

Return Of The Wandering Verse

Ranita Chakraborty Dasgupta

Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University, Kolkata
Corresponding Author: Ranita Chakraborty Dasgupta

Date of Submission: 16-04-2018

Date of acceptance: 02-05-2018

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1923 a German translation to Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens* was published by Walter Benjamin. The Introduction to this book termed as *Die Aufgabe des Ubersetzers* was later published by Harry Zohn in 1969 under the title *The Task of the Translator*. This piece with time became one of the most important philosophical texts that discussed literal translation. According to Benjamin the true purpose of a translation is neither to bring out the original information in the text nor make its meaning more understandable. He opined that a translation exists by its own claim in its time and in the after-life in conjunction with the source text. He termed the translated text to be 'the after-life/continued life' of the source text. The survival of the original text depends on its recreation. According to Benjamin a good translation is one which informs the primary reciprocal connection between languages (Toury, 1995, 55). Though it is a pre-existing connection yet it is inherent to a good translation. A 'good' translation is not the one that follows the original in ditto, its goodness is determined by the level of harmony it achieves with the original text. Such a creative and expansive method of translation leads to the growth of the target culture language as well and hence leads to the development of the 'pure language'. A literal translation should always aim at achieving the pure language. An ideal translation is supposed to be one which in no ways blocks the aura of the original text, instead allows the light of pure language to emerge from it re-inforced via the medium of its own. Benjamin suggests that this can only be achieved through a literal rendition of the syntax which consists the words rather than the sentences. So words should draw the primary focus of the translator. He further emphasizes on inclusion of the 'foreign' in the translation.

In *The Task of the Translator* Benjamin further discusses the idea of reception. He sets aside the priorly discussed notions of equivalence by terming a translation to be the 'after life' of a text. When the act of translation itself becomes important, the question of how close it is to the source text is no more of any importance. In conjunction with Benjamin's idea the historical development of the trajectory of reception of translation focussed primarily on definite analysis. Hence, a translation became not just a change from one language into another but with time it only added newer values to the basic construction of the source text. Concerns like communication of the original text or change in meaning were no more of any worth with the process of translation itself become more and more important. Benjamin's essay proved all the more path-breaking as it raised questions around the origin/originality of the source text. It became particularly important to the deconstructionalists as this was for the first time that someone was looking at the translator and the process of translation as an important component by its own claim, a 'third entity' beyond the binary of the source language text and the target language text.

Any study of literary studies in India has to take into account these nuanced perspectives of Translation Studies. By the end of the 19th century India saw the intrusion of English into the subcontinental consciousness re-affirming its hegemonic status over all Indian languages. This is made possible by the reinforcement of political and administrative pressures. According to Avadesh K. Singh and Asaduddin, on studying the trajectory of translations at this point of time one can locate a shift in focus from the Persian-centric literary culture to an English-centric one. With colonialism the Indian sub-continent entered a phase that demanded a different conceptualization of translation. For Anglicists and Orientalists translating India into their respective languages was a way of re-inventing it according to their own models. As Asaduddin correctly puts it,

Colonialism was a colossal project of translation where human beings and not texts became the object of translation. ...the project of colonial modernity was made possible by translation. Soon there emerged a section of writers and intellectuals who can truly be termed as 'translated men' in the most comprehensive sense.

Moreover, the problem with post colonial approaches is that they fail to explore this project and process of subjectification that was inherent to translations from the colonial times. Bringing in a nuanced

paradigm, Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta points out that with the beginning of the 20th century, translation of poetry in the context of modernity went hand in hand with the individual's sense of identity and existence in the world. For example, translations by Sudhindranath Datta were actually experiences of the original poem created through self expression. Buddhadev Bose translated only to merge with the original. Bishnu Dey looks at the impact of translation in a moment when the text corresponds with the social and political context of the translation. Each of these approaches go beyond Walter Benjamin's idea of translation as the realization of an inherent meaning integral to the original text. The single question that lurks above Bose, Datta and Dey is that of translatability. Buddhadev Bose's notion of 'atmasuddh'i can be located against the grain here to find the site of translation in the self.

For this particular study the primary focus of this paper is on the to and fro movement of a particular bengali poem along the praxis of translation, from Bangla, into English, then Spanish, and then from Spanish again back into Bangla. This trajectory is looked at as a curious case of cultural reception. It has emerged from the research carried out for the larger thesis thriving on the topic of 'Reception of Latin American Literatures in Bangla: From 1980 to 2010'.

