challenge of Complex Linguistics

- ◆ Complex linguistics challenge

Sanskrit’s rich and complex linguistic features, while a testament to its perfection, present significant hurdles for automated translation. Two of the most prominent challenges are:

- **Sandhi:** The process of phonetic fusion where words combine to form a single, long string of letters. A machine must first be able to accurately “undo” this process and segment the text into its constituent words before it can even begin to translate. This requires a robust sandhi-splitting algorithm that can handle the myriad of possible combinations.
- **Compounds (*Samāsa*):** Sanskrit’s ability to form extensive compound words poses another major challenge. A single compound can represent an entire phrase or a complex concept. A machine translation system must be able to not only identify these compounds but also correctly parse them to understand the semantic relationships between the constituent parts. Incorrect parsing can lead to a completely erroneous translation.

4.2.8.3 The Opportunity of *Pāṇini*’s Grammar

Despite these challenges, Sanskrit possesses a unique advantage that makes it an ideal candidate for computational linguistics: *Pāṇini*’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī*. As discussed previously, this ancient grammatical treatise is a masterpiece of formal, rule-based logic. It provides a complete and unambiguous set of rules for Sanskrit’s morphology,



- ◆ Rule-based advantage

phonology, and syntax. This inherent structure is a perfect fit for a Rule-Based Machine Translation (RBMT) system. Researchers can directly encode these rules into a system, which can then handle the complexities of sandhi, morphology, and syntax with a high degree of accuracy and consistency. The logical nature of the grammar also makes Sanskrit an ideal candidate for exploring its use in computer programming and artificial intelligence.

Aṣṭādhyāyī as a generative formal system

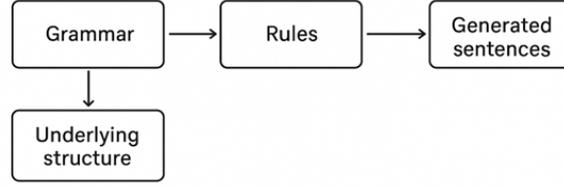


Fig: A conceptual diagram representing the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* as a generative formal system.

4.2.8.4 The Path Forward: Hybrid Systems

The solution to the Sanskrit MT problem lies in a hybrid approach that combines the strengths of different methodologies. This approach would look something like this:

- ◆ **Rule-Based Front-End:** A rule-based system, leveraging the rules of *Pāṇini*, would be used to pre-process the Sanskrit text. This would include essential tasks such as sandhi splitting, morphological analysis (identifying the root and inflections of each word), and compound parsing. This stage would transform the raw, complex Sanskrit text into a structured, machine-readable format.
- ◆ **Data-Driven Back-End:** The pre-processed data would then be fed into a modern neural network. This NMT model, now working with a “cleaned” and segmented input, could focus on the higher-level task of translation. It would learn the contextual and semantic relationships between the languages from a smaller corpus and produce a fluent and accurate translation.

- ◆ Hybrid system solution

This synergistic approach overcomes the primary challenges by using the inherent logic of Sanskrit to compensate for the lack of data, while still taking advantage of the power and fluency of modern neural networks.

A Comparative Analysis of Machine Translation Approaches

To put the discussion of different MT approaches into a more concise context, the following table compares the key features, strengths, and weaknesses of each paradigm.



Feature	Direct Translation	Rule-Based MT	Corpus-Based MT (SMT)	Neural MT (NMT)
Core Method	Word-for-word substitution	Hand-crafted linguistic rules	Statistical probabilities from parallel corpora	End-to-end neural network models
Data Requirement	Minimal (bilingual dictionary)	High (linguistic knowledge)	Very High (large parallel corpus)	Very High (large parallel corpus)
Linguistic Analysis	Minimal	High (morphology, syntax, semantics)	Minimal (focus on patterns)	High (learned from data)
Strengths	Simple to implement	High accuracy for specific domains; good for low-resource languages	Scalable; learns complex patterns automatically	High fluency; better contextual understanding
Weaknesses	Poor quality; fails with complex languages	High development cost; brittle; struggles with ambiguity	Requires vast corpora; poor fluency	Requires vast corpora; “black box” nature
Relevance to Sanskrit	Ineffective due to complexity	Highly relevant due to <i>Pāṇini</i> 's grammar	Limited due to data scarcity	Limited due to data scarcity

