

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow
Volume 6 : 8 August 2006

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PRACTICING LITERARY TRANSLATION
A SYMPOSIUM BY MAIL - ROUND 10

V. V. B. Rama Rao, Ph.D.

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MODERATOR : V. V. B. Rama Rao, Ph.D.

HOW DO DIFFERENT PRACTITIONERS DRAW IN THE CREATIVE FEELING?

I would invite your attention to my Round Two, where I mentioned B.S.R.Krishna's book NIVEDANA (2003) wherein he carried forty-one Telugu renderings of Rabindranath Tagore's poem in the GITANJALI beginning "Where his mind is without fear". He took care to include Tagore's original poem written in Bengali along with his own rendering in English. Krishna is Secretary General of World Telugu Federation with headquarters in Chennai.

I have been attempting to show how different practitioners view and draw in the creative feeling and imagination in a literary text and to communicate it in a different tongue. Our Gurudev, Rabindranath Tagore, the Viswakavi, would not have made it to the Nobel but for his rendering of that poem into English and poet William Butler Yates's good offices. We have a proverb in Telugu: Even a golden plate needs the prop of a wall.

RENOWNED WRITERS AND MANY RENDERINGS OF THEIR WORKS

Renowned actor and parliamentarian Jaggaiah wrote in his intro to Krishna's volume:

"In this genre (literary translation) the most important thing is that the original writer must be renowned. Only then there would be a possibility for many (or any) to render it into another language. Though the subject and the feeling are the same, the rendering of the imagination, style and substance of the poem would depend upon the understanding of the translator. And this leads to the variations or variety in renderings. The more the variety, the more would be the readers drawn to this genre with fresh efforts to understand it. When a number of renderings are brought together in a single volume, there would be an opportunity for the reader to note the variances, weigh and understand the glory of the original.

TAGORE'S ORIGINAL POEM IN BENGALI

Here is Tagore's original poem in Bengali written in 1901:

Chitta jethaa bhoya shoonya, vuchcha jethaa shir
Jnaana jethaa mukto, jethaa guruhEr praachir
Apanaa praangaNa tale, dibasa sharvaree
Vasudher raakhenaai, khanda kshudra kor'
Jethaa baakya hridayer, utsamukha hotE
Vuchchswaasiaa vuthE, jethaa nirvaarita srOtE
Deshe deshe dishe dishe , karmadhaara thaai
Ajasra sasraavidh , charitaardha taai
Jethaa tuchcha aachaarer, marabaalu raashi
Bicharer, srotha pathO, pheeveE naai graasi
PaurushEr korEni shatadha nitya jethaa
Tumi sarva karma chintaa anandEr kori pitah

Bhaarater seyee swarga koro jaagarita.

TAGORE'S RENDERING OF HIS OWN POEM INTO ENGLISH

Here is the Viswakavi's (Tagore's) own rendering many years later into English:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depths of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert land of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

POEM IN TWO DIFFERENT TONGUES.

When a great poet expresses himself in two diverse tongues, he would phrase his thought, feeling creatively in a style and diction that is nearer that of the target language. The poet is the best judge and a mere rendering would leave odd ends sticking out. One would not be a mere replica, linguistically, for each language has its own genius. Language conditions the thought process and the process of expression when languages differ would not be the same.

In Tagore's rendering the Bengali original underwent transformation, not merely transcreation. If we study the original and the rendering many modifications are apparent:

1. *aapno pragaNa tale* is not retained in the English version.
2. 'World' is brought in.
3. *karma dhaara tai* has been transformed for focus where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection..
4. More significantly, *tumi sarva karma chintaa anandEr netaa* – the line relating to God is transformed: to describe Him as one who is powerful to lead forward the mind into ever widening thought and action.
5. Most significantly, *nija hasta nirdaya aghaata kori pitah bhaaratEr seyee swarga kori jaagarita.*,
6. striking mercilessly with your hand is totally absent. Tagore must have had his reasons, very strong ones, considering that we were then under an alien yoke.

With all this one would think more highly of the original poet's rendering. The poem in English is more inclusive, with an appeal that transcends Bharat. Freedom was not on the horizon when Tagore wrote this English version. The emotion of the original came to be tempered with restraint and finer feeling.

