



GANDHI AS TRANSLATOR: A TRANSLATION OF JOHN RUSKIN'S UNTO THIS LAST AS SARVODAYA

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ABSTRACT

Mohandas Gandhi was a practitioner and an activist as well as a theorist; as Marx famously put it, Gandhi meant to change the world as well as interpret it, and he did. This paper tries to locate Gandhi other than these headings, Gandhi as a translator and a journalist. Therefore, researcher explains Gandhi's historical, political and professional aspects. Gandhi translated many worlds' thinkers like Tolstoy, Plato, Thoreau and Ruskin in Gujarati. This paper particularly focuses on translation of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (1860) in Gujarati by Mohandas Gandhi as *Sarvodaya* (1908). This research explores aspects of translation and translation studies through refraction theory of Andrew Lefevere, refraction theory provides three elements of the literary system such as patronage, poetics and language. Further, an influence of this translated text on Indian nationalism and political thoughts.



KEYWORDS: Translation, Refractions, Sarvodaya, Gandhi, Indian political thoughts.

(I)

“Gandhi meant to change the world as well as interpret it, and he did.”

- **Marx.**

Mohandas Gandhi was a practitioner and an activist as well as a theorist; as Marx famously put it, Gandhi meant to change the world as well as interpret it, and he did. This paper tries to locate Gandhi other than these headings of activist and practitioner; it will locate Gandhi as a translator and a journalist. Therefore, this paper critically examines Gandhi and his translation of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (1860) in Gujarati as *Sarvodaya* (1908). To examine Gandhi's translation of *Unto This Last*, it is important to locate Gandhi in historical, political and professional aspects in a period where this translation takes place.

Gandhi stayed in South Africa for 20 years, during his stay in South Africa (1894-1914), Gandhi worked as a lawyer and an activist on behalf of Indian community in South Africa. It was a period when Gandhi read world's profound thinkers like Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau, which shaped many Gandhian ideas such as civil resistance, non-violence and sarvodaya. An influence of these thinkers can be seen in his theory, politics and resistance. Gandhi was an avid reader; his reading list was long, varied and voracious. Gandhi's first racial encounter in South Africa was with Majesty of Durban court, where he was asked to take off his turban, to which Gandhi denied. He wrote to local newspapers about this

incidence as "Unwelcomed Visitor". Gandhi was not just a lawyer in South Africa but he had good knowledge about use of media.

Gandhi founded "Natal Indian Congress" (1894) to raise questions of Indian community, specially voting rights and Citizenship for Hindus. In Natal Indian Congress Primary members were from Merchant class, but later labour class joined the Congress. In 1904, Gandhi started *Indian Opinion*, a newspaper to fight racial discrimination and for civil rights as well as voting rights for the Indian immigrant community in South Africa, with support of Natal Congress and other notable Indians. MadanjitViyavaharik was the owner of the international printing press and the very first issue was prepared by him.

Gandhi published translation of *Unto This Last* in Indian opinion, therefore, it essential to look at readership of this newspaper, which would help to define Gandhi's readership of translated work. The newspaper was published in Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil and English, aim of the newspaper was to create communication between coloniser and colonised, between Europeans and Indians, between rich and poor. He didn't just write against the authority but he wrote to point out weaknesses of India & Indian community too. This newspaper's circulation was among 400 to 600 people, among Gujarati merchant class and educated English people. Gandhi was able to define his readers and wrote accordingly, for him this wasn't business or profession but social work hence his prime focus was on reader and their education.