Summarised Overview

This unit focuses on Corpus-Based Machine Translation (CBMT) and its sub-paradigms, Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) and Neural Machine Translation (NMT). The foundation of all CBMT systems is the parallel corpus, a collection of texts in a source language and their human-translated equivalents in a target language. SMT uses this corpus to build statistical models that calculate the probability of a word or phrase translation and the likelihood of the resulting sentence being grammatically correct. NMT, the current state-of-the-art, uses a deep learning model with an encoder-decoder architecture to process entire sentences and their context, often using an attention mechanism to focus on relevant words during translation.

A major theme of this unit is the challenge of applying these data-hungry approaches to Sanskrit, a low-resource language with a limited digital parallel corpus. The unit concludes that a purely corpus-based approach is currently insufficient for creating a comprehensive Sanskrit MT system. Therefore, the future lies in hybrid systems, which com-



bine the strengths of different methodologies. A hybrid model for Sanskrit would use a rule-based front-end to handle complex linguistic structures like sandhi and morphology (drawing from *Pāṇini's* grammar) and a neural-network back-end to generate fluent and contextually accurate translations from the pre-processed input.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. What is a parallel corpus and why is it essential for CBMT?
2. Explain the difference between a translation model and a language model in SMT.
3. Describe the function of the encoder and decoder in an NMT system.
4. How does the attention mechanism improve NMT's performance?
5. What is the primary challenge of applying SMT or NMT to Sanskrit?
6. How does a hybrid system attempt to overcome the data scarcity problem?
7. Can an NMT model function without a parallel corpus? Why or why not?
8. Why is fluency a key advantage of NMT over other approaches?
9. Name two specific linguistic features of Sanskrit that would be handled by the rule-based component of a hybrid system.
10. How does a hybrid system for Sanskrit blend ancient knowledge with modern technology?

Assignment

1. Identify and list three publicly available parallel corpora for any language pair.
2. Create a diagram showing the flow of information through an NMT encoder-decoder system.
3. Write a short report on the concept of “transfer learning” and how it could benefit Sanskrit MT.
4. Discuss the pros and cons of SMT vs. NMT for a language with an available but small parallel corpus.
5. Develop a plan for collecting and digitising a parallel corpus for Sanskrit.
6. Propose a design for a hybrid MT system for Sanskrit to English, outlining the role of each component.



Suggested Reading

1. Briggs, Rick. "Knowledge Representation in Sanskrit and Artificial Intelligence." AI Magazine, vol. 6, no. 1, 1985.
2. Hutchins, W. John, and Harold L. Somers. An Introduction to Machine Translation. Academic Press, 1992.
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7. Purohit, Er. Kapila, and Dr. Kedar Dutt Purohit. "SANSKRIT LANGUAGE AS IN PROGRAMMING (NLP)." International Journal for Research Trends and Innovation, vol. 10, no. 4, Apr. 2025.

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1. Purohit, Er. Kapila, and Dr. Kedar Dutt Purohit. "SANSKRIT LANGUAGE AS IN PROGRAMMING (NLP)." International Journal for Research Trends and Innovation, vol. 10, no. 4, Apr. 2025.
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5. Rathod, Sarita G. "Machine Translation of Natural Language using Different Approaches: ETSTS (English to Sanskrit Translator and Synthesizer)." International Journal of Computer Applications, vol. 102, no. 15, Sep. 2014.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS

SGOU



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name :

Model Question Paper- set-1

Fourth Semester – M.A. Sanskrit Language and Literature Examinations
DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE - 06

B23SN06DE -SANSKRIT IN TRANSLATION

((CBCS- PG)

2023 Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

Section A

I Answer any five of the following questions in one or two sentences each. Each question carries two marks (5×2 = 10 marks)

1. What are Roman Jakobson's three types of translation?
2. How does *sandhi* pose a challenge for machine translation systems?
3. What is the concept of Sphota?
4. What is the importance of morphological analysis in Sanskrit MT?
5. What is a parallel corpus and why is it essential for CBMT?
6. How does Raja Raja Varma's translation of the shloka capture the poetic elegance and meter of the original?
7. Which translation approach better conveys the emotional nuances (rasa) of the shloka?
8. How do translators handle long compound words (Samāsa) in Sanskrit ślokas?

