

A Journey from Nepali to English: Namdung to Bhanu

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Abstract

Sapkota attempts a critical reading and an analysis of the four translated poems of Dr. Jiwan Namdung by Dr. Bhanu Chettri. He points out that an effort has been made here to show both the possibilities and the constraints that the translator comes across during the process of translation. Rating Bhanu Chettri's translation as chiefly semantic Nikesh states that the strength of Bhanu Chettri as a translator is his ability to remain faithful to the views, expressions and imageries of the poet in the source text.

Keywords: Translation, Ecocriticism, Darjeeling, Source Text, Target Text

Translation is essential to any developed literary culture. Translation into English has made it possible for any Indian literary text to be read and discussed more widely than it could have been in any other language. Literature envelops the history, culture, economic structure and mental depths of a nation and its people. Translation is an effective medium to promote the globalisation of our vernacular literature. "Jiwan Namdung's poem entitled *Outstanding Dreams of Disposed Hills* translated by Bhanu Chettri is a collection of gems glittering with power".¹ The present collection of translated version of Nepali poetry is the outcome of the selection from the four books of Jiwan Namdung's original Nepali poetry namely 'Jiwan Namdung Ka Kavitaru' (1986) *Samay Choop Chap Bolcha* (1991), *Vaishakh* (2002) and *Samarohama/Samarohaharuma* (2008). This article is the result of the close reading of some of the original Nepali poems of Jiwan Namdung and the translated version of the same included in 'Outstanding Dreams of Disposed Hills'. It would not be feasible to deal with all the translated poems in its totality. My effort, therefore is confined to the analysis of the four translated poems of Jiwan Namdung from his collection *Vaishakh* which are included in 'Outstanding Dreams of Disposed Hill' under the titles, 'My Country in a Dream' (*Sapanama Mero Desh*), 'Waves of Teesta' (*Teestako Laharharu*), 'Snakes Do Not Understand Poems' (*Sarpaharu Kavita Bujhdainan*), 'The Flying Horse' (*Baipankhi Ghoda*).

It would be an interesting exercise to re-read both the original and the translated versions of Namdung's poetry from an eco-centric perspective with particular attention to the representation of the natural world. 'Simply defined, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment'.² Like the American transcendentalists, the British Romantics, the poetry of John Clare,

1 George Thadathil's foreward entitled 'Gift of Poetry' in Jiwan Namdung's, *Outstanding Dreams of Disposed Hill*, Darjeeling, Gamma Publications, 2008.

2 Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Manchester University Press, 2002, p. 248.

the work of Thomas Hardy and the Georgian poets of the early twentieth century, Namdung also foregrounds nature as a major part of his subject matter in many of his poetical pieces such as 'Teestako Laharharu', 'Baipankhi Ghoda', 'Concrete Ko Jangalma Harayeko Darjeeling', 'Pradushan' etc. As there exists two distinct national variants of the ecological approach, Namdung's such poems as 'Pradushan' and 'Concrete Ko JangalmaHarayeko Darjeeling', like the British variant tends to be more 'minatory' seeking to warn us of environmental threats emanating from governmental, industrial and commercial forces. But the poet, in 'Baipankhi Ghoda' while talking about the rivulets and the flowers bloomed in an oasis tends to become celebratory in tone like that of the American variant of ecocriticism. The ecocriticism extends the range of literary-critical practice by placing a new emphasis on relevant 'factual' writing, especially reflective topographical material.

It also emphasises the ecocentric values of meticulous observation and collective ethical responsibility. The poems of Jiwan Namdung especially 'Teestako Laharharu', 'Pradushan' and 'Concrete ma Harayeko Darjeeling' are the examples of factual writing drawing our attention to the plight of the river Teesta and Darjeeling hills. The poetical pieces mentioned above are the poet's reflection surging from the meticulous observation of his natural surroundings. The poems are also intended to call for collective ethical responsibilities of his fellow people. An ecocritical study of the poems of Jiwan Namdung unfolds to us that these literary pieces are rich in ecocentric concepts, concepts such as growth and energy, balance and imbalance, symbiosis and mutuality and sustainable or unsustainable uses of natural resources. In this particular poem the poet tells us about the past natural glory of his surroundings and compares the wounded physical environment of the present with the past. The poem is minatory as it warns us of the extinction of the birds, disappearance of the hills and mountains and desertification of the oceans as in the lines: '*Rangin charaharu chitrama anuwad bhaye/Pahadko namma pahiomatra dekhina thaliyo/Samudra ko thawma marubhoomi failina thalyo*'.³