On the broader scale the thesis maps the reception of various Latin American Literatures within the Bangla literary gamut during three particular decades, from 1980 to 2010. During 1970s and 1980s eminent Bengali poets including Bishnu Dey, Shakti Chattopadhyay, and Shankha Ghosh took a lot of interest in the works of well known Latin American poets and literary figures like Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, Jorge Luis Borges, Victoria Ocampo, etc. Each one of them published anthologies of translated poems in bangla with some of the most well known publishing houses in Bengal including Dey's Publishing. Some of these works would be *Pablo Neruda-r Premier Kabita* by Shakti Chattopadhyay (1976), *Chena Phul-er Gandho: Ek guchcha bideshi kabita* by Buddhadev Bhattacharya (1984), *Tumi robe ki bideshini* by Bishnu Dey (1986), *Pablo Neruda-r sreshtho kabita* by Shakti Chattopadhyay (1988). In addition the influence and reception of Latin American Literatures in Bangla was reflected primarily in the introductions to translations and their preludes and the conclusions. However, these translations were made not from the original spanish versions but from their English versions. The next two decades saw the corpus of Latin American Literatures make a widespread entry into the world of academic essays, journals, and articles published in little magazines alongwith translations of novels, short stories and poetry collections by leading Bangla publication houses like Dey's Publishing. This period was marked by a proliferation of scholarship in Bangla on Latin American Literatures. By the 21st century, critical thinking in Latin American Literatures had established itself in the Bangla world of letters.

The primary question here was why the Latin American Literatures were accorded a considerable amount of reception in Bangla in the period from 1980 to 2010 which continues with increasing zeal till present? What was the nature of the predominant concerns and what were the historical, political and cultural reasons behind them? What was actually happening in Bangla Literature that created the ground for vivid literary reception? One needs to inquire this process in relation to the preoccupations of the Bangla literary and political world which initiated the writers to turn their attention to the works of the Latin American writers.

But before one gets into that analytical study of the noteworthy social and political events that led to such an interaction one has to locate the earlier contacts between the Bangla and Latin American Literary contexts starting from as the early 1920s and 1930s. One of the very first interactions was between Victoria Ocampo and Rabindranath in the year 1924 in Argentina. It continues through the 30s and 40s centring on Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz and Gabriela Mistral and their Indian interactions. The Tagore-Ocampo interaction is till date the most significant interaction between a noteworthy Bangla literary icon and an Argentine literary figure where the contact, mutual influence and exchange of literary fervour was direct and widely recorded. Prior to this, there were obviously the two Spanish poets Juan Ramon Jimenez and his wife Zenobia Camprubi who had translated selections from Tagore's *Gitanjali* marking the first official translation of Tagore in Spanish.

Tagore's poetry had considerable influence on the Latin American populace during the 1920s. However, this huge attraction for Tagore was not just the result of similar cultural syncretism¹. As Octavio Paz mentioned in a lecture he gave on Tagore's manuscripts at the University of Delhi, the sole and supreme reason behind Tagore's lingering popularity in Latin America was the magic of his poetry. Eventually, as Indian and precisely Bengali readers came across this view it led to a deep seated interest to know this distant literary paradigm that had such vast appreciation for their very own Gurudev. Adding to the interest of the Bengali populace are essays like the one by Dr. Rajat Chanda titled *Tagore in South America: Some Perspectives*. In that essay Dr. Chanda asserts that the interaction between Tagore and Ocampo is supposedly the one link that establishes strongly the initial association of India with Latin America. The huge documentation that surrounds the Tagore-Ocampo relationship is a strong basis to that assumption. In fact Tagore continues to be a subject of

¹ A similarity can be located in the clash that appeared in the New World as a result of the tussle amongst Native Americans, Spaniards, Portuguese and Africans and in regions of India (Goa, Bengal) where Western influence met with the Indian traditions

study in many Latin American Universities. Other internationally acclaimed events like the Cuban Missile Crisis, the revolutionary Socialist-Marxist endeavors of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, reactions of the Latin American populace to the Vietnam War and last but not the least the football fervour of Brazil and Argentina, all led to an increased interest amidst the Bengali populace for Latin American Literatures. This interest in following years culminated from reading Latin American Literatures in English translations to producing them in Bengali versions. In fact, the greatest literary festival that the Bengali reading populace celebrates each year with mammoth zeal, the Kolkata International Book Fair has had its focal theme based on Latin American countries for as many as four years. In 2003 Cuba was selected as the focal theme of the fair, in 2004 Chile, in 2010 Mexico and in 2014 it was Peru.

