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A Question in Bible Translation.

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AMONG the first questions which a translator of the Bible in North India has to meet and decide, is the use or avoidance of the honorific pronoun *ap*, and the corresponding respectful forms of the verbs. Shall we use these where they would be properly in place in ordinary Hindi or Urdu? or shall we follow the different usage of the Hebrew and the Greek, and always literally render the second person singular? That, in general, we should seek to be literal, and beware lest instead of translators we become commentators, all will agree. Yet, on the other hand, when the literal rendering of the original would defeat the very object of the translator, by concealing the true meaning or spirit of the original, or by giving an erroneous impression regarding it, it will be generally conceded, no doubt, that such excessive literality would be a mistake.

Thus the translator who should *e.g.*, render literally the Hebrew idiom, *mille yadh*, "to fill the hand," as used in the Pentateuch for the act of consecrating the priests, would by this literality, whether in English, Hindi, or Urdu, conceal from the ordinary reader the sense of the original. The guiding principle would seem to be that the translator should constantly endeavour by imagination to put himself in the position of a Hindu or Mohammedan in the circumstances described, and seek to express himself as he would.

But, if so, are we not led to conclude that to render literally in all cases the 2nd personal pronoun, in Biblical narrations of conversation, is a mistake, such that in following thus the letter, we shall almost inevitably conceal or misrepresent, in many instances, the spirit of the original? It is not to be forgotten that the Hebrews were by no means indifferent to the use of respectful phraseology; though, to some extent, Hebrew differs in this from the Indian languages. Such idioms, for instance, as the use of the proper name or title of the person addressed, instead of the pronoun, as *e.g.*, "my lord," "the king," etc., etc., and therewith the 3rd person of the verb, instead of the 2nd—idioms in no wise foreign to Hindi or Urdu—will occur to every one; as also the use of the Heb. *uc* or *bi*, as sometimes illustrating the same fact. There is then no reason to doubt that in such ways as the idiom and genius of their language permitted, the Hebrews, like most Orientals, were careful to speak in forms of respect and deference whenever such were due.

If then, in the translations of conversations in which the speaker, if he had been a North India Hindoo or Mohammedan, would doubtless have used *ap*, *hucur*, or some equivalent word, together with the third person, plural of the verb, or some one of its precativ forms—conversations in which for him to have used *tu* instead

would have been the extreme of discourtesy—we nevertheless insist on following in Hindi or Urdu, the so different Hebrew idiom; are we not, to those unfamiliar with our Bible and our western ways, inevitably misrepresenting, more or less, the tone and spirit of the speakers in such a conversation? And do we not, in so far, by our very literality, practically mistranslate the original? Can we imagine, for example, that in such a conference as is narrated in Gen. xxiii, between Abraham and the children of Heth, marked by the most deferential tone and exquisite courtesy on both sides, these, had they been Hindoos or Mohammedans of North India, would have "tu'ed" each other? or, again, is it conceivable that the sister of Moses, in the conversation recorded in Ex. ii., a slave girl, as she was, if she had been, instead, a Hindoo young woman of North India, would have addressed a princess of the blood royal with *tu*, any more than the latter, on the other hand, if a Hindoo *Raikunwari* would ever have thought of using *ap* in speaking to this slave girl?

A special question arises, however, in this connection as to the use or otherwise of *ap* and other honorific words in addresses to God, as in prayer and adoration. In this case, for reasons to be given hereafter, the present writer would strictly hold to the use of the 2nd person singular, in the pronoun and in verbs. Yet another question, distinct from this, arises as to the rule to be followed in the rendering of the conversations of the historical Christ, as recorded in the Gospels, but into that we will not enter now.

A single word as to the value of the judgment of native opinion on this subject. It appears to the writer that, in the first place, the judgment of native Christians, which is exceptionally valuable in many cases, needs in this instance to be received with caution. The most of these have been for a considerable time under missionary influence, and have also become *familiar* with translations of the Scriptures in which, whether rightly or wrongly *tu* has been kept throughout. It would seem to be practically almost impossible that their judgment should not be unconsciously influenced by these circumstances. Again, for a different reason, it seems to the writer that often the judgment of a Mohammedan on this quest on will need also to be taken with some reservation. For, if he understand that this is the question of translating what he, equally with the Christian, believes to be the Word of God we must then remember with what slavish literality the Mohammedan believes that the Quran, because by him supposed to be also God's word, should be translated: a literality which makes the Hindustani translation of the Quran to be anything but pleasant reading. Can he then well avoid feeling in proportion as he is intelligent in his own faith, that the same principle should be followed in translating the *Taurat* or *Injil*, and that therefore on no account is anything but *tu* to be used where *'allah* or *'at* is in the Hebrew expressed or understood?

It is then, in the judgment of the writer, from intelligent Hindoos who have been as little as possible under European and missionary influence, that we are most likely to get an unbiased and correct judgment on this question; and, as a general rule, he has observed in his own experience, that such most commonly prefer decidedly the use of the various honorific forms in translation under all conditions in which they would have been used had the conversation narrated taken place in Hindi or Urdu, instead of Hebrew or Greek. But more, perhaps, on this subject, at a future time.