The poet holds the unthinking activities of human beings as the major cause of polluting the physical environment and hence calls the human beings as rationally irrational polluting demons. The ecocriticism divides the 'outdoor environment' into four following areas, Area one: 'The wilderness' (e.g. deserts, oceans, uninhabited continents); Area two: 'the scenic sublime' (e.g. forests, lakes, mountains, cliffs, waterfalls); Area three: 'the countryside' (e.g. hills, fields, woods) and Area four: 'the domestic picturesque' (e.g. parks, gardens, lanes)

The most of what is called 'nature writing' concerns the two middle ones; eighteenth century topographical writing, which might be exemplified by James Thompson's *The Season* (1730), Thomas Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* (1757) and William Couper's *The Taste* (1785); had area three as its preferred- location, while the

3 Jiwan Namdung, *Vaishakh*, Nirman Publication Gumpa Ghurpise, Namchi South Sikkim, 2002, pp. 48- 49

British Romantic writing, like Wordsworth's *The Prelude* often centred area two, but the American transcendentalist writing of the nineteenth century was predominantly interested in area one. The nature writing of Namdung like the eighteenth century topographical writing seems to have centred on the two middle areas, as exemplified in his *Teestako Laharharu and Pradushan*. Thus the ecocritical study of Namdung's literary pieces brings to the fore poet's anxiety over the unsustainable exploitation of nature and its resources.

About the poet, Jiwan Namdung

Born in September, 1951 in Moonda Kothi, Sonada in Darjeeling of West Bengal, Jiwan Namdung is one of the prominent figures in the contemporary Indian Nepali Literature. He entered into the literary field as the editor of some of the active literary journals and magazines of the 1970s and 80s, such as *Jagaran* (1970-71) 'Dooars Awaz' (1977-78) *Tewa* (1980-81). His other works include poetry, criticism, translations and numerous other editorials. In 1986 *Jiwan Namdung Ka Kavita Haru*, his first collection of poems introduced him as a poet whose poetic output continues to flow ceaselessly even to this day changing and mellowing with time. However he is well known in the literary circle for his critical works-Samalochana. His significant work on criticism *Paryavekshan* came out in 1994 which won him Sahitya Academy Award.

About the Translator, Bhanu Chettri

Bhanu Chettri, born on 22 February 1961, is versatile writer of Indian Nepali Literature. He is a fiction writer and has a collection of Nepali short stories named *Jindagi Ka Khandit Anuharharu* (2005) to his credit. Besides, he has compiled and edited *An Anthology of Nepali Short Stories in English* (1999). He has translated more than a hundred poems, short stories and articles. Bhanu Chettri also translated Maharaj Seshendra Sharma's literary work *Na Desam, Na Prajalu* making it the first Telegu book to be translated in Nepali. The book attracted a lot of critical acclaim and appreciation and won Bhanu Chettri the Sahitya Academy Translation Award for 2004.

My Country in a Dream

The poem *My Country in a Dream* is a translated version of Jiwan Namdung's poem *sapanama Mero Desh* from the collection *Vaishakh*. The poem has already been translated into thirty different languages. The close reading of both original and the translated version of the poem unfolds to us that the translator does have a sound understanding of the views and expressions of the poet. It is evident that the work is an amalgamation of the literal and semantic translation with the variation of communicative translation creeping in occasionally. Even the surface reading of the work in target language reveals that the poem has been translated efficiently.

As far as the patriotic theme of the poem is concerned it has been faithfully kept intact in the target text also. Such faithful expression in the target text as "His jersey was looking like/the map of a country",⁴ beautifully re-echoes the patriotic theme of the source text. Jiwan Namdung's use of unsophisticated language in the source text has been effectively adhered to by the translator in the target text. The wise selection of the phrases and vocabularies has obviously helped the target text readers to flow with the meaning of the original text without any disturbances.

The pictorial quality is one of the special features of the poems of Jiwan Namdung and the poem in discussion is one without exception. It is thus a great challenge for the translator to create the same pictorial effect in the target text as found in the source text and that too without being too sophisticated in expression and Bhanu Chettri proves himself efficient in this aspect. The pathetic imagery of ragged and half starved soldier is beautifully recreated in the following lines: "His face was looking disturbed like Kashmir/May be due to sleepless and tiresome nights."⁵ The allusive quality of the original text is not allowed to fade away in the translated version either. The lines like "His jersey was looking like map of the country" which the poet refers to the worn out jersey worn by the old soldier is allusive of our nation torn by political strife and corruptions and other social maladies. Thus the ambiguity of the imagery does not escape from the eyes of the translator.