Coming to the very interesting trajectory of literary reception and survival that this paper discusses in particular, it would more appropriately be termed as “translation as reception”. It is a rather well-known fact that Neruda had translated or paraphrased Tagore’s 30th poem from “*The Gardener*”. Interestingly Neruda’s translation of Tagore’s poem found its way back into its source culture and language via two distinct pathways. Firstly, in 1976 when Shakti Chattopadhyay translated it from Neruda as *Amar akashe godhuli belay* in his collection *Pablo Neruda-r Premer Kobita*. Secondly, in 1986 in Bishnu Dey’s posthumous publication *Tumi robe ki Bideshini* as *Amar akashe shondhae*. Both these collections were published by Dey’s Publishing. Obviously, I found this to and fro movement of a single poem from Bengali to Spanish and from Spanish back to Bengali rather curious. A close analysis of all these versions in contrast to each other releases completely new-fangled dimensions and readings that each translator has brought in into his individual kind and from his individual perspective. I intend to carry out a discussion of this interaction in my talk which is a significant part of my second chapter.

The Gardener was published in 1913. The poems in this collection were translated by Tagore himself. Tagore took a radical approach while translating his own poems often leaving out or altering large sections and at times fusing two separate poems together. He referred to it as a book of prose. Most of the lyrics in this collection were love poems originally written much earlier than the religious and philosophical poems in the *Gitanjali*.

Thanks to the extensive research work done by Sisir Kumar Das and Shyama Prasad Ganguly, as far as the Spanish translations of Tagore’s works are concerned, Indian readers are aware of two names: Zenobia Camprubí Aymar (1887-1956) and Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958). These two had played an instrumental role in disseminating Tagore’s works in the Hispanic World. It was through translation of translations that Spain and Hispanic America had been introduced to Rabindranath Tagore. Together, they translated most of Tagore’s English works into Spanish, including *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* that appeared as *Ofrenda lírica* in Spanish in 1918. In the period from 1914 to 1922, Jimenez and Camprubi produced twenty-two Spanish translations of Tagore’s English works. In fact, their translations still stand to be the most in number and the most important and popular ones.

Jimenez knew French. Perhaps he came across Rabindranath for the first time in Andre Gide’s French translation of *Gitanjali*. But when translating he didn’t refer to it but looked at Tagore’s own English translations. Nonetheless, Jimenez had limited knowledge of the English language and was primarily assisted in this venture by his wife Zenobia Camprubi. She was a bi-lingual equally fluent in both English and Spanish. In fact it was Zenobia who first came up with the proposition of translating Tagore’s works into Spanish and had prepared the first draft. Jimenez’s part was to revisit the translations and rework on them from a poet’s perspective adding the lyrical fervour to the translations. Juan Ramon Jimenez played an instrumental role in introducing Tagore’s works to the Spanish speaking world. He helped add that charm and enigma to the translations - it was a poet who had translated another poet and hence the magic. There started the earliest of the interactions between the Bangla literature and the Spanish reading-publishing world.

Tagore had given the Latin American poets and writers something that they had been looking for, for a very long time. His humanist poetry with its mystic charm helped them get rid of the idealised notion of the Classical Europe. In Tagore’s works and his thoughts they found the option of a rejuvenating non-European literary model which no longer needed to follow Rome, Greece or Paris. The impact of Tagore’s ingenuity on the Latin American writers and poets was not just intellectual, it was also in terms of the powerful novel visions that he had presented them. Latin American literateurs were higoove with Tagore and his poetry at a very young age and later on critics like Octavio Paz, on close analysis, did comment that Neruda’s poetry in its turn was deeply saturated by the original essence of Tagore’s thinking. The poet Neruda was catapulted to fame with the publication of his first ever book of verses, *Twenty Poems of Love and a Song of Despair* (1924). The poems in this collection were exuding romantic passion and sensuality which was till then unknown to Latin American Poetry. When studied carefully this collection had a noticeable similarity to the thoughts and philosophical insights provided by Tagore in some of his verses. In fact, Neruda’s poem 16 and the 30th poem from *The Gardener* were almost indistinguishable in thought and expression. Claims of plagiarism rose immediately and this were to follow him for the rest of his life. Neruda mentions it in his memories that he had considered putting

in an explanatory note recognizing that these two poems were paraphrases of Tagore's "The Gardener". It was absent in the first edition, but got included in the second edition that was published from Buenos Aires.

