

Note on the Interpretation of "Pasidati"

IT might be taken for granted that translation, whatever its modes, could be described as an attempt to express the intention of one language in words of another. This involves the translation of words. But the connotations of a word in one language rarely "express" those of its "equivalent." Some ideas are missing, some others are added, according to the specific ideology of the people who speak the language. Words are created if the need arises to name an object or to express an idea. Even objects of use, however, are very different in various parts of the world and during different periods of history. How much more ideas! This difficulty is not so great in languages spoken by people of the same cultural group and of the same

1. See I. A. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*. (Kegan Paul), p. 135 on "express" and A. K. Coomaraswamy's review of *The Meaning of Meaning*, in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1933.

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historical period, but even there certain expressions seem to be extremely troublesome to the translator. For instance there is the word "Weltanschauung," which today belongs not only to the vocabulary of the German philosopher but to that of the German grocer too. It cannot be "translated," only described and explained, and in most European languages it is used in its original form. It must be that this term names something special in the history of German thinking with which there does not coincide any single word in English or French. At any rate it is easy enough to explain. But the difficulty seems insurmountable in approaching ideas which are expressed in a language in use among people of a different cultural group, and which developed in historical times very far from those of the language in which it has to be translated. This is due to the fact, that the social circumstances and the ideology in which the language roots, and the subjects this language usually deals with, are extremely remote from those of the translator. The translator usually makes the mistake, instead of emphasising the variance in the meanings, of trying to force the foreign ideas into a parallel with his own. This has not only the result that the ideas are distorted, but that the reader who approaches the subject with the armour of his own ideology, will resist the differences. He is likely to be open only to his own ideas.

This "bending of the ideas towards each other" is not deliberate on the part of the translator. His thinking is strongly determined by his own ideological background, and notions which do not fit in may remain unnoticed. But values are not eternal and not everywhere identical, and ways of thinking in different societies differ. Approaching every idea with doubt will prevent ideological differences from being forgotten.

In the diverse translations of the Pali texts this "bending of the ideas towards each other" takes place to such an extent that it is nearly impossible for the average reader to appreciate the special character of Western and Eastern religions. The use of the word "Gospel" for the Doctrine of the Buddha, the word "Sabbath" for the *uposatha* days, the word "Lent" for *vassa*, implies that the contents of every religion must be the same, and that a parallel will make it easier to the reader to understand. But just the opposite is true. The reader is at least as lax as the translator, and will be content, that the *uposatha* days are a sort of Sabbath. He is not reminded of the fact, that Sabbath and Lent have not the same history and not the same moral ideas as *uposatha* days or *vassa*. T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, Galmers, Woodward, Childers and the PTS Dictionary, all apparently agreeing on the very great differences in the Pali and English expressions "for convenience sake"—as Childers expresses it—find these translations acceptable.

Though the sense of these expressions is misleading, let us accept the plea of convenience. But there is another instance, which shows much more nearly arbitrariness in the translation of a word. The meaning which the translator gives varies according to the context. In each instance his own

attitude is reproduced, and it is altogether forgotten that the use of one special word in the various contexts of its original might give insight into the mental attitude of the people whose social, cultural, emotional poise it expresses. The word I refer to is *pasādati*.

The dictionaries give a number of meanings for this word. The PTS Dictionary has :

1. to become bright, to brighten up. 2. to be purified, reconciled or pleased to be clear and calm, to become of peaceful heart, to find one's satisfaction in (loc. to have faith.

For the noun *pasādo* it gives :

1. clearness, brightness, purity; referring to the colours ("visibility") of the eye. Also in Abhidhamma with ref. to the eye in function of "sentient organ sense agency," sensitive surface. 2. joy, satisfaction, happy or good mind virtue, faith. 3. repose, composure, allayment, serenity. (The references have been omitted).

Childers lists for *pasādati* :

- to be clear, serene, tranquil, to be content, satisfied, pleased, glad; to be favourable or gracious; to rejoice in, take pleasure in, to have faith in, to believe, to be converted.

He gives a number of references, and, going through them, the reader finds that the word is translated as "to be pleased," "to like someone," in instances dealing with ordinary laymen. When it refers to a *thera* as in "*Bhaddasā'amhi there pasāditvā*" the choice of expression is already determined: having conceived an affection to the *thera* Bhaddasāla. But for passages connected with the Buddha himself or his doctrine, it is translated to have faith, believe, be converted.

Tam sutvāna pasādiṃsu nāgarā te samāgatā, hearing this (a sermon of Buddha's) the assembled citizens became believers. *Satthu . . . dhammadesanā:kosani sutvā pasidanti*, hearing the sound of Buddha's preaching, they are converted. *Pasannamano kālam katvā*, dying with a heart full of faith, etc.

Among the various compounds we have *pasannūdako*, having clear water. The meaning "faith" in the translation of the instances given is to be found only in a religious context.

For this there is an explanation in the article on the noun *pasādo* in the same Dictionary :

"*Pasādo*, brightness, clearness; favour; grace; refreshing joy, serenity of mind faith (*prasāda*).

