

ISSN 2738-2699

YEREVAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

TRANSLATION STUDIES: THEORY AND PRACTICE

International Scientific Journal

volume 2 | issue 2(4)

TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN ARMENIAN PERIODICALS IN INDIA

VARDUHI BALOYAN *

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5018-4045>

INSTITUTE OF LITERATURE AFTER M. ABEGHYAN OF NAS RA

Abstract: The article aims to examine the role of periodicals in the formation of translated children's literature in the late 18th-19th centuries in the Armenian communities of India. A brief historical account of the Armenian press in India is also provided. English-Armenian literary relations in the 18th century originated in Armenian communities when the British East India Company strengthened commercial relations with Armenian trading networks. This period was marked by socio-political change and created conditions for the development of new Armenian literature. The periodical literature for children evolved into a significant tool for influencing Armenian children's attitudes, values, and behavior in Indian communities. Translations had a significant role in the popularization of the Eastern Armenian language and the establishment of literary and cultural ties between the Armenian community and the British colonists. Editors of periodicals and translators were concerned about how to introduce modernity and enlightenment-era European concepts, on the one hand, and how to foster a sense of national identity and belonging on the other. Translating children's literature was the most effective vehicle for achieving these goals.

Key words: children's literature, Armenian communities, Armenian periodicals

1. Introduction

Printing was not a profitable business for Armenians in India; rather, it promoted the survival of Armenian cultural and national identities in a foreign environment. Wealthy Armenian merchants operated their own printing presses and supported Armenian printers by placing direct orders for publications.

In the book "Armenians in India" M. J. Seth notes, "They came to this country by the overland route, through Persia, Bactria (Afghanistan) and Tibet and were well established in all the commercial centres long before the advent of any European traders into the country" (Seth 1937: 2). Armenian communities in India were

* varduhi.baloyan@edu.isec.am



established in Surat in the 14th century. In the 16th and 17th centuries, however, a substantial Armenian community began to grow in India. The community was able to spread out and eventually established itself in the port cities of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras.

In the article “Port Cities and Printers” S. Aslanian offers the term “port-Armenians” to describe “almost exclusively long-distance merchants whose livelihood and identity were largely shaped by their relationship to the sea” (Aslanian 2014: 55). As a result of this relationship, these merchants were curious about the world around them and able to enrich their cultural identities through various encounters. This trend was also reflected in literature and in the emergence of translations.

With the growth of printed books the need for texts targeting children arose rapidly in the Armenian community. Translations had a significant role both in the popularization of the Eastern Armenian language and in the establishment of literary and cultural ties between the Armenian community and the British settlers. The purpose, on one hand, was to further the international outlook, understanding and emotional experience of foreign environments and cultures, as well as to make more literature available to children and to contribute to the development of Armenian young readers’ values. It should be noted that literary relations contributed to the emergence of the first bilingual dictionaries. Shmavonian published an English-Armenian dictionary which was intended “for the entertainment of studious children” (Mkhitarian 2016:81).

The spread of print culture and British colonization gave rise to new literary traditions in colonized India as well. In “The Bengali Novel,” Supriya Chaudhuri writes; “From 1800 onwards, missionary activity at Serampore and the establishment of the College of Fort William make printing in Bengali a necessary part of the colonial project” (Chaudhuri 2012: 101).

Similarly, these socio-political changes created conditions for the development of new Armenian literature, which was important for shaping the mindset and behavior of Armenian children. Though periodicals and translations did not openly address nationalist ideologies and politics, the translations of such works as Thomas Day’s “The History of Little Jack” and Lord Chesterfield’s “Advice to His Son” placed the emphasis on specific concepts and standards of conduct, virtues, national heritage and moral values to create an ideological set of views.

According to Chaudhuri during the same period “colonial readers represent a rapidly growing market for books imported from England. Early translations and imitations in several Indian languages attest to the popularity of *Shakespeare*, *Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Johnson’s Rasselas* and *Goldsmith’s The Vicar of Wakefield* (Chaudhuri 2012: 103-104). As we will see, similar literature was being translated and published in Armenian printing houses.

2. Periodicals and Reflections on Some Translated Literature for Children

The Armenian printing business in India operated for a century and published almost 200 books and booklets and more than ten periodicals. In this article we will focus on

some translations published in *Azdarar* (*The Intelligencer*, 1794, Madras), *Azgaser* (*the Patriot*, 1845, Calcutta), *Azgaser Araratian* (*Patriot Araratian*, 1848, Calcutta), and *Hayeli Kalkatian* (*Mirror of Calcutta*, 1820, Calcutta), and their impact on the production and publication of Armenian children's literature.