Coming to the third tier of this trajectory, Tagore's Bangla poem *Manas Pratima*, which was translated by the poet himself as the 30th poem of *The Gardener* reappears in Bengali print as *Amar akashe gudhuli belay* in 1976 and as *Amar akashe shondhae* in 1986. The former appears in Shakti Chattopadhyay's collection of translations of Neruda's love poems *Pablo Neruda-r Premer Kobita*; and the latter in Bishnu Dey's posthumous publication of translated poems from around the world, *Tumi robe ki Bideshini*. Both these collections were published by Dey's Publishing.

Now, if we try to locate the route that *Manas Pratima* travels it stands somewhat like this. In 1900 it appears for the first time in Bangla in the collection *Kalpana*. In 1913, Rabindranath translates it into English as the 30th poem of "The Gardener". In 1917 it gets translated into Spanish for the first time in *El Jardinero* by Jimenez and Camprubi. Thereon, in 1924 it once again gets translated into Spanish by Pablo Neruda as the 16th poem in his first ever collection *20 Poems of Love and A Song of Despair*. Finally, *Manas Pratima* gets translated back into Bangla in 1976 and 1986 by Shakti Chattopadhyay and Binshnu De respectively.

Rabindranath's *Manas Pratima* essentially has a creative principle that vividly comes forth through his imagination. It populates the lonely void of the skies of his imagination. With the vision of the clouds receding to the horizon and the sunsetting amidst, in a sense it brings the wisdom of an entire day pulled in together. It is not just the romantic love, the poem appears to be an act of meditation. Rabindranath's poem exudes a creative principle that drives the urge to craft which goes on to fill the void of his vacant mind. At a point it is the sense of creativity and the enigma of the creation of the poetic mind that seems to fill up the poet's entire existence, his life and his death (*jibon-marono bihari*). Rabindranath's verse brings forth the pain of passion and the bitterness and sadness inherent in it (*shudha-bishe mishe*). Finally, the poet's self is so enmeshed in the essence of his creation that it leads to the ultimate moment of wonder (*mugdhanayano bihari*), that is not just a static moment but is one that transcends the visual image. When Rabindranath translated *Manas Pratima* into English it fell short of the pain and passion of the creative zeal that oozes in the original Bangla. The pain of the bleeding heart, the sadness of the lonesome poet is missing in the translation.

Zenobia Camprubi and Juan Ramon Jimenez translates *Manas Pratima* into Spanish in 1917 as the 30th verse in their collection *El Jardinero*. However, due to the lack of the cultural instinct their version lacks the creative impulse completely. It misses the watershed of the poet's vision and the creative principle inherent in the painful pleasure of creating the woman-the beloved of one's imagination. It lacks the powerful active female force that we come across in Rabindranath's poem.

By the time the poem reaches Neruda and he translates it as his own, the suggestion that the beloved is the poet's creation is completely lost. He is not painting the vision "like a cloud" as Rabindranath did. Rather he says "Your form and colour are the way I love them".... In that sense Neruda is a far more modern poet. In Jimenez, the approach is a more gendered one (*En la red de mi música, te tengo presa, amor mio... In the net of my music, I have you prey, my love..*) while Neruda broadens out the expanse of his love for his beloved (*you are taken in the net of my music*). Neruda transfers the pain to her eyes in a sense that the poet suffers from a sense of dissatisfaction, an angst. (*My soul is born on the shore of your eyes of mourning... In your eyes of mourning the land of dreams begins*) Neruda starts off on a macrocosmic note but ends on a precise microcosmic note. Nonetheless, his translation comes close to Rabindranath as he asserts the woman with a more active agency. Rabindranath talks of how creativity inspires a vision of love...for Neruda the woman he loves inspires his poetry. Rabindranath's poem has a gentle despairing tone while Neruda's passion has him shouting (*voy gritando en la brisa de la tarde*).

As mentioned by the Royal Spanish Academy, Neruda translated the 30th poem of *El Jardinero* as the 16th poem in his collection only to please a girl who was a voracious reader of Tagore's works. As a tribute to his beloved he re-worked Tagore's masterpiece without any intention of plagiarism. However, it created a great hue and cry. A scandal emerged in the literary magazine *Pro* (of Buenos Aires) where he was accused of plagiarising Rabindranath's poem. Neruda's poem 16 and Tagore's poem 30, translated from English by Camprubi, were placed side by side. The second stanza in Neruda's prose-poem "*Eres mia, eres mia de labios dulces y viven en tu vida mis infinitos suen-os*" meshed with "*Eres mia, eres mia, y vives en mis suen-os solitarios*" and more such similarities. In addition, Rabindranath had translated "with the shadow of my passion have I darkened your eyes, Haunter of the depth of my gaze". Camprubi had mis-read 'haunter' as 'hunter' (cazadora) and Neruda continued with the same. As a result Neruda's integrity was questioned by people like Vicente Huidobro and Pablo de Rokha. Hence, in 1937 he included a note in the latest edition of his *Veinte* poems mentioning that the 16th verse was a paraphrasing of Rabindranath's 30th poem in *the Gardener*.