In practice the literary rendering acquires besides the beauties intended by the original poet to be put across the beauties intended by the practitioner. This also leads either to transcreation or free translation. The prime objective of the practitioner is to make available to the readers in the target language the beauty in the source to which his reader does not have access.

BACK TRANSLATIONS

For gaining insights into the complex practice, a back translation of the Telugu versions is worth the trouble. Let us agree first to agree that back rendering is a very unusual task which is undertaken for an academic purpose only and as such the task of this essayist is only academic with no intention to pass adverse comments or pass unnecessary value judgment.

BEZAWADA GOPALAREDDY'S Rendering (1977)

Where chitta* is without fear
Where the head is high
Where jaana is free, voluntary
Where compounds of residences do not break day in and day out the land in actual compounds
Where utterances flow abundantly as streams of action and flow from the heart springs in many directions
Where the desert sand dunes of mean practices do not dry up the flow of thought and imagination
Where the objectives of human life do not become devoid of purpose
Where You are the maker and Lord of all actions, thoughts and joys
Strike mercilessly with your true hand and awaken Bharat, my Father.

Note *Chitta*, *jnaana* and words like that are not easy to translate. Some translated *Chitta* as *Manas*, *eda*, *eDada* and *Madi* while Tagore made it Mind.

All back renderings are those of the poems taken from NIVEDANA. (Courtesy B S R Krishna).

It must be admitted here that my back renderings given here are quick and ready and no perfection in them is claimed.

OBSERVATIONS

Gopala Reddy gave the title *Prardhana*, Prayer. The rendering is faithful to the original Bangali composition. While the sentence structure is faithfully adhered to, where the mind is led forward by thee into ever widening thought and action is not here. 'Awakening with a merciless slap' and the idea of God being the master are retained. Tagore's English rendering is not taken into consideration. A poet himself, Gopala Reddy studied at Santhiniketan and considered the original poem important than the English version. The political situation changed at the time of his rendering. This is also significant.

TIRUMALA RAMACHANDRA - AWAKEN OUR MOTHERLAND

A land where even a little bit of fear does not touch the mind
Land where where one can go head held aloft
Land where knowledge does not know any limits
Land where it is not broken in the sides
Land where every word issues forth from the depth of truth
And flows around everywhere
Land which does not get neglected, old shape-worn and barren
Land where without let up thoughts and actions blossom
Land where with you becoming the companion of the heart,
O Father, into that land awaken our Motherland.

OBSERVATIONS

Tirumala Ramachandra was a renowned Sanskrit/Prakrit scholar and he thought it fit to title the poem *Awaken our Motherland* bringing into sharp focus the aspiration and ideal of Independence. The language he chose was literary (bookish would be pejorative) and he sought to give a kind of solemnity by this choice of the literary level of style. The words *suntEni, sOkani, eruka, erugani* are chosen for euphony. Towards the end he brings in 'being a companion of heart' and 'beauty of the land of gold' adding effulgence to the plangent prayer. This practitioner obviously thought that the fervour of patriotism needs highlighting.

GUDIPATI VENKATACHALAM - WAKE-UP CALL

Where *madi* is fearless
Where men go around with heads high
Where knowledge and wisdom blossom plentifully
Where between the walls the world is not divided into pieces
Where from the innards of truth gush talk/words
Where labour without fatigue extends its arms towards wholeness/fullness
Where stream of reason would not flow into the desert of lifeless custom
Where the heart/mind (*eDada*) is led by You into ever-blossoming thought and action
Into that free heaven, Father, awaken my country.

OBSERVATIONS

Gudipati Venkatachalam the renowned social revolutionary, thinker and writer rendered Tagore's Bengali version into Telugu in 1958. His rendering is not the literary. It is nearer to the spoken language. Chalam was considered a master of Telugu prose. He rendered "Reason" into *buddhi*, heart-mind-intellect. Perfection is rendered as *paripoornata*, fullness. He called the poem simply *mElkolupu*, wake-up call, or awakening.

SANKARAMBADI SUNDARACHARYA - MOTHER EARTH

Where the mind is secure shedding fear
Where the head is aloft with honour
Where shackles of knowledge are undone
Where the worlds remain unbroken by narrow harsh walls
Where words spring forth from the depths of truth
Where efforts that no know fatigue extend towards the condition of ripeness
Where the crystal clear awareness would not lose its way into the desert of evil custom
Where the mind is led forward by You, Master, in ever-widening thought and action
May this Mother Earth become fulfilled to wake into
Paths of free, heavenly effulgence.