Azdarar set aside a special space for the publication of a variety of literary and historical works created or translated by educated people either in Madras or outside India. The purpose of Shmavonian's printing company was to publish original works written in Armenian, information translated from foreign publications, news from Armenia and Persia, and a monthly calendar noting British public holidays as well as Armenian feast days.

The first ever English – Armenian translated work published in *Azdarar* was Jonas Hanway's (1712-1786) "*An Historical Account of the British Trade Over the Caspian Sea: With a Journal of Travels from London Through Russia Into Persia; and Back Again Through Russia, Germany and Holland. To which are Added, the Revolutions of Persia During the Present Century, with the Particular History of the Great Usurper Nadir Kouli. In Four Volumes,*" published in London in 1753. *Azdarar* published it in 1783 under the title "On the Life and Deeds of Nadir Shah, King of Persia." A detailed study of this publication is given by M. Aslanian (Aslanian 1985: 94).

One of the earliest works of children's literature to be translated into Classical Armenian and published in *Azdarar* was Thomas Day's (1748–1789) "The History of Little Jack" (1787). Thomas Day was a famous writer for children and a supporter of Jean Jacques Rousseau's pedagogical views. Therefore, according to M. Aslanian, *Azdarar* became the first periodical to disseminate Rousseauism among Armenians through "*Jack's Story*" (Aslanian 1982: 102). "The History of Little Jack" (1787) was another of Day's children's novels (Day's bestseller novel "*Sandford and Merton*" (1783) was intentionally written for children). In "The Influence of Rousseau's 'Emile' upon the Writers of Children's Books in the Late Eighteenth Century," Silvia Wiese Patterson (1969: 79) considers Thomas Day an author most influenced by the views of Rousseau. Shmavonian, in his turn, referred to Rousseau on various occasions in *Azdarar*. The Armenian literati of that time, concerned about the education of Armenian children and youth, believed that European ideas and values could be best established within the Armenian society through literature. *Azdarar's* editors noted; "the youth can unite and liberate the nation" (*Azdarar* 1795: 143-144).

"*The History of Little Jack*" was thought to share the moral and aesthetic views of Defoe's "*Robinson Crusoe*." As Maro Aslanian notes "The cover of Shahamirian's "*Vorogayt Parats*" (*The Snare of Glory*, 1773) was decorated by one of the famous covers of Robinson Crusoe's early English publications, a sign to prove that Shahamirian possessed the book and had definitely read it. However, its content was still unknown to the readers of the Armenian community" (Aslanian 1982: 105). Because Day's novel was a more appropriate size for the periodical, they chose to translate it for the Armenian children. Robinson's example was referred to as a "fantasy of survival" which is often utilized to explore one's priorities, necessities and know-how (Vasset 2019: 228). Little Jack was the best fit for the Armenian periodical as an example of adventures, hardships, hard work, perseverance and finally survival. As mentioned by M. Aslanian (Aslanian 1982:108) "Hard work has a wider connotation;

for example, in the West, it can be used to achieve social freedom and develop into a self-sufficient, contributing member of the society.” *Azdarar* criticizes idleness. Little Jack’s image reflects *Azdarar*’s own viewpoints: “He employed part of his fortune to purchase the moor where he formerly lived, and built himself a small but convenient house, upon the very spot where his daddy’s hut had formerly stood. Hither he would sometimes retire from business, and cultivate his garden with his own hands, for he hated idleness” (Day 1822: 68).

Another translation published in *Azdarar* is the essay “*The Vision of Mirzah*.” Shmavonian translated it from Joseph Addison’s intermediary ‘word for word’ translation. Addison writes; “I intend to give it to the public when I have no other entertainment for them; and shall begin with the first Vision, which I have translated word for word...” (Addison 1711: 5). Shmavonian translated it under the title of *Tesilq Mirzayin, Nshanakich Bnutyan Mardkayin Kentats* (“The Vision of Mirzah, Superior Nature of Human Life,” *Azdarar*, 1794, no 1). The work has subsequently been adapted for young readers many times.

Azgaser (Patriot 1845-1848) and *Azgaser Araratian* (“Patriot of Ararat,” 1848-1853) featured numerous translations of poems and novels where the names or pen names of the translators were included but the authors were mostly left unidentified. Most of the poetry in Calcutta’s newspapers was translated from English. These included works by Firdusi, Shahname, Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Servantes, Burns, Byron, Longfellow, Addison, Steele and others. The translations were placed in a column called “Banasirakanq” (Philology). Taghiadyan (1803-1858) considered translated literature essential for the moral education of the nation.

