



## A REVIEW OF TRANSLATION IN MARATHI

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### Abstract

*This paper provides an in-depth review of translation in Marathi, tracing its evolution from ancient religious texts to modern advancements. It highlights the profound historical role of translation in disseminating cultural and spiritual knowledge, as well as its later function as a tool for cultural transformation during the colonial period. Through case studies of translated literary works, it illustrates the diverse critical reception and the ongoing debates within the field. Finally, the paper identifies prominent scholars, journals, and institutions that have shaped Marathi translation studies, concluding with recommendations for fostering a more robust and visible translation ecosystem in the future.*

### Keywords

*Marathi Translation, Cultural Transmission, Colonial Influence, Nativism, Translation Evaluation, Dalit Literature, etc.*

### Full Article

Translation plays a crucial role in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, enabling the exchange of ideas, literature, and knowledge across different languages. Marathi, a prominent Indian language spoken by over 83 million people, has a rich literary and cultural heritage that has been influenced by and has contributed to various other languages through translation. The study of translation in Marathi encompasses historical, linguistic, cultural, and technological aspects that shape the way texts are rendered from and into the language. This research paper aims to review the evolution, challenges, and significance of translation in Marathi. It explores key periods in the history of Marathi translation, from early religious and literary works to contemporary adaptations of global literature. The paper also examines the theoretical frameworks applied in Marathi translation studies, including issues of fidelity, cultural adaptation, and linguistic nuances. Moreover, the study highlights the role of translators in shaping Marathi literature and the impact of technology on modern translation practices. By analyzing notable translated works and their reception, this paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how translation has contributed to the growth and diversification of Marathi literature and its interaction with other languages.

### **Historical Survey of Marathi Translation:**

Marathi, recognized as a classical language by the Government of India in October 2024, possesses a rich and extensive literary history that significantly predates many modern Indian languages. Its written form is evidenced as early as a 739 CE copper-plate inscription found in Satara. The language truly began to flourish as a literary medium during the Yadava period, particularly from the late 13th century onwards. During this era, Marathi literature was predominantly religious and philosophical, driven by the Mahanubhava and Warkari devotional sects. Influential saint-poets such as Dnyaneshwar, celebrated for his monumental works *Dnyaneshwari* (a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita) and *Amrutanubhav*, and Namdev, whose



religious songs even found their way into the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, were central to this period. Early prose works like Mukundaraja's *Vivekasindhu* and Mahimbhatta's *Līlācaritra* further cemented Marathi's status as a robust literary language. The translation of these profound religious and philosophical works, particularly those from the Bhakti and Varkari sects, was instrumental in extending their reach beyond the immediate Marathi-speaking community, contributing to their 'universal and contemporary appeal'. This early engagement with translation demonstrates its foundational function as a vital vehicle for cultural and religious transmission, enabling the spread of spiritual doctrines and cultural values across linguistic and geographical boundaries. The process was not merely a linguistic transfer but a crucial mechanism for shaping broader cultural discourse.

The 19th century ushered in a transformative era for Marathi translation with the advent of the colonial period, fundamentally reshaping the Marathi literary polysystem. This period introduced three primary models of translation: missionary, pedagogical, and commercial. American Missionaries, notably establishing the American Marathi Mission in Bombay in 1813, played a pivotal role. They set up the first press in Maharashtra in 1816, becoming instrumental in disseminating print culture and producing a wide array of Marathi materials, including tracts, textbooks, and religious translations, such as the New Testament. British officials, alongside Marathi pundits like Sadashiv Kashinath Chhatre and Balshashtri Jambhekar, also contributed significantly by translating English non-literary texts into Marathi. Early pedagogical translations, exemplified by Mahadevshastri Kolatkar's anthologies of translated poems, introduced novel themes such as love for family, longing for freedom, and human equality. These themes initially encountered resistance and "mockery" from the Marathi literary establishment, as they diverged significantly from traditional Marathi poetic conventions. However, despite this initial negative reception, these translated works ultimately influenced and shaped the sensibility of the emerging generation of modern Marathi poets, including Keshavsut and Tilak. This historical trajectory illustrates how translation during the colonial period functioned as a powerful tool for cultural hegemony and transformation, facilitating the introduction of new literary paradigms and reflecting the prevailing colonial cultural expectations. It was a top-down influence that reshaped literary tastes and forms.