OBSERVATIONS

Sundaracharya penned the glorious lyric *maatelugu tallikee*, which is sung even today. ('A garland of jasmines to our Telugu Mother').

Honour is added to intensify the meaning of heads held high.

The ideas in the original are put across in slightly different tropes as when saying the shackles are undone – untied.

Worlds are devoutly wished to remain unfragmented between narrow, harsh, walls.

The last lines are transformed in the sense the prayer becomes a devout wish: May Mother Earth become fulfilled and wake into paths of free heavenly effulgence.

It is a wake-up call but the title becomes Sanskritised – MAATRU BHOOMI, Mother Earth.

CHARLA GANAPATI SHASTRY - HEAVEN OF FREEDOM

Where the *manas* (*mind*) fearlessly holds its head up
Where it does not bow to injustice
Where the pure power of speech gushes forth with limitless freedom
Where within the walls of the home days and nights stay *
(*There appears to be some printing mistake)
Where the temple of the world entire would be undivided into pieces by walls of narrow lanes
Where from the solemn plane of truth ambrosial words emerge
Where the current of action flows in all directions and across all countries in rivulets
Where the deity of fatigueless Endeavour stretches the creepers of Her hands fully
Where valour forever would stay pure without breaking into pieces
Where the current of knowledge would not stray and get dried up in a lifeless, ruined sand desert
Where the heart with noble ideas and devout action would be led forward by You
Into that rich heaven of freedom. O Father!
With merciless hand strike to awaken my country Bharat.

OBSERVATIONS

Charlapalli Ganapati Shastri is a renowned Vedic/Sanskrit scholar. He rendered this poem into Telugu in 1971. Tagore's *chitta* is called *manas*.

Where the head is held high is rendered more clearly as not bowed before injustice. This is an addition. There is no corresponding expression or word to *vaaghdhaati*, power of express.

The order of ideas is not the same as in the original. 'Within the walls of the house yard days and nights ..' is changed.

Ekkada into gOdala lOpala naa vaakiti!O raatrimbavallu nivasintunO appears to be odd. WE cannot guess how this oddity occurred.

Dreary, desert sand of dead habit is rendered as lifeless, wicked, ruined sand desert.

The last two lines are very near to the original. But God's description *tumi sarva karma chinta anandernEtaa* is left out.

BALANTRAPU RAJANIKANTA RAO - CREATOR OF ALL ACTION COMFORT AND GRIEF

Where (*chitta*) the mind is empty of fear
Where knowledge is open
Where in the home yard day and night are not broken into mean grains*

Where the current of action flows in a thousand ways
Becomes fulfilled and spreads in all directions and countries
Where the stream of thought would (NOT) dry up
(The word in parenthesis is my addition for correctness)
In the wasteland of mean custom
Where effort in a hundred ways goes forward according to Your will
Into such heavenly place this land of Bharat awaken, Father,
Slapping mercilessly with your own hand,
Creator of all action, comfort and grief!

OBSERVATIONS

Balantrapu Rajanikanta Rao the renowned doyen of lyrics and music gave as title Tagore's own line in the latter's Bengali poem. He followed the Bengali original when it comes broken into fragments, words coming from the depths of the heart in a well sounding Sanskritised vocabulary. For example, *hridayodgatOchchwasana*.

The flow of thought would not dry up flowing into the desert sand. Somehow an error seems to have crept in.

The last lines are true to the Bengali original.

SUMMING OF THE MODERATOR

Each of the practitioners displayed enthusiasm in different ways to communicate in Telugu Tagore's feeling. We must congratulate them all and stand beholden to them.

The thread of 'gains and losses' and other aspects remain to be taken further by enthusiasts. I would be delighted to get feedback as well as contributions from new participants. The earlier ones have always been welcome to enrich this Symposium by Mail.

A word before I conclude this round. Dr Johnson wrote this sentence in his Preface to the celebrated ***DICTIONARY***

"Every other author may aspire to praise: the lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach – and even the negative response has been yet granted to very few."

Should we read Practicing Literary Translators in the place of Lexicographers?

Here is my devout wish: May the tribes of practitioners of literary translation increase and prosper!

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