Artsvi Bakhchinyan examined a number of translated poems in *Azgaser* and *Azgaser Araratian* in his article “*On Some Poems in Translation Published in the Calcutta “Azgaser” Newspaper*” (Bakhchinyan 2015). As Bakhchinyan notes; “It is unclear on what basis the identities of the authors of the translated works have, with a few notable exceptions, been neglected, while the names of the translators (often under pseudonyms) have been provided” (Bakhchinyan 2015: 346)¹. Similarly, *Spectator* also had unsigned “topics of the day.” One may assume that the reason the articles (both in the *Spectator* and in the Armenian language periodicals) were unsigned or signed by fictitious authors was that by doing so the editors could announce that the articles did not necessarily represent the views of *the newspapers*.

A detailed bibliographical list of translated works published in *Azgaser* is found in Artsvi Bakhchinyan’s aforementioned article (Bakhchinyan, 2015: 345-352). He examined a number of poems and confirmed the authorship of four of them (William Drummond (1585-1649, “To a Bird Singing”), William Cowper (1731-1800, “The Negro’s Complaint” and “The Nose and the Eyes”), and George Gordon Byron (1788-1824, “On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year”) by matching Armenian translations with passages from the original texts. As Bakhchinyan mentions, “these facts are important not only for the history of literature translated into Armenian, but also for the history of Armenian-British literary relations” (Bakhchinyan 2015: 353).

¹ I have translated this passage from A. Bakhchinyan’s article originally written in Armenian.

The translation of Earl of Chesterfield's "Advice to His Son" (1846) was published in *Azgasar's* issues of 1846, numbers 47, 48, and 52. The translator is not mentioned. In the 1846 release Lord Chesterfield's "Advice to His Son," and "Absence of Mind" were published as "Baroyakanq" (Moral Studies) (1846:208). In the 1847 edition it is entitled "Useful Advice" (*Pitani Khratq*) (1847: 156). In 1848 it again appeared in the column "Baroyakanq" (1848: 226). The translator is again unidentified. Chesterfield's letters introduced theories of education which embodied principles of education prevalent in the 18th century. Over time, each of the following chapters was translated and published; "Absence of Mind," "Vanity" (1846), "Intention," "Different Types of Brutality" (1848), "Modesty" (1852). We may assume the Armenian translators intended to emphasize the importance of honor, virtue, moral values, taste and fashion in order to create an ideological code of behavior.

Besides children's literature, it is worth referring to the poem "Wife" by Edward Taylor (1642–1729), an American poet and Puritan priest of English origin. Unpublished until the 20th century, the poems are a private spiritual diary of great significance to our understanding of the religious and psychological history of the period. It is interesting to note that although Taylor's work was not published in English until the 20th century, a translation appeared in the Armenian periodical *Azdarar* in 1846.

In order to make more literature available to children, Hovhannes Avdalian (referred to as Johannes Avdal or John Avdal), editor of "The Calcutta Mirror" (Calcutta 1820), printed the book "*Angitats Anpet*" (Useless to Those Who are Stupids) in 1821. In 1815, in Bombay, a society was established under the name "Ojanaspyur" or "Aid-spreading" for the purpose of preserving the adherence of the Armenian community to their own Church and promoting knowledge and science by printing useful books. These books included both original compositions and translations, and were distributed gratuitously among the community. "In the year 1820, on the 29th of July, a prospectus was issued by the "Literary Society" (in conjunction with the Ochanaspeurean), announcing to the public their intention of establishing a weekly Journal, to be entitled, "The Calcutta Mirror" (Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, vol. 14, 348). Its directors were Messrs Mackertich, A. Aganoor and John Avdal. The circulation of the newspaper was very brief, however, and after its discontinuation Mr. Avdal printed the book "*Angitats Anpet*" in order to make more valuable literature available to Armenian children. It is translated from "*Elegant Extracts*" (1783) and abounds in portions of the beautiful writings of Addison, Johnson, Blaire, etc. It contains 340 pages and brief biographical sketches of the authors are included. In the book, 94 works are translated from 25 English writers. As the translator states at the beginning, this work was done for the entertainment and enjoyment of the Haykazun (Armenian) students. Most of the works in "*Angitats Anpet*" are found in "*The Spectator and the Tatler*." The title page of the book includes the following note:

