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SOME DIMENSIONS OF TRANSLATING OR WRITING ABOUT HEGEL IN URDU

by Ashfaq Saleem Mirza*

Abstract. In this short testimony, I will recount my personal experience of studying and lecturing on Hegel in Pakistan. I will underline the difficulties brought about by the lack of philosophical texts in Urdu along with the lack of interest in and perhaps even aversion toward Hegel in Pakistani universities. I will describe how I have approached Hegel's philosophy after a thorough study of Marxism. Furthermore, I will sketch the composition of the current Urdu philosophical language. Finally, I will give some examples of the expressions I proposed in my works to translate Hegel's terminology before the first Hegelian writing was translated into Urdu in 2019.

Keywords. Hegel in Urdu; Translation; Philosophy in Pakistan; Philosophy of History; Marxism

Generally speaking, in the universities of Pakistan where philosophy is taught on the masters' level, least attention is paid to Hegel's philosophy. The books of history of philosophy, which are generally read or prescribed to be read, do not cover the chapters on Hegel comprehensively; or with little interest. The readers have to depend on the material available in Urdu in translated books of history of philosophy by Russell and Durant, where Hegel is not more than just mentioned¹. The only exceptions during my readings was Coplestone whose coverage is exhaustive and comprehensive. Unlike the other English speaking writers, he pays a lot of attention to Hegel.

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¹ The more popular of the two is Will Durant's *Story of Philosophy* which pays more attention to Schopenhauer and Voltaire. The same is the case with Bertrand Russell who in his *History of Western Philosophy* after preliminary introduction says «Hegel's philosophy is very difficult – He is I should say the hardest to understand of all the great philosophers» (B. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 701).

Nevertheless, Coplestone's works did not open the way for my access to Hegel. It was really Marx and Engels who directed my attention towards the great German Philosopher. Fascinated by Marx's dialectical materialism I was keen to know about its original sources. That led me to the name of Hegel and Feuerbach, respectively for dialectics and materialism.

Small dictionaries of philosophy prepared for Urdu readers in Pakistan translating English terms mostly depend on Arabic terms translated by Arabian thinkers while dealing with Greek philosophers. Consequently, the chapters on modern philosophy were left unattended in these dictionaries. They only accommodated little from modern philosophy. There was a time when Jamia Usmania of Deccan started a project of translating books of philosophy in Urdu and, along with other philosophers, German philosophers like Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were translated, but not Hegel.

So a person like me who started reading Hegel from the *Phenomenology of Mind*, the *Science of Logic* and the *Philosophy of History* stood in an empty field in this regard. When I took interest of writing on Hegel in Urdu I was mostly empty handed. I found it very difficult to proceed on this untrodden path, so I was left with no option but to translate various concepts of Hegel on my own.

Before coming to that, it was necessary to grasp the true spirit of Hegel's Philosophy. In German language, the word 'Geist' is used both for mind and spirit. So one can say that to proceed further in this direction, it was necessary to comprehend the 'Geist' of Hegel. It required a lot of reading from Hegel's own text. For me the key to Hegel's understanding was a sentence: «The finite not only alters, like something in general, but it *ceases to be*; and its ceasing to be is not merely a possibility, so that it could be without ceasing to be, but the being as such of finite things is to have the germ of decease as their being-within-self: the hour of their birth is the hour of their death»². This sentence from the *Science of Logic* opened me the gate to study Hegel in detail.

² G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. by A.V. Miller, foreword by J.N. Findlay, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1969, p. 129.

The next concept which gripped me was Hegel's introduction of a new method for philosophy that revolutionized the whole mood of philosophy. I agree with Novack when he points out that «Hegel must be regarded as the founder of modern logic, just as Copernicus was the father of modern astronomy, Harvey of Physiology and Dalton of Chemistry. As matter of fact, since Hegel, not a single new law of dialectic has been discovered in addition to those listed by him»³.

As I mentioned earlier, at that time there was not a proper book of philosophy in Urdu. Recently, in 2019, National Language Authority of Pakistan has published Hegel's *Philosophy of History*. It was translated by two persons. One of them died translating the earlier chapters and the last chapter was translated by my friend Dr. Iqbal Afaqi. But no one endeavored to translate the *Science of Logic* or the *Phenomenology of Mind*.