After India's independence, the tradition of translating from Marathi into English persisted and evolved, largely driven by the efforts of bilingual authors. National institutions like Sahitya Akademi and state-level bodies such as the Sahitya Sanskruti Mandal have actively promoted and facilitated literary exchange by translating works between various Indian languages and into English. A significant contemporary development is the GyanSetu project, launched by the Somaiya School of Civilization Studies. This ambitious initiative aims to translate over 25 landmark global works across diverse disciplines—including economics, physics, psychology, history, and philosophy—into Marathi by the end of 2027. This project represents a strategic effort to enhance global academic access for Marathi readers and enrich Marathi intellectual discourse by providing foundational knowledge from around the world. The progression from early religious translations to colonial influence and then to this post-independence initiative signifies a profound shift in translation paradigms: from external influence to internal empowerment. The GyanSetu project, unlike earlier colonial endeavors, is driven by a desire to equip Marathi readers with global knowledge, positioning Marathi as a language actively engaging with and contributing to worldwide academic discourse on its own terms.

### **Evolution of Translation Studies in India with a Focus on Marathi:**



Translation Studies, as a distinct academic discipline, formally emerged in the 1980s, expanding its scope to interlink various disciplines and genres of study. In the Indian context, the development of this field was inherently necessitated by the nation's profound linguistic diversity, where translation has historically served as a vital means of cultural exchange and communication. India's multilingualism has always been viewed not as a "problem" but as a rich resource that enriches societies and promotes cultural pluralism. Maharashtra has made substantial and illustrious contributions to the broader field of Indian translation. The growth of translation culture in Marathi can be broadly categorized into distinct historical phases, with notable periods including 1825-1850, 1850-1875, and 1875-1900, each reflecting different influences and priorities. Early translation efforts received significant impetus from institutional initiatives, such as the Dakshina Prize Committee. Established by the British government in 1851, this committee aimed to reward high-quality translations and original writings, thereby boosting translation activity in Marathi. A landmark contribution to the institutionalization of translation was made by the great Marathi historian Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade, who founded *Bhāshāntar* in 1895. This journal was exclusively dedicated to publishing scholarly English works translated into Marathi, further solidifying translation's role in intellectual discourse. The establishment of such formal bodies and dedicated publications signifies a deliberate, institutionalized effort to promote and regulate translation. This move beyond individual, ad-hoc translation efforts indicates recognition of its strategic importance and its direct causal link to the accelerated development of translation practices and literary forms within Marathi. Translation played a major part in shaping modern Marathi prose.

In contemporary India, translation is recognized as far from a neutral or apolitical act; it is deeply intertwined with complex issues of power dynamics, identity construction, and cultural negotiation. A notable imbalance persists in academic and literary translations, where Western languages, particularly English, predominantly serve as the source or target. This results in Indian texts being translated into European languages more frequently than vice versa, a "one-way transaction" that raises critical questions about agency and representation. This disparity highlights existing power structures in global literary exchange. Conversely, translation is increasingly being leveraged as a powerful tool for resistance and empowerment. It actively brings marginalized voices—such as those from Dalit literature, tribal folktales, and women's writings—into mainstream discourse, thereby challenging entrenched socio-political structures and expanding literary horizons. This demonstrates translation's potential as a tool for social justice. This implies that Translation Studies in the Marathi context must critically engage with these socio-political dimensions, moving beyond purely textual analysis to examine how translation shapes and is shaped by societal power dynamics.

### **Translation Quality Evaluation:**

The evaluation of translation quality is a nuanced process, particularly in literary contexts, where assessment extends beyond mere linguistic accuracy to encompass communicative value and fidelity to the original text's essence. A comparative study of the original and translated works is considered crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the translation's beauty, intricacies, and any inherent lacunae. Deep knowledge of both the source and target languages are fundamental for translators to achieve accuracy and for evaluators to assess it effectively. Specific frameworks and tools have been developed to address the divergent needs of evaluating different translation types. For instance, in high-stakes domains such as medical translation, rigorous protocols are followed. The European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC) guidelines for translating patient questionnaires, such as the EORTC QLQ-H&N35 for Marathi-speaking head and neck squamous cell cancer (HNSCC) patients, exemplify a structured, multi-stage