ԱՆԳԻՏԱՅ ԱՆՊԷՏ Յորում պարագրին քաղուածք պէսպէս գեղեցկապաճոյճ,
խրատական և հոգեգուարճ բանից՝ ի գանազան երևելի Անգլիացի մատե-
նագրաց. զլխատրաբար դիտեալ՝ ի հրահանգութիւն և ի զբօսանս Համբակաց:

Հարագատարբար թարգմանեալ աշխատասիրութեամբ ՊԱՐՈՆ ՅՈՎՀԱՆՆԻՍԻ ԱՎԴԱԼԵԱՆՑ՝ Աշակերտին արժանապատիւ Պարոն Յարութիւնին Գալուցեան, և միոյ յանդամոցն գերապատիւ ԻՄԱՍՏԱԽՆԴԵԱՆ ՄԻԱԲԱՆՈՒԹԵԱՆ: Ի լոյս ընծայեալ հրամանաւ մեծարոյ Պարոն Մ. Յ. Աղանուրեանց՝ Աթոռակալի և Միաբանի, և նպաստաւորութեամբ ծախուց Օժանդակաց Տպարանիս:

Ի Հայրապետութեան սրբազնակատար Տեառն Տեառն ԵՓՐԵՄ Կաթողիկոսին ամենայն ՀԱՅՈՑ: Ի ԿԱԼԿԱԹԱ. ի 31 Յունվարի, 1821:

(“Useless to Those Who are Stupids” contains portions of the beautiful, instructive and joyous writings of the greatest English writers with the purpose of educating and amusing students. Faithfully translated by Mr. Hovhannes Avdalyants, the student of Reverend Mr. Harutyun Galutsyan and the very reverend members of the “Literary Society.” Published by the order of Reverend Mr. M. Y. Aghanurians, the Chairman and abbot, and by the contribution of the Printing House. To the Patriarch His Holiness Eprem Catholicos of All Armenians. Calcutta, 1821”).

Hovhannes Avdalian is one of the greatest translators of the 19th century. His knowledge of classical Armenian and English contributed to the development of high-quality translated literature and enabled Armenian readers to become acquainted with the works of the greatest European writers of the time. Following the opening of the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy in Calcutta, in 1821, when knowledge of Classical Armenian, English, Greek, Persian and Hindu was strengthened and given new attention, Hovhannes Avdalian was invited to teach there. He was also the first Armenian to become a full member of the Academy of Sciences of the Bengali Asian Union. Among his students was the famous translator Tadeov Khachatur Avetum.

Avdalian’s translations were directed towards the moral and spiritual education of children and youth. In 1826 he translated Samuel Johnson’s “Rasselas” (“The Prince of Abissinia: A Tale,” London, 1759), an apologue, meant to convey moral virtues and useful lessons. The book was widely read throughout Europe as it was translated into most of the modern languages.

It is worth mentioning the translation “*Chritsosusuyts*” (Calcutta 1828), originally written by Beilby Porteus, Lord Bishop of London. On the title page is written; “A summary of the principal evidences for the truth and divine origins of the Christian revelation: Designed chiefly for the use of young persons. As one of the publishers of the book writes: “... *it is so admirably fitted in all respects, to enable the young Christian “to give a reason for the hope that is in him”* (Porteus 1850: i-ii). The translation was intended to be used at the Armenian Philanthropic Academy to educate Armenian students. When the college ultimately closed, Avdalian wrote about it in his speech delivered at the board meeting of the Armenian Philanthropic College in Calcutta: “Because the love for Armenian literature decreased in our city; because they started to consider the knowledge of the Armenian language useless, unlucky and futile; because they said that they would not become priests or teachers. Since our childhood, it is the English language to which we have been devoted, which has been beneficial and highly demanded. They could earn their daily bread for living only through the English language. Anglo-mania is possessed by the hearts as a nightmare.

Anglo-mania completely drained the love for native linguistics and Armenian literacy²” (Venice 1858: 31-33).

3. Conclusion

With the growth of printed books the need for texts targeting children arose rapidly in the Armenian community in India. To this end, translations had a significant role both in the popularization of Eastern Armenian and the establishment of literary and cultural ties between the Armenian community and the British settlers.

The analyses of translations of such prominent works as “The History of Little Jack,” “The Elegant Extracts,” “The Vision of Mirzah,” “Advice to His Son” and others show that the publishers’ aims were to help young readers develop an international outlook, an understanding of and an emotional experience of western culture and values. At the same time, the choice of works aimed at fostering belonging and sense of national identity. *The early Armenian language periodicals in India bore the traditions of their contemporary English periodicals and were influenced by their style.*

This period was marked by global socio-political changes and created conditions for the development of new Armenian literature, both translated and original. The editors aimed to popularize those aspects of western ideals that would aid in the revival of Armenian culture.