A few lines later we read :

"The words *pasādo*, *cittapasādo* and *manopasādo* are constantly used in the sense of faith in Buddha, lit. 'rejoicing' because of the joy or peace of mind which belief in the Buddha brings with it. Burnouf, wrongly throws doubt on this use of the word, observing that 'in connection with Buddha *prasāda* is the

our with which He receives those who come to Him' (Int. 198, comp. 383). The syntactical use of *pasāda* in this sense refutes this view; the following are instances where it will be seen, that the word for Buddha or his religion is in the dative case . . ."

Instances given indeed prove that Burnouf is mistaken, but they are not sufficient to settle the question about the correctness of the usual interpretation. It would be incorrect to say, that the translators interpret *pasādo*, mentioned in connection with religion, as "Faith." Whether *pasādo* in the original Pali texts was used in this sense has to be discussed.

W. Rhys Davids translates *satthari pasāḍim*, as: (I had) faith in the teacher. In a footnote he adds :

"*Pasādi*. There is no English word that quite fits this or its variants *pasādo*, *pasanno*. They are expressions of the satisfaction akin to aesthetic gratification felt by the believer in whom faith, confidence, amounts to passion akin to religious love . . ."

He is surely right in attributing an emotional quality to the word and in understanding in it the expression of aesthetic pleasure, but this pleasure and emotional intensity, I suggest, are due to another experience, not to that of faith. Here it is that the translator's own ideological background darkens the view. In the same way Chalmers renders in the *Cūḷa-Sihanāda-Sutta* :

Atthi kho no āvuso satthari pasādo, atthi dhamme pasādo as "we believe in our teacher, we believe in his doctrine,"

which reminds us not only by its religious attitude, but even through the sound of the words, of the Christian Creed.

The Sanskrit Dictionary of Monier Williams lists the following meanings

Prasad, *pra-√sad* P. *-sīdati* (cp. also *Ā.ete*) to fall into the power of (acc.), to settle down, grow clear and bright, become placid and tranquil (as the sea or the sky; met. implied to the mind), to become clear or distinct, to become satisfied or pleased or glad, be gracious or kind (with gen.) to favour; with inf. "to deign to." Imp. often "be so gracious, please." (References omitted).

The St. Petersburg Dictionary has :

Sad—sīdati, pra—prasad klar—hell—heiter werden *cetah prasīda* klar werden, sich von aller Aufregung frei machen, heiter und ruhig werden. Deutlich werden. *Heiter*—guter Laune werden, seine gute Stimmung gegen Jmd (gen.) äussern, Jmd seine Gewogenheit an den Tag legen. Gnade ergehen lassen, gnädig sein. 2. gut von Statten gehen. 3. beruhigen. 4. partic. (a) *prasatta* befriedigt, (b) *prasanna* klar. *Prasāda*. (von *sad* mit *pra*) m, Klarheit; Ungetrübtheit.

The sense "Faith" or "to believe" does not occur.

To understand the meaning of Pali words, we have to turn to the Sanskrit. There is a change in the interpretation of the two languages, there must

Roman characters have been used instead of Devanāgarī because of exigencies in printing.—[Ed.].

be a reason for it. Can it be supposed, that the feeling of being pleased, clear, satisfied, inclined towards somebody, changed into "Faith" in the course of development of the new religion?

To have Faith is to believe in something which cannot be explained. For Western religions the keyword seems to be Faith, for Eastern, Knowledge. Faith culminates in the Christian attitude of "*Credo quia absurdum*,"⁵ Knowledge, for the Buddhist, leads to the supreme goal of Enlightenment. The West reveres the saint, the East the sage.

He is pleased, satisfied, with the attribute of highest intellectual appreciation which turns into ecstatic delight, is a fairer rendering of *pasīdati*. And this highest delight in clearness of thought, in understanding and accepting the doctrine has an emotional quality, not less important and gladdening than Faith.

There is a recurring passage in the Suttas, repeated by the person to whom the Buddha expounded his doctrine, whether he is an adherent of another sect or an educated brahmin or a layman. It expresses this delight and the enthusiasm for the clearness of the exposition, which makes it possible for him to understand the teaching and to attain through this understanding that clearness of mind (like clear water or a bright sky), which is the result of calming down after the tension and excitement accompanying the passionate search for Truth.

"Abhikkantaṃ bho Gotama abhikkantaṃ bho Gotama. Seyyathāpi bho Gotama nikkujjitaṃ vā ukkujjeyya, paṭicchannaṃ vā vivareyya, mūlhasa vā maggaṃ āchikkheyya, andhakāre vā telapajjotaṃ dhāreyya cakkhumanto rūpāni dakkhinti evamevaṃ bhotā Gotamena anekapariyāyena dhammō pakāsito."⁶

The hearer is obviously *pleased* with the quality of the logical discourse. This attitude is found not only towards the Buddha himself. Any teacher

3. Faith may be defined as the mind in a state of conviction merely, while Philosophy may be said to be a state of reasoned conviction. Faith is the mind in a state of conviction regarding supersensible things no matter whether philosophical or not, and Philosophy is the mind convinced one way or another, after a thorough scrutiny into the profounder principles concerned. Dr. Wallace quoting Sir William Hamilton.