Mr Henry Polak, a close friend of Gandhi, gave him a book to read for his train journey. The book was *Unto This Last* written by John Ruskin, a leading art critic and a political economist of Victorian era. Gandhi's life was profoundly influenced by this book; he states in his autobiography that this book changed his life. Soon after reading this book, Gandhi changed his way of life by establishing the Phoenix settlement (*Ashram*). Here, he and his co-workers practiced many of the ideas put forth by Ruskin, even he sifted *Indian Opinion's* printing press to this settlement. In 1908 he published a translation of *Unto This Last* as *Sarvodaya* in weekly columns of *Indian Opinion*, also the noticeable factor here is that Ruskin published *Unto This Last* in monthly journal *Cornhill* magazine as four essays, later published as Book in May, 1892. Gandhi tells us that he didn't translate *Unto This Last* literally but gives a summary of ideas which Ruskin proposed. For critical inquiry of this translated text, researcher relies on Andre Lefevere's theory of Refraction. Gandhi's *Sarvodaya* is a refraction of *Unto This Last*, while *Unto This Last* is also a refraction of Bible's story; the title *Unto This Last* is a quotation from the parables of worker in vineyards. The parable allegorizes Christ's promise of the kingdom of heaven to all his followers, including those who convert at the end of their lives, who in that sense receive 'pay' equal to that of the first disciples. While Ruskin's aim in the book is to give scripture a material meaning, even as he gives economics a moral meaning.

Andre Lefevere proposed his idea of refraction in essay 'Mother Courage's Cucumbers: Text, System and Refraction in a Theory of Literature' (1982). Definition of refraction in context of translation is the adaption of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work. What refraction essentially tries to do is that it naturalises the different cultures of source texts for the target audience. A systems approach to literature makes use of following assumptions according to Lefevere: Literature is a system, embedded in the environment of a culture or society. It is a consciously constructed system, as it consists of objects, text and people, who write, refract, distribute, read those texts. Lefevere suggested a new theory to study translated text as a new text / original text.

According to Lefevere, refraction can be studied by analyzing main three factors of "The Literary System":

'The literary system' consists of 3 essential elements-

1. Patronage
2. Poetics
3. Language

1. **Patronage consists of three components:** An ideological one (literature should not be allowed to get too far and step out of, for the other systems in a given society), an economic one (the patron assures the writer's livelihood) and the status component (the writer achieves a specific position in society). These three components of patronage in refraction work by comparing source text, target text and author of the target text.
2. **Poetics consists of two components:** A poetics possesses a code of behavior. One is an inventory of literary devices, i.e. genre, motif, prototypical characters, situations and symbols. The other is functional, which describes what the role of literature is or should be in the social system as a whole.
3. **Language:** There are two aspects of language - the formal side of language (grammar) and the pragmatic (cultural semiotics) side - a use of language which reflects the culture. Acceptance of foreign writer or text depends upon need of receiving system and therefore work of literature is adapted or refracted according to the cultural establishments inside the receiving system. (Refraction is original to the great majority of people who are tangentially exposed to literature.)

Ruskin's *Unto This Last* is also refraction of Bible's story, but his narrative was with political-economic perspectives and for English people who are mainly Christians so as they can understand biblical allusion, while readers of Gandhi were unable to follow some of Biblical allusions since majority of his readers were Hindu. Ruskin's narrative involves Greek mythology, many of Latin terms and of course political economist like John Stuart Mill and David Ricardo make his case.

For example, "AD Valorem" title of his 4th essay, the nominative of Valorem is Valor; a word means "to be well" or "Valuable"; the value of thing to buyer and value of thing to seller. Ruskin put forth statement of Mr J.S. Mill that "Comparative estimates of moralist" has nothing to do with political economy, Ruskin disagreed with that statement. Further, Mill's "To be wealthy" is "to have a large stock of useful articles," Ruskin accepts this definition and adds that wealth can be used for form-use and abuse, Usefulness to ab-usefulness. While making a case for value of a thing and useful articles Ruskin explains his thoughts through Greek god, "Wine, which the Greeks, in their Bacchus, made, rightly, the type of all passion, and which, when used, cheereth god and man"; Yet, when abused becomes "Dionusos," hurtful especially to the divine part of man, or reason." Ruskin agrees with Mill on his definition of "to be wealthy", and so is Gandhi. But Gandhi knows his readers; they can't decode biblical allusion and Greek mythology therefore Gandhi translated the text without references to political economist like J.S. Mill, David Ricardo, biblical references and Greek mythology. Yet, Gandhi conveyed his moralist ideas and argument in language of his readers, which was language of Gujarati businessmen living in South Africa, who cannot decode references from European culture.