As a translator, Bhanu Chettri exercises his liberties and licenses with regard to the omission and the shuffling of the phrases and sentences as evident in the omission of the third line of the original text in the translated version.

Waves of Teesta

'Waves of Teesta' is translated version of Jiwan Namdung's literary piece, '*Teestako Laharharu*'. The original poem consists of forty four lines and the translated version consists of forty eight lines. Like most of his poems Jiwan Namdung follows the technique of 'free versification' in writing this poem. 'Waves of Teesta' certainly proves Bhanu Chettri as a skilled artist in the art of translation. The translator is able to transport the elegiac note from the source text to the target text without much difficulty. The translator sees to it that the poet's lamentation over the vanished glory and the endangered identity of the river Teesta remains undistorted in the translated version. The lucidity of language which is one of the key ingredients of the source text is not missing in the translated version either. Even a casual reading of the target text would create a parallel effect to that of the source text.

The poet's switch over to sarcastic note in the line number thirteen and fourteen, "*timro garjan sita pani achel malai /hans uthna thaleko cha*"⁶ has not escaped the notice

4 Namdung, *Outstanding Dreams of Disposed Hill*, Darjeeling, Gamma Publication, 2008, p. 7.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 54

of the translator. The personified river Teesta does not cease to flow and roar in the translated version as well. The translator has even succeeded in preserving the allusive quality of the source text in the target text. The poet's lamentation over the eclipsed glory of Teesta is actually the poet's lamentation over the lost identity of his people. The reefs that the poet speaks of are allusive of the society which is deaf, dumb and blind to the woes of Teesta. Like the source text readers the target readers too would not find it difficult to identify themselves one with the plight of the river Teesta and this speaks of the efficiency of Bhanu Chettri as a translator.

The Flying Horse

The Flying Horse is translated by Bhanu Chettri from Jiwan Namdung's Nepali poem entitled *Baipankhi Ghoda*. As the poem was composed on the occasion of the constitutional recognition of Nepali Language (20 August 1992), it is not only a piece of literary art but also a document. The poem is the result of jubilant mood of the poet on account of the event mentioned above. The poet here reveals the power of the language in exploring the human world. Like most of Bhanu Chettri's translated works, the present poem also bears the stamp of the semantic method of translation where the translator is faithful to the views and expressions of the poet in the source text. The poet speaking on the power of language transports the readers to the distant lands at the same time.

The Flying Horse does not seem to be a translation of mere words and phrases but also of the poet's feelings and emotions about language. The poet's reference to verbal language in 'The Flying Horse' rather than the written language is beautifully brought in the target text also. The poet's effort to concretize such abstract thing as language with the help of images such as flying horse, chariot and flower gets accomplished in the target text more strikingly. But the translator's grip on the natural and logical flow of expression and ideas which the source text is proud of becomes somewhat loose. The flying horse that was speeding throughout the original poem seems to have slowed a little in the translated version especially in the lines, "A new edition of a prince of an unknown country"⁷ and "sometimes a flower of a wishing tree".⁸ The translator's effort to be reader centred by shuffling the sentences might have been one of the reasons which have slowed down the natural flow of ideas and expressions in the target text. Nevertheless it has not paralyzed the translated version of the poem completely. The target text still preserves the originality of the poem with regard to the theme, subject and the lucidity of the language.

Snakes do not Understand Poems

The poem '*Snakes Do Not Understand Poems*' translated version of the poet Jiwan Namdung's original poem entitled '*Sarpaharu Kavita Bujhdainan*' is one of the biting

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

satires directed towards the people who are deceptive, opportunist and hypocrite like the snakes. The poem seems to be a product of the poet's observation and understanding of a section of people in whom he seems to have detected the snake-like qualities. When the poet condemns the crawling creature on account of its deceptive and opportunist character, we are reminded of the biblical passage where 'God the Creator' condemns and curses the Satan to crawl upon the earth for having deceived Eve, the mother of the mankind. The translator skilfully preserves the pungency of satire in the target language as evident in the following lines: "Sometimes they attend /the recitation programmes too! /There, they pay less attention to poems/ But concentrate more on their victims".⁹