References

- Addison, Joseph. 1870. *Addison’s Essays from the Spectator*. London: William Tegg. <https://books.google.am/books?id=sVvakdU5cKQC&hl=hy&pg=PR3#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China and Australasia. 1822. “Brief Account of the Armenian Press.” Vol. 14, pp. 347-349.
- Aslanian, Maro. 1982. “Russoyi angliatsi hetevordy “Azdarari” ejerum” [the English Follower of Rousseau in the Columns of “Azdarar”]. *Historical-Philological Journal*, vol. 3: 96-109. Yerevan: the Armenian branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences.
- Aslanian, Maro. 1985. *Angliatsi heghinakner Addisoni and Steeli patmvatsqneri “Azdararum”* [Short Stories by English Writers Addison and Steele in “Azdarar”], vol. 1:160-168. Yerevan: the Armenian branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences.
- Aslanian, Sebouh. 2014. *Port Cities and Printers: Reflections on Early Modern Modal Global Culture 1512-1800*. Vol. 7: 51-93. Accessed August 13, 2022. <https://history.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/17.aslanian-libre.pdf>
- Avdalian, Hovhannes. 1858. *Speech by Mr. Hovhannes Addressed to the Board Members of Armenian Philanthropic Society*, pp. 31-33. Venice, St. Lazzaro.

² Translated into English by me.

- Azdarar. 1795. Vol. 7, pp. 143-144.
- Bakhchinyan, Artsvi. 2015. "The Activity of Armenian Merchants in International Trade." *Regional Routes, Regional Roots? Cross-Border Patterns of Human Mobility in Eurasia*, no. 14, pp. 23-29. Accessed August 27, 2022. https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/rp/publications/no14/14-03_Bakhchinyan.pdf
- Baladouni, Vahé, and Margaret Makepeace. 1998. "Armenian Merchants of the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries: English East India Company Sources." *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society Held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge*, vol. 88(5): 281-294, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1006664>. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society.
- Chaudhuri, Supriya. 2012. "The Bengali Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Indian Culture*. (eds.) Vasudha Dalmia and Rashmi Sadana, pp. 101-123. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Day, Thomas. 1822. *The History of Little Jack*. London: Dean & Son.
- Govindarajan, Vinita. 2017. *Paper Trail: How the World's First Armenian Journal Emerged in Madras in 1794*. Accessed August 24, 2022. <https://scroll.in/magazine/845597/paper-trail-how-the-worlds-first-armenian-journal-emerged-in-madras-in-1794>
- Hussain, Ruquia. 2010. "Armenian Renaissance and Safavid Peace." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 71, pp. 921-27. Accessed September 15, 2022. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44147560>.
- Hussain, Ruquia. 2013. "Armenian Merchants in India Trade from French Sources." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 74, pp. 269-76. Accessed 3 Sep. 2022. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44158825>
- Mkhitaryan, Margo. 2016. *Hayeren arajin parberakany ev nra khmbagiry [First Armenian-Language Periodical and Its Editor]*. Yerevan: YSU Publishing House.
- Morley, Henry. 1891. *The Spectator. A New Edition Reproducing the Original Text Both as First Issued and as Corrected by its Authors with Introduction, Notes, and Index*, vol. 1. London: G. Routledge & Sons.
- Patterson, Sylvia Wiese. 1969. *The Influence of Rousseau's 'Emile' upon the Writers of Children's Books in the Late Eighteenth Century*. The Florida State University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Porteus, Beilby. 1850. *A Summary of the Principal Evidences for the Truth and Divine Origin of the Christian Revelation*. Edinburgh: po A. and C. Black.
- Sanjian, Ara. 2012. *Celebrating the Legacy of Five Centuries of Armenian-Language Book Printing, 1512-2012*. Michigan: University of Michigan-Dearborn.
- Seth, Mesrovb. 1937. *Armenians in India, from the Earliest Times to the Present Day: A Work of Original Research*. Madras: Asian Educational Services.
- Vasset, Sophie. 2019. "Robinson Crusoe and the Aesthetic of Survival." *Études anglaises*, vol. 72, pp. 225-240.
- Wolff, Joseph. 1837. *Researches and Missionary Labours among the Jews, Mohammedans, and Other Sects*. Philadelphia, O. Rogers. Accessed September 17, 2022. <https://www.loc.gov/item/31008997/>