Another example of Gandhi's rendering or say refraction of *Unto This Last* was on ethical consideration for economic analysis. Gandhi shared Ruskin's distrust of classical political economy with the model of 'economic man' engaged in the pursuit of individual self-interest. Gandhi and Ruskin held different views on the role of the state in social and economic life. Gandhi believed that in exceptional circumstances private enterprise was preferable both on ethical and economic grounds to state enterprise, and wanted the power and functions of the state to be restricted to a minimum. As Gandhi was a political man for him this maxim was ground for his theory of "Swaraj" an ideal state, especially in case of India.

Unto This Last can be looked at as a Satire on industrial revolution, capitalism and class system that emerged. The ideology that Ruskin proposed was Christian socialism and liberalism, that everybody should get equal opportunity for survival and thrive. He proposed an idea and horror that was about to come because of industrial capitalist policies of England. On the other hand Gandhi's satire was on wealth distribution, on coloniser and also on colonised. The ideology Gandhi translated from Ruskin was an idea against industries and capitalist society, he didn't just counter Europe for making Colonies as object of consumptions or raw material, but also he narrates that India must avoid industrialisation and consumptions of their own people after independence in order to make a

"Swaraj." Readers of *Indian Opinion* were mainly Gujarati merchant class. Gandhi's message was clear to them that labourers must get paid by their capacities. Gandhi laid out 3 main maxims from *Unto This Last* for his readers, they were: 1. the good of individual is contained in the good of all. 2. That a lawyer's work has same value as a barber's in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work. 3. That a life of labour, i.e. the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the worth living. As Bondurant has observed, "Gandhi did not share the more conservative views of Ruskin which held the common man inferior, erected an aristocratic hierarchy and denied the masses any political control on grounds of incompetence"

Ruskin's use of language was for Latin and English schooled people of England, and also *Cornhill* magazine was Victorian literary magazine that published with a selection of articles on diverse subjects and serialisations of new novels. In Gandhi's case, use of language was according to his readers and culture he wrote in. Jitendra Desai praised Gandhi for his language and translation.

[Gandhi had skills that of a good writer. He seemed to understand the intricacy of the words he employed and his language was decidedly simple, clear and precise, free of artificiality. One of the specialities of his writings was conciseness. He had an excellent hold over choice of words where transferring an idea into another language was concerned. He didn't stick with the syntactic or semantic equivalence in his translations. He translated "Death Dance" into "Patang Nritya" (which has stylistic equivalence with the phrase.)]

As stated above about his writing and use of equivalence for translation, it is necessary to look at Gandhi's published medium of *Sarvodaya*. Gandhi's practice as journalist is a third phase of Gujarati journalism that was for a reason,

[Both English and Gujarati articles were written on one topic. But the Gujarati articles were filled with a variety of sensory and liberal feelings, while the articles written in English were more theoretical. Comparisons of both of them show that readers have an upper hand in determining the style of writing. Thus, the articles in Gujarati language also take into account the readers' education of Indian Opinion.]

Gandhi's use of language to translate *Unto This Last* was language of Gujarati readers of South Africa, as like he was trying to do communicate with his readers, by taking their examples and their situations. Gandhi summaries main 3 maxims from Ruskin and present it in common reader's language. While Ruskin's language was formal and academic in nature, Gandhi's language was informal. He used cultural terms used by common people in day to day communication. For him following flowery or formal language was not necessary as long as he was able to convey ideas/ principals of political economy with ethics and morality. On the other hand Ruskin tells us in one of his essay that his critics lament about his lack of logic in his proposed ideas.

