Examining Illustration as Intersemiotic Translation: A study of Alice in the Wonderland in Abridged Odia Translation

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Abstract

The paper attempts to investigate the impact of illustration in the making of world literature in Odia. Illustration served as a medium of expression, mode of storytelling, an element of embellishment to the narratives, and an agent of advertisement, but remained specific to children's literature. The current paper attempts to examine whether illustration served as a promotional tool or as a medium of translation, in a world literature series titled '*Biswa Sahitya Granthamala*' (collection of the world literary series in Odia translation), published in the twentieth century by a renowned

Indian publisher, *Granthamandir*, Odisha. The author examines the abridged illustrated novel, 'Bichitra Desha re Alice' (Alice in Wonderland) based on the theories and techniques of illustration. The article relates to the emergence of the practice of illustration in Odisha, a provincial state of India, and proceeds to discuss its' significant function in the world literature series. It is a qualitative study based on the primary sources, i.e. the book published under the *Biswa Sahitya* series. The study revealed that the publishers followed significant patterns and techniques, and observed several informative functions of illustration in the series.

Keywords

Illustration as intersemiotic translation, Odia literature, illustration a promotional tool, Bichitra Desha re Alice, *Biswa Sahitya,* Indian literature.

Introduction

The Illustrations are images used to supplement the text and enact a significant role in the reception of the book. The concept of illustration in the literary field emerged in the eighteenth century from illustrated fiction, a hybrid medium of storytelling that

received immense popularity among the eminent authors of the age. The classics of literature received the only preference to get adorned with the illustrations that triggered the market value. Many illustrated novels such as *Tom Jones*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and *Robinson Crusoe* were published. The succeeding century witnessed the decline of the illustrated fiction as it challenged the suitability of the prose text. The rise of modern fiction resulted in the fall of the illustrated tale as 'unsuitability' posed a problem. The attention of the illustrators shifted from the fiction to the book cover designing that gained momentum and continued relentlessly. During the 20th Century, the status of illustration remained confined to a specific category, i.e., Children's book.

Illustration is categorized as 'Intersemiotic Translation' that relates to the recreation of the verbal texts into pictures. Emerging from the typology of Jacobson (1959), Intersemiotic translation refers to translation between two different mediums. The concept has been further adopted by Oittenen (2002) and elaborated by Pereira (2008). Critics consider illustration as a secondary art as it is extracted from visual texts (Behrendt 1997:24), but at times, they bridge the gap between a Source Culture (SC) and Target Culture (TC). Illustration is considered as the recreation of the textual information with creative transposition (Pereira 2008:106). Pereira claimed that illustration could be considered as translation because an artist adopts translation strategies like omission, addition, explicitation, condensation and others to render exact visual reflection of the verbal text. The use of the aforementioned methodology depends on the verbal translation of the text and the cultural distinction between SC and TC. Pereira further asserted that "illustration re-creates the literary and cultural values of the text" and every time changes with every new translation.

Recent studies have attempted to examine front covers as intersemiotic translation. Pereira (2008) referred to Jacobson's 'intersemiotic translation and considered illustration as

'intersemiotic translation par excellence.' He argued that illustrations follow the same strategies used for textual translation and both involve interpretation. Pereira further discussed three ways through which illustrations can translate a verbal message, namely, through literal semiotic translation, by emphasizing on narrative elements and by adapting the pictures to a certain artistic trend (2008: 104). Sonzogni (2011) studied book cover as intersemiotic translation and asserted the interconnected relationship between the cover and the text. His analysis was not based on the existing book covers in the market, but he insisted that the book cover should transmute a similar message as in the text. It cannot be denied that illustrations change with every translation to confirm with the cultural norms of the target culture. Furukuwa's (2012) analysis of different translations of Banana Yoshimoto's kitchen novels concluded the same. She observed manipulations of the book covers in the translated versions. Salmani and Eghtesadi (2015) studied three retranslations of Nathanial Howthorne's 'A Scarlet Letter.' They made a semiotic analysis, implementing the framework proposed by Kress and Van Leewen (2005). Lau (2015) observed the development of book covers over the ages and identified the gap between the function of a book cover, earlier as a 'protective device' to 'an advertising tool' in the present. The extensive study throws light on the vital role of front covers in the book industry in the current era. Ozhan (2018) analyzed the five book covers of retranslations of 'The Old Man and the Sea' in the context of Iran.