4. But Buddhist philosophy has . . . nearly a dozen words built upon the proper "know"-stems alone (*jan, vid*). And the question for the student of Buddhist Psychology arises: how far does the greater richness of Buddhist intellectual nomenclature correspond to a greater manifold of knowing or of knowledge?

C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Psychology*, p. 120.

5. "*Credo quia absurdum*" has an interesting history. It has been attributed variously to Tertullian (c. 155-222 A.D.) and to St. Augustine (345-430 A.D.). It has been suggested too, that the phrase is a transformation of Tertullian's "*Certum est quia impossibile est.*"

6. Excellent, Gotama, most excellent! It is just as if a man should set upright again what had been cast down or reveal what had been hidden away or tell a man who had gone astray, which was his way, or bring a lamp into darkness, so that those with eyes to see might discern things about them;—even so, in many a figure has the reverend Gotama made the Doctrine clear Transl. Chalmers.

and with the greatest reverence and the "fellows in the higher life" too praise each other's intellectual achievements in the same way. There is no need to import the idea of Faith into this phenomenon.

In the Majjhima Nikāya, *Ratha-Vināta-Sutta*, Sāriputta and Puṇṇa, two disciples of the Buddha, congratulate each other after a discussion on questions of doctrine in the following way:

Sāriputta:—Acchariyam āvuso abbhutaṃ āvuso, yathā taṃ sutavatā sāvakena amma-d-eva Satthusāsanam ājānantena evam-evam āyasmatā Puṇṇena Mantāniputtana gambhīrā gambhīrā pañhā anumāssa anumāssa byākatā. Lābhā abrahmacāriyaṃ suladdhalābhā sabrahmacāriyaṃ ye āyasmantaṃ Puṇṇaṃ mantāniputtaṃ labhanti dassanāya labhanti payirupāsanaṃ . . .

Puṇṇa: . . . Acchariyam āvuso abbhutaṃ āvuso, yathā taṃ sutavatā sāvakena amma-d-eva Satthusāsanam ājānantena evam-evam āyasmatā Sāriputtana gambhīrā gambhīrā pañhā anumāssa anumāssa pucchitā . . .⁷

They obviously take pleasure (*pasīdanti*) in each other.

How much joy and gladness there is in the reaction to the obtaining of insight and greater clearness is explicit in the sentence which ends the discourse of the Majjhima Nikāya:

Idam avoca bhagavā. Attamanā te bhikkhū bhagavato bhāsitaṃ abhinandanti."⁸

The PTS Dictionary says:

Attamano (atta + mano) having an upraised mind, delighted, pleased. *Abhinandati* (abhi + nandati) to rejoice, find pleasure in (acc.) approve of, be pleased or delighted with (acc.).

Walders notes:

Attamano (adj.) rapt, delighted, joyful. *Abhinandati* to be pleased with, to approve of, to welcome, to rejoice at, to delight in. (References omitted).

W. Geiger, *Abhinandati*, who in his Pali Anthologie und Wörterbuch gives for

sich setzen, —beruhigen, —aufklären, heiter oder zufrieden sein, Gefallen haben an, Zuversicht haben zu, Vertrauen auf. P. P. *pasanna* klar, lauter, zuversichtlich, zufrieden,

Sāriputta: Wonderful Sir, Marvellous Sir! How like a well instructed disciple understands the Master's teaching to the full, has the reverend Puṇṇa Mantāniputta point by point, questions deep and profound. It is a great thing, a very great thing that his fellows in the higher life have the reverend Puṇṇa Mantāniputta to see and converse with . . .

Puṇṇa: . . . Wonderful Sir, Marvellous Sir! How like a well instructed disciple understands the Master's teaching to the full, has the reverend Sāriputta point by point questions deep and profound Transl. Chalmers.

Thus spoke the Lord. Glad at heart, those Almsmen rejoiced in what the Lord said. Transl. Chalmers.

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Early Christian literature too for instance the Epistles of St. Paul warn the convert against being seduced by false doctrine. But the apparent safeguard against this danger is not intellectual criticism but a strengthening of Faith.

Considering all this we can render *pasīdati* most appropriately as a mental attitude which unites deep feeling, intellectual appreciation and satisfaction, clarification of thought and attraction towards the teacher. To introduce here the Christian conception of Faith and of conversion is unnecessary.¹² It will be agreed that the intellectual appreciation and critical acceptance of knowledge and of attaining Truth as we meet it in the Suttas is some distance away from: "L'homme sans la foi ne peut connoître le vrai bien ni la justice."¹³

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12. Attention in this article has been directed only to the question of the attitude of the Buddhist as it is revealed in the Pali texts. Whether Faith plays a role in Buddhism as practised today and why, is another problem which will require inquiry into the subject which needs does a religion satisfy and in what way.

13. Pascal, *Pensées*.