Gandhi's translation wasn't just for readers of *Indian Opinion* but Gandhi made *Unto This Last* simple text that can be understood by common readers, as he didn't use all biblical and economics references as Ruskin did, but he makes his idea clear about what was central argument of Ruskin about political economy. By Refracting, Gandhi made complex text simple. Ruskin wrote that his critics always lament about not giving enough logic to his ideas, that's why it is necessary for Ruskin to take references. At last, Gandhi wrote fifth chapter in his *Sarvodaya* as 'interpreted' to tell readers what was his aim for translating *Unto this last*.

(II)

These arguments points out that Gandhi was not attempting translation of book but rather to present book in a manner intelligible to Indians who didn't know English. For that reason, he did not explain what the title of book meant with biblical reference, as it could be understood only by a person who had read the Bible in English and knows vineyard story. Since, Gandhi explains the aim of Ruskin's book which was to work for welfare of all. If Gandhi translated title *Unto This Last* by literal translation title would be *Antyodaya* but Gandhi translated title as *Sarvodaya* This signifies that he refracts Ruskin's idea than go by word to word translation.

Andre Lefevere suggested that refraction play a very important part in evolution of literature, As Gandhi's refraction of *Unto This Last* represented with cultural, political and social situation of his time, it becomes a literary text that influence Indian political thoughts as well as economic policies.

Therefore, *Sarvodaya* translated again in English language from Gujarati by Valji Desai, to make Gandhi's thought accessible to every reader of India and other than India. Since there are no biblical references or Greek mythology any reader of any country or religion can understand Gandhi's *Sarvodaya*.

Even during freedom movement "*Sarvodaya Movement*" as socio-political movement emerged for social issues like caste system in India, for welfare of all. Gandhi alongside this movement worked for *Harijans* (untouchables), with Vinoba Bhave. In 1930 when government banned his two newspapers "Navjivan" and "Young India", he restarted the newspapers with other names, "*Navjivan*" as "*Harijanbandhu*" and "Young India" as "*Harijan*". His aim was to create an equal society, during this period he was travelling across India campaigning against untouchability and was not in favour of giving untouchables, separate electorates. He meant to create "*Swaraj*" and it was not possible without *Sarvodaya*—welfare of all.

Even after independence, Gandhi's ideas were influencing Indian politics and policies. Many of ideas were from *Unto This Last*, for example, A word that does not appear in Gandhi's book is autarky. But autarky — an economic system closed to outside trading partners — was a central principle of Indian economics until the reforms that began in the 1990s began to liberate Indians from poverty by the millions and build a large and growing middle class. By considering this policy of India, there is an assumption that Ruskin's economical ideas influence not just Gandhi but economic policies of India. Gandhi read Ruskin several years before writing *Hind swaraj*, which was a critic of modern civilization, the most severe indictment of modern civilization was, in Gandhi's opinion, its dependence on technology. Thus Gandhi says, "Machinery ... represents a great sin." The goal of *Swaraj* had to be the welfare of the whole people to be attained through the principle of *Swadeshi*. Here he proposed idea of *khadi* to avoid machine material, in this context Gandhi wrote, "It is necessary to realize that machinery is bad. We shall then be able gradually to do away with it. Nature has not provided any way whereby we may reach a desired goal all of a sudden. If, instead of welcoming machinery as a boon, we should look upon it as an evil, it would ultimately go." His complete rejection toward industries is derived from Ruskin. Both Gandhi and Ruskin "It is necessary to realize that machinery is bad. We shall then be able gradually to do away with it." the philosophy of 'nature treatment'. There are many political and economic thoughts that Gandhi proposed in *Sarvodaya* as well as in *Hind Swaraj* which he derived from Ruskin. After taking all perspectives and arguments under consideration is it possible to say that somehow, somewhere Indian political and economic thoughts are influenced by Western political thoughts.

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