So I had no precedent before me to avail proper translation of Hegel's concepts or terminology. I reverted back to my comprehension of Hegel to find proper wording for his basic concept of philosophy. Though I got some, but not much help from two dictionaries of philosophy in Urdu. So I have to coin my own concepts in Urdu depending on my comprehension of Hegel's thought.

Moreover, many translations available of Marx and Engels which were published in Moscow during the Soviet era were available. Those were later on published in Pakistan, after the fall of the Soviet Union, by two or three publishers. In this regard, works of Sher Jang and Syed Sibte Hassan were of great help in borrowing terms from their works which were published in Urdu.

It was a great job but my keen interest in interpreting Hegel in Urdu made it easy. I tried this in my first book *What is Philosophy – a New Materialist Interpretation* published by Fiction House, Lahore in Urdu. It opened the way for further works on Hegel in Urdu. This exercise gave me a new confidence and impetus which made other phases of this task easier for me.

³ G. Novack, *An Introduction to the Logic of Marxism*, New York, Pathfinder Press, 1971, p. 55.

Every philosopher has his own style of writing which is different sometimes even from the philosophers born in the same milieu. This can also be seen during the time in which their culture flourished. I saw and discovered this particularly in the writings of German thinkers and I have come to the conclusion that Hegel has his own peculiar style different from Kant and Fichte. So while interpreting or translating any philosopher in Urdu or any other language are you able to grasp the nuances of that style or not. If you are not close to that, you will not be able to convey to the readers in Urdu. I don't know how far I was successful in making my readers to understand of what I comprehend from the original text of Hegel or from the text of his interpreters. After inquiring readers who keenly read my articles I received a positive answer from them. Some of them who were not well versed with philosophical text complained about the difficult language while discussing Hegel in my articles. Later on, in the later writings, I made it a point to use the language which is more accessible to reader.

Next to style, the other major difference is culture. We in the subcontinent South Asia, who write in Urdu, live in a totally different cultural environment than German states of 18th and 19th Century. We have not been able to develop the culture of reading philosophy or to opting it as a subject at university level. In general, our behavior pattern mostly lacks logic thinking due to influence of various religious schools who try to inculcate love for other worldliness in the mind of a child in the early years of his mental development. Sometimes it becomes very difficult to select the subject of philosophy in college and university due to two main distinct reasons. One reason is that philosophy, as I just mentioned, is considered to be a push towards atheism and this is not acceptable to the society in general and parents in particular. The second is that there is less scope of getting some job if you get a master's degree in philosophy. This keeps you unemployed unless you get a job as teacher in some college for teaching philosophy which is difficult in a society that does not have the capacity to absorb the importance of the subject.

While introducing his new concepts and terminology, in historicity and dialectics, Hegel is very innovative and peculiar. He does not fall back on previous use of philosophical language in the tradition of German Idealism. Actually it was not suitable for his mode of philosophical thought. So he coined his own terminology to communicate with the readers. His dialectical method, which he does not like to be termed metaphysical, explains and gives new meaning to terms like 'Being', 'Nothing', and 'Becoming'. Comprehending these terms and translating them in Urdu while conveying the real mind or spirit of Hegel was not an easy task. After comprehending these terms as I could, I made it a point to be as close to Hegel as I could be.

I prize especially Hegel's concept of passion plays the key role in determining the historical circumstances. He makes it a motivating force in the life of historical personalities like Alexander, Julius Caesar and Napoleon. This passion pushes them towards the great deeds in their lives and ultimately to the door step of death, but leaves a mark on annals of history. If one wants to understand the role of Heroes in Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, all these concepts are interrelated dialectically in his thought.

Next a very important concept in Hegel's philosophy is that of freedom. Freedom when analyzed in the structure of Civil Society and State is the key concept in determining the role of individual in the modern state. He thinks an individual gets full freedom while playing an important part in the modern concept of state.

Then there was a very interesting concept of 'Cunning of Reason' which is the core concept of Hegel while describing the true nature of historical personalities in his *Philosophy of History*. I translated it in Urdu as 'Ayare Aqal', which is much appreciated by my friends who are keen to read Hegel in Urdu.

After the death of Hegel and his philosophy both propagated by Right and Left Hegelian has played the important role in philosophical movement. One can see the strong influences of it in existentialism and in all shades of postmodernism. Up to Derrida and in the thoughts of modern French philosophers, the modern linguistic thoughts in the subcontinent in Urdu reflects all shades of the original thoughts of Hegel. So I felt it important to introduce Hegel in Urdu.

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