

REMINISCENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

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In exile in India, when I was studying in Buxa Tibetan monk's camp in West Bengal, a group of senior monk students were sent to Sarnath, Varanasi in 1969, to fill up the Acharya slots in what was then known as Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, affiliated to Sanskrit University. I was one among the group.

Thus, I was an Acharya Geshe candidate from 1969 to 1971 in the Institute which was then only two years old. Shri Chandra Chuda Mani was a lecturer there teaching English literature. As there were not many English-speaking people amongst academic and administrative community of the institute, he was a much sought-after person in the institute. I clearly remember that he was very often found sitting in the office of the Director. One day the then venerable Director was dictating a letter in English with the help of Shri Mani and there were brief confusions of words between "pupil" and "people" and another time between "causality" and "casualty" due to miss-pronunciation of words by the Director. I was only an amused silent observer.

I did not have the opportunity of attending his classes during my time in the institute as curriculum of Acharya in those days did not include English as a subject nor any other modern subjects. However, I used to be fascinated by Mani ji's ways of communicating with students. Once while waiting for the bus used for transporting students and lecturers between Varanasi city and Sarnath, he asked a young and small monk for his name. After hearing the name "Dorje", he spontaneously said, "Oh Vajra!" Then, he added, "You do look like Vajra, small and handy!" He must have seen Tibetan style of Dorje and bell held in hands during rituals. This then a small monk is now a senior scholar in the institute which has also grown to be a Central University. Often, I see Mani ji with his school going son at the institute who is now Additional Director General of Archeological survey of India, Dr. B.R. Mani.

During my visit to Korea in August 1984 to attend an international Conference in Seoul, I visited the headquarters of Korean Buddhist Jingak order. It was interesting that they regularly chant "*om mani padme hum*" the mantra of *Avaloketeshvara* but *Avaloketeshvara* is not much known to them. The main figure in their temple is Buddha *Amitabha*. They showed interest in knowing the link between the mantra they chant and *Amitabha*, so wanted to have a translation of *Manikabum* from Tibetan into English and sought my help. I went so far as to commission a translation on their behalf, and the work was started by Mani ji assisted by a Tibetan fellow but unfortunately the work remained unfinished.

However, this exercise helped me in paying more attention to the subject of translation of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit and Tibetan into English which resulted in my organising in 1990 in Delhi the first International Seminar on "Buddhist Translations: Problems and Perspectives". It was an important gathering of eminent scholars where the problems and perspectives including history of translation of Buddhist texts were discussed extensively. That is how despite not being a professional translator, I got involved in some significant projects and continues to take interest in this subject.

Buddhist translations have three phases and a fourth should now be projected.

The first phase covers the early years of the colonial period on the Indian subcontinent, when Christianity and Christian values were an integral part of the colonial mentality. During this time the translations of Buddhist texts into English from Pali, Sanskrit and Tibetan were often done by persons who were deeply committed to and influenced by Christianity. These translations contain a very high degree of Christian colouring in the language of the translations and in the interpretation of the original material.

In the second phase of translation of Buddhist texts, which may be taken to cover roughly the first half of the 20th century, although the colonial, political and economic domination of many Buddhist lands

in Asia continued, the influence of Christianity and Christian values on western translators faded into the background. In this phase the categories and concepts of traditional western philosophy became dominant and most translators were powerfully influenced by Kant. However, the introduction of Kantian categories and concepts into the translation and interpretation of Buddhist texts did not help to reveal the real object and purpose of these texts.

The third phase of translation of Buddhist texts into English from Sanskrit and Tibetan sources is marked by the introduction of more models and conceptual schemes taken from the western intellectual and philosophical tradition. This phase prevailed roughly few decades in the middle of the twentieth century as is evident from the translations of some western scholars in which Kant and Marx, as well as Berkeley, are largely abandoned. Here, the new fashion has been to look to western psychology, as taught primarily by Freud and Jung, for conceptual schemes to be used in the translation and interpretation of Buddhist materials. There has also been a new tendency to adopt the concepts of linguistic relativism, particularly as propounded by Wittgenstein, for help in the work of translating Buddhist texts into English. There are many modern translators who, in their translations of Buddhist texts, have made large-scale use of concepts and terms taken from modern Western psychology and linguistic relativism. The most obvious example of these new influences in the translation of Buddhist texts into English is the works of Guenther.

What these three phases have in common is the imposition of the Western conceptual scheme upon Buddhist material. It would not be wrong to say that all the translators working in these three periods have looked at the Buddhist texts through some Western spectacles of one colour or another. The results have inevitably caused some distortion to the original genuine Buddhist content to a greater or lesser extent.

The goal of translation should be to convey the whole sense and meaning of the original text to the reader. This basically means that the purpose and nature of the translation needs to be clearly identified. This can best be done by dividing it into two: 1) strictly an academic one, and 2) nonacademic. In the case of the former, it is utmost important that not a single word of the original text is lost in the process of translating it into the target language. Here the translator must keep in mind that the original text may also had gone through a translation from another language e.g. Sanskrit. In such cases, it is of great help if the translator has a fairly good knowledge of vocabulary and general sense of Sanskrit or for that matter any other language. In the second case, since the purpose is to convey the intended essential message of the text to the reader, the result of the translation should be as if the author of the original text is living today and he would have written in such a language and style comprehensible to the average educated reader of today. This style of translation can be called liberal translation. Here, one can also go a step ahead and say that universally accepted words of Sanskrit and in certain cases, words from other languages should be added and used liberally.

Following is one of few inspiring prayers translated from Tibetan into English by me during my semi-retreat stay in an Indian village, in Haryana which can hopefully serve as examples of liberal translation.

Dedication of Essence of Teaching by Lama Tsongkhapa

1. It is by the grace of the guru, that I came across the teachings of the all-surpassing teacher, the Buddha. May all the beings be guided by the sublime guru. To that I dedicate this merit.
2. May the teaching of the benevolent one, the Buddha, be never shaken by the wind of wrong notions, and may there be abounding people, who having realized the mode of teaching, have gained faith in the teacher.
3. May I never be loose in upholding the system of the Buddha elucidating the truth of interrelatedly existing, even at the risk of my deprivation of body and life.
4. May I spend days and nights contemplating on the methods of promoting the way, found by the supreme guide with immense hardship in his past lives.
5. When I strive in the cause of Buddha Dharma with pure motivation, may the Bhrama, the Indra, the Lokapalas and the Black Lord and other protectors be always supportive.