Need for a Translation Institute— A Point to Ponder

By Lavina Ambreen Ahmed

EVERY nation tries to project a favourable image of itself to the outside world. One of the best ways of going about the task is through literature. Our literary works provide an insight into the history, social norms and cultural heritage of Bangladesh that enable foreigners to get a better understanding about the land and its people.

When Bangladesh came in to being, there were many dreams and expectations of the citizens. Many thought that in an independent country there would not be any major obstacle to impede the enhancement of culture. Yet, after twenty five years of Independence, the efforts taken to present the complete picture of our country appear to be paltry. Interestingly, we don't have a translation institute that can publish the translated versions of selected Bengali works. More importantly, do we need an independent translation institute to bridge the gap between languages? Or should it function under Bangla Academy? In this write-up prominent personalities who have contributed a great deal to our literature, share their opinions on the subject.

Most often than not Bangla Academy gets the blame, as translation work falls under the institution's responsibilities. Its job is not only to encourage research projects in Bangla, but also to take the initiative of translating some of our best novels.

It is disappointing to note however that, since its inception way back in 1955 Bangla Academy has not given due importance to setting up a department for translation.

Prof Syed Anwar Hossain, the DG of Bangla Academy firmly agrees that a translation department is a must for the academy. This department will be devoted exclusively to the various aspects of translation.

At present, the largest and the oldest research institute of the country boasts only a small unit comprising 4/5 members handling translation jobs "One of the main problems of the Academy is manpower constraint. We need to increase the number of employees before we can consider expansion or decide to take on additional obligations."

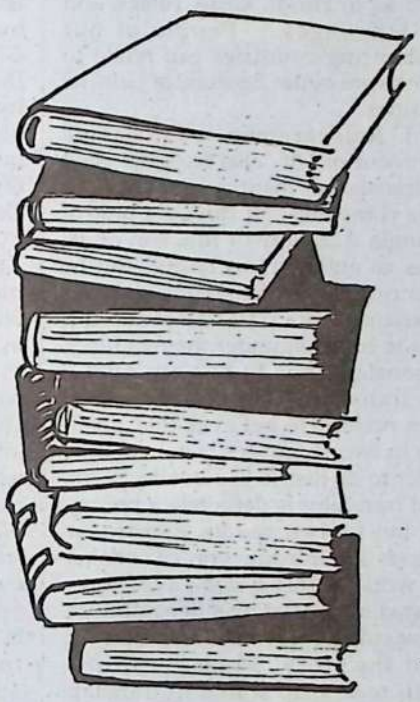
But he is confident that if the resources are there, such as — adequate and competent staff and financial support, then running the department should not be a difficult job. To attain best results ,it must also be free from bureaucratic hurdles.

There are also other problems that the Academy faces, whenever it undertakes a translation project. "The dearth of capable translators is perhaps the biggest of them all." — the DG enlightens. "Often we have in our possession manuscripts that are worthy of translation. But finding an expert who is keen on taking the assignment and ensuring that s/he delivers it on time becomes a tedious chore." Infact, the academy's main grievance is not lack of funds, but the unavailability of efficient translators.

Savs the DG, whenever we organise seminars and workshops inviting participants from all over the country, we get a lot of promises of cooperation. But in the end, very few keep their commitments."

However, the good news is that Bangla Academy has chalked out a proposal for recommendations . If the necessary changes are implemented the Academy will get a translation department in its premises.

Prof Sirajul Islam Chowdhury of the English Department of Dhaka University is of the opinion that there should be an autonomous body for translation. But his reason is different. He believes that such an institute is mandatory not only to project our image abroad, but primarily for academic purposes. He elaborates: "The quality of education has gone from bad to worse. The fact that there is only about 5% text books available in Bengali for higher studies is responsible for the poor standard of education in our country. Attempts are not taken to translate text books in to Bengali. Since, our's is not a bilingual society and we do not have the resources to move towards bilingualism, we have to produce more text books in Benguli. That is where translation steps in." He believes that by imposing English on students we are only creating mediocre graduates who lack efficiency and confidence.



Talking about the translation of our literary works, Prof Chowdhury believes that before thinking about projecting our literature, we have to develop it and make sure its not below par. "More emphasis should be given to the enrichment of culture, rather than the projection of it"

Chowdhury also perceives that translation work should be directed towards a certain region. "Instead of trying to attract the Anglo-Saxon readers , we should target the South Asia-