Forty years later, Rabindranath's immortal verse found its way back into the Bangla world of letters through the pens of two of the most celebrated Bangla poets, Shakti Chattopadhyay (1976) and Bishnu De (1986). Shakti Chattopadhyay's translation *Amar akashe godhuli belay* asserts an active agency to the poet over the beloved who is a more bodied entity rather than the abstract creation of one's imagination. He describes the

beloved in terms of the self, positing the self as the superior determinant. Rabindranth's 'You' the imagined beloved becomes "naari" here, a sexually charged reference uttered in a possessive tone. The word "amar" appears as many as 17 times in Shakti Chattopadhyay's rendition which is evident of the sense of possession that runs as an under-current through the entire poem. So the poet is situated at the centre of this verse, it is less the desire of the transcendental spirit of the creative impulse and more the bold, aggressive lover. In the 4th stanza, he refers to the beloved as "Priyo" and not "Priya" in a way de-gendering the entity. Furthermore, he introduces an extra stanza at the end which appears to be a new addition (tomar bhitoro shatashahasrya pratidhani...). With this one he brings in a sense of hope and peace that is enmeshed with the beloved's existence. Shakti Chattopadhyay tries to re-visit and re-locate this poem in a way that completely overturns the prior vision and poetic essence surrounding *Manas Pratima*. He brings in a Hungryalist approach by disturbing and confronting the potential reader's pre-conceived idea of this poem de-mystifying it of its romantic fervour. To quote Dr. Amiya Dev, "Quoting this journey a philosopher friend of ours once raised a curious philosophical issue: Is Shakti Chattopadhyay's Bangla (Neruda) a Bangla translation of Rabindranath's original Bangla poem?"

Manas Pratima once again appeared in 1986 as "*Amar akashe shondhae*" in Bishnu De's posthumous collection. Bishnu Dey belonged to a generation of modern Bangla poetry which had its mark in the sense of dissent. Dissent not in looking forward but that which engulfs poets who try to grapple with the problems of contemporaneity. The general predicament was between the mix-up of a borrowed enlightenment and the darkness of a subservient survival integral in the complex of history fated by the colonial ruler. Rabindranath was one glorious exception who embraced the absolutes without evading the crisis and the struggle. Repelled by this scheme of things poets like Bishnu Dey started conceding the absolutes surging into the reality of conflicts and maladjustments. Hence, Bishnu Dey's interpretation of *Manas Pratima* reveals a poet's solitary struggle in quest for human dignity in a crisis of uprooted identity. He achieves a fusion of the microcosm and the macrocosm which doesn't embrace the tragedy of personal love in the context of man's sordid involvement in treachery echoing the ravages of war. The cosummate symbolism of this poem reveals perfect assimilation of the conscious and the unconscious no longer bound to a process of glorious objectification.

The style of the poem has a distinct quality of aesthetic immediacy appropriate to the world of untried experiences and vigorous perceptions that he is trying to understand and extend in his poetry. His verse in fact comes as a challenge to the scheme of indolent abstractions. The precision of his poetic diction, use of conversational idiom and the perceptual command of images which objectifies his feelings with certainty makes it all the more different from the romantic tone of Rabindranath.

In conclusion, one can't help but be amazed at the awe-inspiring journey that this poem travels across seven decades and in three languages around the globe invoking distinctive and equally curious renditions every time it sees print. Each and every rendition brings forth the –pre-suppositions and poetic impulses individual to the poets which mark the ingenuity of this journey in its every layer making this one example of translation as reception and survival unique and one of its own kind.

REFERENCE LIST

- [1] Toury, Gideon. 1995. *Descriptive Translation Studies – and beyond*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Citations

E.V. Ramakrishnan, Guest Editorial to *Translation Today Vol-III* (CIIL, 2006), i-xii

M. Asaduddin, "Translation Today Vol-III", 1

Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta, "Translation Today Vol-III", 162

IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Ranita Chakraborty Dasgupta "Return Of The Wandering Verse." *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. vol. 23 no. 04, 2018, pp. 40-44.