

## HONORIFICS IN INDIA

One problem which confronts the translator into many languages of India is that of the translation of Greek personal pronouns, for in Greek there is only one form of each whereas many of our languages have three forms of the second person pronoun as well as distinctions in the third (and in some cases the first) person.

In many early translations (not in all), it was decided to "translate" by using only one equivalent for each Greek pronoun. This is no longer considered satisfactory and much thought has been given to alternatives. We invited three persons who have been considering the issues involved to write a few notes on the solutions advocated by their particular revision committee. We believe the resulting symposium will interest translators and revisers in other languages. We shall be glad if it also stimulates discussion and elicits information. <sup>1</sup>

### IN THE MARATHI NEW TESTAMENT

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Marathi has three pronouns in the second person. These are *tu*, *tumhi* and *apan*. *Tu* is singular "thou", and is used in addressing a child, a servant or an inferior. It is also used familiarly among very close friends. Children use it in addressing their mother (but not their father) and then of course it carries affection. It is used respectfully to God, in prayer. At all other times the use of *tu* would be definitely insolent or derogatory. *Tumhi* is plural "you". It is used when more than one individual is addressed. But it is also ordinarily used in addressing any one individual when the use of *tu* as described above would not be appropriate. Hence it is the common ordinary word that strangers, acquaintances and friends will use in speaking to one another courteously and casually. The third word, *apan* is still more courteous and will be used when it is desired to be especially polite to the one addressed. *Tumhi* and *apan* are plural in form, and all words in the sentence that are governed by them will therefore have plural inflexions even when the sense is singular.

Since Greek and Hebrew have only simple "thou" and "you", without any complications depending on the degree of respect intended (though such respect is often clearly shown by the use of *Kurios*, 'Sir', etc.) the problem is whether to use *tu* always for the second person singular, or sometimes also *tumhi* and *apan* depending on the occasion.

Earlier translations had consistently used *tu* in order to be literally faithful to the text. But the Marathi reader would often be confused. For example, when Paul, arrested by the soldiers, wants permission to

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address the crowd from the castle steps, he respectfully asks the chief captain, "May I speak unto thee?" A Marathi reader, seeing here the derogatory *tu* where the most polite *apan* would obviously have been used, would quite naturally expect the next sentence to record that the chief captain slapped him on the mouth for such rudeness, instead of meekly inquiring about his Greek. When Tertullus the orator so obviously flattering the "most noble Felix" at the beginning of his speech, spoils all the effect by using *tu* as he would to a servant, a Marathi reader will feel like laughing aloud at the joke.

Because of such glaring anomalies the previous revision substituted *apan* in such places. But it retained the use of *tu* in all cases where Christ was involved, lest failure to do so might seem a slight to His deity. This resulted (from the uninitiated Marathi reader's viewpoint) in an even greater anomaly. Christ, the hero of the story, is addressed by the derogatory *tu* while lesser men are politely called *apan* or *tumhi*.

As a *guru* (religious teacher) Christ would be expected to use *tu* to His disciples, while they addressed him as *apan*. Those who came to seek his favour, such as the leper, or even Nicodemus at his evening visit, would certainly use the polite *apan*. Even the Pharisees seeking to ensnare Him in His speech, and while arguing with Him publicly, would, for appearance sake alone use nothing lower than *tumhi*. About the only time in the Gospels when *tu* used to Christ would be appropriate to the situation, from a Marathi point of view, is when He is mocked by the soldiers. The disciples would, as chums, use the familiar *tu* to one another in their own circle, but on more formal occasions when addressing each other in public, they would likely use *tumhi* lest strangers present might misinterpret the former term as disrespectful.

Our present revision is therefore using what is felt to be the appropriate pronoun in each place, whether it refers to Christ or to ordinary persons. We feel that in doing this we are certainly translating the "spirit" of the Greek, in which no sense of inferiority is denoted by the singular pronoun, and where obvious respect is very often shown to Christ.

In Marathi, when the writer is writing of one for whom he cherishes respect and affection the plural of respect would also be used in the third person. For example, an admirer of Mahatma Gandhi, in writing his biography, would speak of him as "they" or "them". If our Gospel writers had been writing in Marathi today, they would undoubtedly have used this style. That is, they would have said "They went" for "He went" and "They did" for "He did", etc. Verbs and other words in the sentence that agree in number with the subject would all be in the plural.

Naturally, to translate this way raises problems. In order to make it clear that Jesus alone, and not the whole group, went, we would have to substitute the name "Jesus" for the respectful pronoun "they".

Also on this principle, the apostles, Paul, Barnabas, and others, should all be referred to in the respectful plural.

However, when a Marathi writer is writing in a detached and objective way, especially as a historian relating events hundreds of years past, he would use the singular in the third person, and not the plural of respect. So we, in our revision, have retained the singular form of the pronoun in the third person. In doing so, the writers may appear a little more detached than they actually were, but a Marathi reader is not jarred by any sense of incongruity. We have used the plural forms of respect only in the second person, that is, when the speakers' actual words are, as it were, being quoted.

A problem arose when we came to the great confessions of Peter in John 6 and Matthew 16. Here Peter seems to recognize Christ as more than man, and we wondered if we should here use the *tu* denoting deity. But we felt that if we used that term in these instances we would not be able to revert afterwards to *tumhi* or *apan* as far as the disciples were concerned. We then took guidance in this matter from the many modern English translations for at this point the problem is exactly the same for Marathi and English. We found these translations, including the Berkeley Bible, the Amplified New Testament, Williams, and other versions, all of which we knew were unquestionably loyal to the concept of Christ's deity, had used the plural form "you" as one would address a man, and not "thou" as one would address God, throughout the Gospels, even in the two instances mentioned. We have therefore similarly used *tumhi* or *apan* throughout the Gospels.

After His glorification, however, certified to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead, the situation is different. When Jesus is addressed in the book of Acts and elsewhere He is unquestionably addressed as God. Therefore, in Acts 9, for example, when Saul asks, "Who art *thou*, Lord?" and when Ananias in his prayer, addresses Christ and says, "I have heard . . . how much evil he has done to *thy* saints," we have used the singular forms to denote His deity.

#### IN THE REVISED HINDI NEW TESTAMENT

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A special feature of the current work of revising the Hindi New Testament is the use of "honorific" forms of address. The Hindi language is sensitive to the status of the person addressed in conversation. It is also sensitive to the status of a third party about whom one may speak. In the former case, there are three ways of addressing a person: (1) By the second person singular, equivalent to "thou" and "thee" in English. This is used either for a relationship of special intimacy or affection, or for contempt and cursing. Circumstances and context will determine which meaning is intended. In the area of religion the second person singular is appropriate for the intimacy that