process. This involves independent forward translations by native Marathi speakers, a reconciled translation, back translations into English by other independent fluent translators, and finally, pilot testing with the target patient population to ensure contextual accuracy and comprehensibility. This meticulous approach underscores the critical importance of precision and patient safety in specialized translation. In the realm of linguistic analysis for psychological and emotional states, a novel framework has been developed for the Marathi translation of the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) dictionary. This initiative aims to expand the utility of automated linguistic analysis to the Marathi-speaking population. The development process involves initial translation, wildcard expansion, dictionary expansion, linguistic analysis, wordlist development, cultural adaptation, and a rigorous validation process, including equivalence research. The performance of this translated dictionary is assessed based on its ability to accurately capture linguistic features, emotional tones, and psychological constructs within diverse Marathi text samples, demonstrating promising reliability and validity. Furthermore, the Multidimensional Quality Metrics (MQM) framework is employed to classify errors in both human and machine translations, providing qualitative insights into the differences between them. This framework helps establish the strengths and weaknesses of different translation types for specific language pairs, informing the training of human translators and guiding quality improvement efforts in machine translation. The varied methodologies for evaluation—from rigorous clinical validation to linguistic tool adaptation and error classification—highlight that "quality" in translation is not a monolithic concept. Different domains and purposes necessitate distinct assessment criteria and approaches.

### **Analysis of Translated Marathi Literature:**

The critical reception of translated Marathi literary works offers a nuanced perspective on the challenges and successes in bridging linguistic and cultural divides. Case studies across various genres illuminate the complexities involved. Novels: Bhalchandra Nemade's seminal Marathi novel, *Kosala*, translated as *Cacoon*, is widely regarded as a modern classic and a groundbreaking work in Marathi literature. Its reception was dual: while it faced a "hostile reception" from the Marathi establishment for its portrayal of the professorial class and its "profane world," it garnered an "enthusiastic following among readers of the younger generation". Its English translation is praised for successfully conveying the "Marathi ethos" despite the inherent challenges. Another notable example is Sachin Kundalkar's *Cobalt Blue*, translated by Jerry Pinto, which received acclaim for being "fluid, poetic and had the exact tints and textures of emotions as the original Marathi novel". This highlights the critical importance of cultural and emotional fidelity in literary translation. Conversely, the translation of popular foreign novels like *The White Tiger*, *The Da Vinci Code*, and *The Alchemist* into Marathi has been studied specifically for the "problem of equivalences". This demonstrates that even for widely accessible global works, the theoretical challenges of translation remain pertinent when adapting them to the Marathi linguistic and cultural context. The critical reception of translated Marathi novels thus operates on two levels: assessing the original work's literary merit and evaluating the translation's success in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps while maintaining artistic integrity.

The translation of Marathi poetry has been a particularly contentious area. Dilip Chitre's *Anthology of Marathi Poetry 1945-65* faced extensive and severe criticism from Bhalchandra Nemade. Nemade pointed out numerous flaws, including "mistakes of English grammar, spelling errors, clumsy notes on contributors, repetition of the name of the translator page after page, unattractive cover, inadequate equivalents, hackneyed phrases, irrelevant but attractive expressions, paraphrases, wordiness, improper rhythm, loose and dazzling words". Nemade famously dismissed Chitre's endeavor as a "programme of no importance". This detailed, scathing criticism reveals an evolving critical standard for poetic translation in Marathi. Earlier



translated poems, introduced during the colonial period, were initially "mocked" for expressing themes divergent from traditional Marathi poetic traditions. However, these same translations later played a significant role in shaping the sensibility of modern Marathi poets. This suggests that robust criticism, even if harsh, is vital for the maturation of translation practices and for establishing benchmarks for quality, pushing translators to address deeper nuances beyond literal rendering. Furthermore, the translation of Dalit poetry, exemplified by anthologies like Arjun Dangle's *Poisoned Bread*, has been crucial in bringing marginalized voices and their unique experiences into wider literary discourse.

Marathi drama was insufficiently represented in English translation. However, this situation began to change significantly in the 1980s and 1990s, with substantial translations of works by prominent playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar (e.g., *Sakharam Binder*, *Silence*, *The Court is in Session*), G. P. Deshpande, Satish Alekar, Shanta Ghokale, and Mahesh Elkunchwar.