The current study attempts to reveal the techniques of the book cover designing and in-text illustration for the world literature series in Odia translation. The objective of the paper is to analyze the impact of illustration in the reception of a world literature series titled *Biswa Sahitya Granthamala* (Published by *Granthamandir*, an award-winning Indian Publisher based at Cuttack, Odisha). The immediate target readers of the series happen to be children. The paper intends to answer the following question, i.e., what role does

illustration performs in a children's world literature series in Odia translation? What strategy is adopted to illustrate the novels? Does illustrated novels had some significant effect on the readers? To resolve the posed questions, the paper uses a qualitative methodology to analyze the function of Illustration in the Odia translation of world literary texts.

The second section would provide a brief overview of illustration in Odisha; its emergence, evolution, and reception in the Odisha book market would establish the foundation of the study. The next section would elaborate on the role of illustration in the making of the concerned children's world literature series, *Biswa Sahitya Granthamala*. The *Biswa Sahitya* series included in-text illustration in thirty-four books, but the limited scope of the paper uses '*Bichitra Desha re Alice*' (Alice in the Wonderland), and *Debamanaba Hercules* for the current study. The study would emphasize on both front cover and in-text illustration of the books to examine the contribution of illustration as a promotional tool of the series.

Illustration in Odisha and *Biswa Sahitya Granthamala*

The concept of children's literature emerged in Odisha, a provincial state of India in the 1980s and the history of illustration began not

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before the 20th century. Printed editions of nineteenth-century Odisha could barely afford the woodblocks for illustration and preferred the books to be text focussed. The children's books produced during this period by Upendra Tripathy, Ramakrishna Nanda, Balkrushna Kar, Udaynath Sadangi, and Birakishore Das contained minimal pictures, mostly on the front cover (Biswal, 136). The practice of illustration in Odisha took a rapid bloom in the initial phase of the twentieth century. The establishment of the printing press in Odisha in the post-independent era introduced illustrations in children's academic books and later shifted attention to the literary texts as well. 1909 onwards, a significant rise in children's magazine, created a literary consciousness and strong inclination towards illustration in children's magazines. Printing technology developed rapidly in post-independent Odisha, introduced illustration in academic books, and stimulated the production of children's magazines. Colour printing was introduced in children's magazines towards the last phase of the twentieth century. The study of the evolution of illustration from Woodblock to Offset printing, Black and White images to colour pages, magazine, and comics to literature in Odisha remains incomplete without the analysis of the function performed in children's world literature.

Biswa Sahitya Granthamala (BSG), a children's world literature series, aptly justifying the title, comprises more than eight hundred stories under one hundred and eighty-seven titles. The series introduced the world authors and literary texts from across the globe to the native readers in the form of abridged version in Odia translation. It is worth mentioning that the books under the BSG series are not picture books, instead illustrated novels or stories. The use of images in *Biswa Sahitya Granthamala* can be examined from two different perspectives. First delineating the function of illustration as a paratextual element and exploring the significant contribution in the reception of the translated books in Odisha.

Secondly analyzing the strategy used by *Granthamandir* in using the in-text illustration for storytelling. In this paper, we shall analyze the book cover and the in-text illustration of the concerned books and examine the function of illustration in the series in general.

Book Cover in Bichitra Desha re Alice

The function of a book cover in a world literature series is worth mentioning. It grabs the attention of the potential consumers, persuade the readers to explore the text, convey linguistic information about the book, and reflect the genre (Genette, 1997). Book covers, before the early nineteenth century served as a protective device for the handwritten manuscripts. A mechanical bookbinding came into practice since the 1820s. Eventually, the book covers functioned as an advertising tool and a medium of communicating about the book. In the twentieth century, the book industry became commercially competitive, and book covers served a vital role in advertising and inviting potential consumers to purchase the book.

The books in the BSG series used no decorative title font or ornate backdrop. Contrary to the trend of the children's books, the series made a deliberate attempt to avoid any extra embellishment to keep

it simple and less complicated. A unique text placement and maintenance of proper space on the cover give it a professional look. It can further be considered as a form of branding. *Granthamandir* chose simple text, minimal font, and a unique layout for cover designing of all the books of BSG. Let us examine the cover below:

Image 1 displays the front cover of '*Bichitra Desha re Alice*' (Alice in the Wonderland). The book cover dissects the whole area into three blocks. The first block contains the title of the book and the series, the second and third contain enough space for image and name of the publication house, respectively. The title is written with large font in the centre. The title of the series is mentioned at the top of the cover with bold letters that indicated prominence. The name and logo of the publisher appear at the bottom middle of the cover in all the books of the series. The publisher's decision to maintain the space for the name of the series, *Biswa Sahitya Granthamala* (The collection of world literature) is from a commercial perspective. It generates a unique code for the books for being under one series. None of the books specifies the name of the author, or the translator on the front cover (which is preserved for the title page) reflects the publisher's emphasis on the title of the children's series that is

capable enough to grab the consumers. The back covers of all the books contain information about the series and testimonials.