One may be surprised to see the title *Snakes Do Not Understand Poems* but the snakes that the poet refers here are not the footless reptiles but the two legged social and rational creatures that we find in our society. These snakes-like people even pretend to get involved in the literary activities but their involvement is fired by their self centred motives and desire for name and fame. The satire in the target text is as pungent and penetrating as we find them in the source text. It is the translator's efficiency which does not allow the essence of the poem to evaporate during the process of translation. The translator does deserve admiration for his successful effort to inherit the sinister images from the original poem to the translated version. The imagery of 'frog', 'lizards', 'darkness', 'venom' and 'cold blood' are all sinister and they all lend the poem a serious atmosphere. Even the allusive quality of the source text does not escape the translator's eye. The allusive quality in the original line '*goshthima kavita kam ra shikar besi khojne garchan*'¹⁰ finds its fitting expression in the line "there, they pay less attention to poems but concentrate more on their victims", of the translated version.

The dark path which camouflages the cursed creature from being noticed by its enemies is allusive of the pretensions and hypocrisies that camouflage the sinister inner workings and the conspiracies of the corrupt and conceited. The poem also re-echoes the Shellyan concept of the poets as "the institutors of laws, and founders of a civil society, and the inventions of the arts of life"¹¹ Like Shelley, Jiwan Namdung tries to mend the ways of the wicked people in order to form a civil society with the help of the poetic truth and wisdom.

A detailed reading of both the original and the translated text shows that the translator has exercised the technique of liberal translation in some places for example the translator has done away with the second and third line of the original text in the translated version. Though the reason for this omission is not certain but it could be that the lack of suitable substitutes of Nepali words in English might have forced the translator to recourse to liberal translation. Brevity of expression without disrupting

9 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

10 Namdung, *Vaishakh*, p. 11.

11 B.B. Jain, *Upakar's Ugc Net/Jrf/Slet*, Kolkata, Upakar Prakashan, 2010, pp. 99-100.

the flow of ideas is one of the strengths of Bhanu Chettri as a translator which is of course a hard job to accomplish especially with the constraint of suitable substitutes of typical Nepali words in English.

Conclusion

Wordsworth, in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* discusses the function of great poetry as "to please, to move, to transport". He says that the moral function of poetry consists "in the knowledge of Man, Nature and Human life".¹² The critical analysis of both the original and the translated poems of Jiwan Namdung certainly bears witness to the Wordsworthian statement. Namdung's poems do please; move and transport us. The discussion on the four translated poems of Namdung clearly shows the poet's knowledge of man, nature and human life. The poet Jiwan Namdung's versatility as a writer is borne out by the various themes and subjects ranging from the patriotism as in *My Country In a Dream* to love for nature as in *Waves of Teesta*, from jubilation as witnessed in *The Flying Horse* to satiric mood in *Snakes Do Not Understand Poems*. "The poet writes with his eyes on the contemporary scene, the present values and beliefs. One cannot call him pessimistic but he does communicate his anguish at the increasing preoccupation of modern society and growing isolation of the individual".¹³ "Today the world is moving fast and rapid development in science and technology has made it possible for the people of different parts of the world to come closer. Hence, translation has played a vital role in this regard for which the translator has also been called the 'recreator'. The Greeks called the poets *Vates* which meant a maker or creator. Obviously it would not be an exaggeration to call the translator as the recreator.

Translation of literary work from one language to another obviously helps in the globalisation of regional literary works. The analysis of the four poems in this article certainly proves Bhanu Chettri as an efficient artist in the art of translation. The strength of Bhanu Chettri as a translator lies in his precision and brevity of expression, lucidity of language and fidelity to the expressions and the views of the poet. But the journey of translation does not seem to have been as easy as the target text readers would think it to be. As the translator he confesses that the translation of Nepali literary works into English is a hard job. "The absence of reliable Nepali- English dictionary and the difficulty of finding suitable substitutes of typical Nepali words" in English were some of the constraints that the translator had to confront during the process of translation. But there is no doubt that the effect and the impression that Bhanu Chettri creates in the target text readers is parallel to the one which the source text has created on its readers. Finally for a country like ours translation could be the best means to strengthen our pluralistic cultural heritage and Bhanu Chettri's effort is obviously a step in this direction.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Kamla Sakritayan, *Indian Literature*, (No.122), p. 14.