Modern Marathi short stories have also found their way into English translation, with some works appearing in American, Canadian, English, and Indian journals. *Of Closures & New Beginnings* by Saniya, skillfully translated by Keerti Ramachandra, has been praised for its graceful description of the feelings and predicaments of urban Indian women, effectively capturing the emotional nuances of the original.

### Notable Examples:

The critical landscape surrounding Marathi translations is vibrant, marked by significant engagements and ongoing debates among prominent scholars. Bhalchandra Nemade, a distinguished novelist, critic, and a key proponent of the Nativism theory, stands out for his incisive critiques of translated works. His detailed critique of Dilip Chitre's *Anthology of Marathi Poetry 1945-65* is particularly notable, where he identified a range of linguistic and stylistic errors and questioned the selection criteria, ultimately deeming the venture "of no importance". Nemade's criticisms also extended to the broader challenges of transmitting Marathi literature abroad. Vilas Sarang, another influential scholar and translator, has highlighted a "bothersome tendency among Marathi bilingual translators to substitute vivid images or metaphors with abstract, generalized ideas". He provided a specific example from Chitre's translation of Vinda Karandikar's poem, illustrating how a culturally specific image conveying "socialist awareness" was wrongly rendered as "classical fatalism". G. N. Devy, director of the Somaiya School of Civilization Studies and a key figure behind the GyanSetu project, has pointed out the peculiar situation of the "non-existent audience for English theatre in India," despite a large readership for printed English. This observation highlights a significant market barrier for translated Marathi drama. Kiran Nagarkar, a celebrated author who wrote in both Marathi and English, has openly discussed the economic realities facing translators, noting their "poorly paid" status and the "laughable" profits from translations. He emphasized that translation is far more than linguistic substitution; it is "taking one culture and replacing it with another".

These critical examples collectively reveal a complex interplay of economic realities, critical discourse, and the potential for canonization of translated works. The observations by Nemade, Sarang, and Devy demonstrate that critical reception is not solely about aesthetic judgment but also involves ideological stances (such as Nemade's Nativism) and market dynamics (like Devy's audience analysis). Nagarkar's points about translator compensation directly link the economic viability of translation to the quality and quantity of output. This suggests that the "success" or "failure" of translated Marathi works is a complex outcome shaped by literary merit, translational skill, rigorous critical scrutiny, and the underlying economic and institutional support (or lack thereof). Effective criticism, therefore, needs to address these systemic issues, not just textual flaws, to foster a healthier translation ecosystem.



### Key Figures in Marathi Translation Studies:

The field of Marathi translation studies has been shaped by a diverse array of scholars, translators, and critics across different historical periods. Historical Figures who laid foundational groundwork include the Saint-Poets such as Dnyaneshwar, Namdev, Mukundaraja, Eknath, Tukaram, and Mukteshwar, whose original works formed the basis for early translations and significantly influenced Marathi literature. During the colonial era, early translators and pundits like William Carey, George Jervis, Thomas Candy, Sadashiv Kashinath Chhatre, Hari Keshavji Pathare, and Balshashtri Jambhekar were instrumental in translating English non-literary texts into Marathi. Major Candy notably published "Hints for the Guidance of Translators" in 1850.

Justine E. Abbot, an American missionary, undertook pioneering work in translating almost all Marathi saint poetry into English, culminating in *The Poet-Saints of Maharashtra* series. His approach aimed to let the saints "speak for themselves" and marked him as an "insider" to Marathi culture. Mahadevshastri Kolatkar introduced American literature to Marathi readers through his translated poetry anthologies. The historian Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade made a significant contribution by founding the journal *Bhāshāntar* in 1895, dedicated to scholarly English works in Marathi translation. In the realm of drama, Priya Adarkar, Shanta Shahane, and Kumud Mehta were key translators of Marathi plays into English. Contemporary Scholars, Translators, and Critics continue to drive the field forward. Bhalchandra Nemade is a prominent novelist, critic, and a leading proponent of Nativism, well-known for his critiques of translations. Dilip Chitre, a celebrated poet, translator, and filmmaker, translated Tukaram's poems in *Says Tuka* and edited *Anthology of Marathi Poetry 1945-65*. Vilas Sarang, a distinguished scholar and translator, authored *The stylistics of literary translation: A study with reference to English and Marathi* and provided critical commentary on abstract substitutions in translations. Arjun Dangle has significantly contributed to Dalit literature in translation, editing works like *A corpse in the well* and *Poisoned Bread*. G. N. Devy, director of the Somaiya School of Civilization Studies, leads the ambitious GyanSetu translation project and has commented on audience issues for English theatre.