Section B

II Answer any six of the following questions in a half a page each. Each question carries Five marks (6×5 = 30 Marks)

9. Define translation equivalence and explain its importance.
10. What does *Anekāntavāda* contribute to modern translation theory?
11. Explain the impact of Bible translations on Indian regional languages?
12. How do Sanskrit's long compound words, or *samāsa*, present a unique problem for translators?
13. Describe the content of Banabhatta's Kadambari
14. Explain the different translations and adaptations of the Valmiki Ramayana.
15. Analyze the linguistic Influence of Sanskrit on Regional Languages.

16. Describe the function of the encoder and decoder in an NMT system.
17. How does a hybrid system for Sanskrit blend ancient knowledge with modern technology?
18. Explain the difference between a translation model and a language model in SMT.

Section C

III Answer any two of the following questions in two pages each. Each question carries fifteen marks (2×15 = 30 marks)

19. Explain the interdisciplinary nature of Translation Studies and its significance in modern scholarship.
20. Describe the essential attributes of a competent translator and explain how these qualities affect the quality of translation.
21. What is the role of rasa and dhvani in Indian translation theory?
22. Explain the structural difference between Sanskrit's inflectional nature and Malayalam's agglutinative nature that creates a core challenge in translation.



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name :

Model Question Paper- set-1

Fourth Semester – M.A. Sanskrit Language and Literature Examinations

DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE - 06

B23SN06DE -SANSKRIT IN TRANSLATION

((CBCS- PG)

2023 Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

Section A

I Answer any five of the following questions in one or two sentences each. Each question carries two marks (5×2 = 10 marks)

1. What is meant by *Dynamic Equivalence*?
2. What is the core distinction between the Arthashastras and the Dharmashastras?
3. How did Arya Ezhuthu script handle Sanskrit phonemes, and why was this important for translation?
4. What is a parallel corpus?
5. What does Manipravalam mean, and what grammatical rule did Līlātilakam set for 'good' Manipravalam?
6. How does Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) generate translations?
7. What are the main challenges in translating Sanskrit ślokas with Samāsa and Anekārtha terms into modern Malayalam?
8. What is the main principle of Rule-Based Machine Translation?

Section B

II Answer any six of the following questions in a half a page each. Each question carries Five marks (6×5 = 30 Marks)

9. Briefly describe the "Vernacular Renaissance" in medieval India.
10. Compare and contrast Word-for-Word, Literal, and Free Translation methods.
11. Analyse the challenges and principles of media translation in the age of globalisation.
12. Examine the transformative role of translation in introducing modern literary genres and ideas to regional Indian literatures.

13. Define translation equivalence and explain its importance.
14. Describe the early contributions of Western scholars to Sanskrit translation and study.
15. How did the translation of Sanskrit works into regional languages serve as a political tool for the Mughal Empire?
16. How does Sanskrit-Malayalam translation differ from translation between unrelated language families like English and Chinese?
17. How did Kuttikrishna Marar's work on Rasa and Dhvani theories impact Malayalam literature and its readers?
18. How did Manipravalam shape the translation and adaptation of Śākuntalam in Malayalam?

Section C

III Answer any two of the following questions in two pages each. Each question carries fifteen marks (2×15 = 30 marks)

19. Discuss the philosophical and linguistic challenges of achieving equivalence in translation.
20. Explain the challenges of translating Kadambari and the Arthashastra into English.
21. Analyze the Translations of Sanskrit works in other Indian languages.
22. Compare the complexity of a KBMT system to an RBMT system.

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യാതൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുരിട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

കുരീപ്പുഴ ശ്രീകുമാർ

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**DON'T LET IT
BE TOO LATE**

SAY NO TO DRUGS

**LOVE YOURSELF
AND ALWAYS BE
HEALTHY**



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