The series highlighted the novel venture of introducing world literature to the native readers. Hence, the front cover bears no other linguistic information except the title of the book and the series. The colour of the series title and the logo varies in each book depending on the color combination of the front cover. The books included an image in the middle that either hints about the background, Genre, or storyline of the concerned book. For instance, in *Bichitra Desha re Alice* (*Alice in the Wonderland*), the image in the front cover displays the protagonist, a small girl in the court of the King of Hearts. It relates to the event from the story and hints at Alice's journey to an imaginary place where people dress as cards. Similarly, in the book, *Debamanaba Hercules*, the front cover projected an image of Hercules fighting with the seven-headed dragon. Hercules is shown in the fighting posture with a sword in his hand and one of the seven heads of the dragon lying on the ground. It is indicative of the valour of the protagonist that made him a semi-God in Greek mythology.

In-text illustration in *Bichitra Desha re Alice*

Illustration performs the task of a stimulus in drawing a positive reception of the book among the target readers. The pictures and story, share an interconnected relationship as the former adds life to the latter, which again acts as the source of inspiration. Illustration predominantly relies upon the tone of the narrative and the emotional content of the story. *Bichitra Desha re Alice*, an abridged Odia translation contains three illustrations. The first image in chapter 1 (p-6) shows Alice sitting on the floor and crying over her shrink size. The table looks too big and she appears too small. The key placed on the table appears huge. The secret door is also shown in the picture. The second image is in chapter-8 (p-17), finds Alice in the Rose garden, where three gardeners painted the roses into Red. The last illustration is in chapter-11 (p-42), Alice is shown in the royal court of the King of Hearts. The pictures are placed in the middle of the page that covered half of the space. No major changes are made in the pictures. It reproduced the textual elements and visually displayed the virtual message. Pereira (2008: 109) considered this category of illustration as 'Literal Semiotic Translation.' The illustrations made no changes in the characters or events in the plot and offered a 'faithful representation' of the verbal sign.

The illustration in the book also displayed the metonymic nature of translation when it comes to the selection of cultural elements, scenes and passages to be illustrated. For instance, in the abridged Odia translation of the epic 'The Ramayana, under the BSG project, illustrations displayed the essential events from the life of Lord Ram. The life of Lord Rama in Ayodhya, in the forest, Abduction of Sita, Hanumaan's meet with Sita, fight with Ravan's army, *Agniparikshya* of Sita, and so on is well portrayed. These images choose to display the elements of the narrative (Pereira 2008: 109) as characters, settings, action and are capable of carrying the plot forward, but it is used to make a double emphasis on the events. The

movement of the plot is marked simultaneously in both the text and images that follow. The illustration here contributes to textual coherence through referential cues for the text. Literal intersemiotic illustration is also marked in the books titled, 'The Ramayan,' 'Gulliver ra Bhramana Kaahani' and 'Debamanaba Hercules.' In 'Debamanaba Hercules,' the projected images justify the valour of Hercules as a demi-God who fought against demons and performed miraculous tasks that earned him the equal stature of the Gods.

Discussion and Conclusion

Illustration and children's literature are considered as two sides of a coin as it is connected to the readability and reception of the text. The positive impact of the visual element could not be denied as pictures incite the imagination, improvise textual comprehension, and provide better reception to the text. The multiple functions of illustration in children's books are elucidated by Zhihui Fang in his work. He emphasized the contribution of illustration every aspect of literary production, starting from plot development to maintaining textual coherence and promoting the book in the market (1996:11). Levin et al. (1987) focused on the representational function of illustration and discussed four conventional and one unconventional functions of illustration in the processing of the text. The illustrated

novels sharpen the perception, polish imagination skills and nurture the reading habit of the readers. The analysis of illustration in one of the books of *Biswa Sahitya* series revealed that the function it performed is mostly informative.

The analysis of the front cover and the in-text illustration of '*Bichitra Desha re Alice*' confirmed that the illustrations were not intended to localize the text. It abides by the publication objective of introducing the world authors and the pictures are made similar to the original text. The visual representation of the texts did not localize the settings but landed the readers to the foreign land.

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that the publisher used foreignization in illustrating the books. There is a marked deviation from the overuse of illustration in the literary venture of *Granthamandir* that connected the dots between the need for illustration and struggle of the publishers to maintain the same. Being self-funded, the publisher relied on the local artists and the limited number of existing pictures to balance the cost of production. It is worth mentioning that the publisher used illustration as a tool to project the diverse world culture and followed a pattern of designing the book covers and selecting images for in-text illustration. To conclude, the illustrations in the world literature series minimize the gap between the author's intention and the reader's reception of the text by generating a visual image that stimulates the memory for better comprehension and remembrance.

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