Kiran Nagarkar, an author, has voiced concerns about translator remuneration and the cultural transfer inherent in translation. Sunanda Mahajan co-edits a quarterly journal publishing Marathi translations of foreign literary texts. Prafull Shiledar edits the Marathi literary quarterly *Yugvani*, which actively publishes translated poetry. Lastly, Keerti Ramachandra is recognized for her skillful translation of Saniya's short stories in *Of Closures & New Beginnings*. The extensive list of scholars and translators, spanning historical figures to contemporary academics and practitioners, demonstrates that expertise in Marathi translation is not confined to a single era or discipline. It involves literary figures, linguists, cultural critics, and even computer scientists working on Machine Translation. This conveys that a holistic understanding of Marathi translation requires acknowledging this diverse lineage and the inherently interdisciplinary nature of the field. The inclusion of figures like Nemade and Chitre who also engaged in critical dialogue further underscores the self-reflexive and evolving nature of the field.

### Academic Journals and Publishing Initiatives:

The infrastructure for academic discourse and publishing in Marathi translation, while facing challenges, is supported by a number of dedicated and generalist journals and publishing initiatives. Dedicated Marathi Translation Journals have played a crucial role. *Bhāshāntar*, founded by Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade in 1895, was historically devoted to publishing scholarly English works in Marathi translation. More recently, *Yugvani*, an oldest running Marathi literary quarterly since 1946, regularly publishes Indian and world poetry in Marathi translation,



aiming to nurture creative minds and expand literary sensibility. Additionally, a quarterly journal co-edited by Sunanda Mahajan specifically publishes Marathi translations of literary texts from various foreign languages, though its name is not specified in the available information. General Literary and Academic Journals Featuring Marathi Translations or Criticism also contributes significantly. *Anuvad*, a bilingual quarterly journal published by Bharatiya Anuvad Parishad, focuses on translation theory and practice across India. Other Marathi literary journals that have shaped Marathi reading and literary culture over the years include *Jnanprakash* (1849-1951), *Anushtubh*, *Satyakatha*, *Asmitadarsh*, *Abhiruchi*, *Kavitarati*, *Marathi Sanshodhan Patrika*, and *Samaj Prabodhan Patrika*, among others. In the English language, periodicals such as *Bombay Literary Review*, *The New Quest*, *Indian Literature* (Sahitya Akademi's journal), *The Little Magazine*, *The Atlantic Quarterly*, and *Literary Olympics* have featured Marathi fiction and poetry in English translation. A significant new initiative is *Transarea*, a peer-reviewed research journal launched by the Somaiya School of Civilization Studies, dedicated to interdisciplinary studies including literature and philosophy, indicating a new platform for scholarly dialogue and intellectual exchange. While there is a recognized "dearth of good reviewing" and a perception that translated texts are not fully integrated into mainstream literary criticism, the existence of numerous journals and new initiatives suggests a fragmented but growing infrastructure. The fact is that *Yugvani* actively publishes translations and *Bhāshāntar* historically did so indicate dedicated platforms, even if their impact on broader critical discourse is sometimes limited. This implies that while challenges remain, there is an underlying, albeit under-resourced, ecosystem supporting translation and its critical review in Marathi. The issue might be less about absence and more about visibility, funding, and integration into mainstream literary criticism.

### Conclusion:

This comprehensive review reflects the dynamic and multifaceted nature of translation in Marathi. Historically, translation has been a powerful force, initially serving as a vehicle for cultural and religious transmission in ancient times, then transforming into a tool for cultural transformation during the colonial period and more recently, evolving into a means of internal intellectual empowerment. The field is deeply rooted in complex theoretical frameworks, particularly the concept of equivalence, which, despite its centrality, faces inherent limitations in fully capturing the holistic meaning of culturally rich texts. The indigenous theory of Nativism further emphasizes the critical importance of conveying cultural ethos, highlighting the challenges posed by culturally loaded words that defy direct translation.

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