



TRANSCREATING THE SOURCE TEXT: OSCAR WILDE'S "THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE ROSE AS KETEKI" BY JATINDRANATH DUWERAH

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Article Info:

Article Received:22/04/2015

Revised on:27/04/2015

Accepted on: 30/04/2015

ABSTRACT

Translation of a literary text is more than a bilingual transfer of the source text. A translator has to not only render the ST (Source Text) content in the target text/language, but also needs to work as a mediator to fix complicated issues generated in the process of translation. Often, the translator has to shift from the original for rendering the ST as receptor-friendly. This paper attempts to investigate how Jatindranath Duwerah makes a departure from Wilde's story while rendering it as a prose-poem in Assamese. Moreover, it looks at how literary conventions of different literature groups have boundaries which makes establishing a foreign text 'as it is' a challenging task. Literature is considered as a product of the socio-cultural construct of a definite geographical location. Hence, apart from the linguistic factors, social and cultural variables also influence and direct translation. As a result, the ideological set-up of both the source language and the target language should be equally considered. However, to meet the target reader's (target culture) needs, many a times the translator may have to sacrifice or omit segments of the original text.

KEY WORDS: translation, equivalence, source text, target text, target culture, target reader

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Translation studies took a cultural turn with Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere in the 1990s which resulted in a shift to contextual translation. A literary text is seen as a product of history and a given culture, and therefore the target culture translation should not be judged by mere linguistic correspondence between languages, or universal standards of quality and accuracy. Bassnett & Lefevere (1990) are preceded by Even-Zohar (1978) with polysystem theory where they anchor the priority of the target language reader with the belief that translations should be directed by their objectives and not solely by TL (Target Language) substitution. Similar views are seen in Skopos theory of Hans Vermeer (1984) which emphasises on the purpose to be achieved rather than the

establishment of equivalence. It is a functionalist approach and concentrates on the end or result of a translation- whether it is achieved well or not. Here, importance is put on the target reader so that ultimate justice is done. Establishing equivalence with the source text is not emphasized. This theory advocates that there is no single 'correct' translation as there is potentially unlimited readers and hence unlimited purposes (skopoi). The elasticity in the process of translation is thus given much importance so that the expectations (purposes) of the target readers are fulfilled. This is how Vermeer 'dethrones' source text supremacy. This is quite surprising to see how Jatindranath Duwerah had long back, during the first half of the 19th century, adapted the story of Wilde into a creative prose-

poem that stands the requirements of the target reader. Here, requirement refers to the artistic demand of the text in relation to the literary convention(s) of the target language as well as a psychological need in the reader's mind. The whole body of readers of a particular language group makes an interpretive community where they are directed to perceive a text in a similar way and hence their presuppositions, hypotheses and even the speculative conclusions about a text resemble. This is why (and how) the readers of a definite group are identical in their accepting and enjoying a literary text, which is again the outcome of their ideological constructs and ways of life. As a result, it is a challenging task to present a foreign text with all its dissimilarities and expect it to be accepted by the target reader. In such a situation, a translator has to reduce inconvenient situation as far as the target reader is concerned, so that either he can bring the reader closer to the foreign text or recreate the ST (Source Text) as much as familiar to the target reader. In doing so, the translation may result in 'loss or gain'- loss of the original elements, gain of new things in the TT (Target Text). While coming to the present research, it would be pertinent to consider both the ST and the TT from a thematic perspective for a critical analysis.

The Assamese prose poem *Keteki* is an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *The Nightingale and the Rose* by the renowned Assamese poet Jatindranath Duwerah. This prose-poem as inspired by the English story of Oscar Wilde is not mentioned anywhere in Duwerah's reviews or criticism. It is pointed in Ananda Bormudoi's article 'Anubad Sahitya' included in his anthology of essays, *Samaj, Sahitya, Samalochana* (1995). In the present study, an attempt is made to discuss this prose poem following Bormudoi's brief interpretation of the same and how it deviates from the original in relation to its omission of an important part of the ST. The original short story tells about a bird that sacrifices its life for the cause of love. The nightingale that sings magnificent songs in the original is the keteki in the Assamese story. It is no less beautiful than the original poem; Duwerah takes a surprisingly beautiful equivalent for nightingale; it is an Assamese bird named keteki and

what he selects for the ST rose is again a namesake of the bird- here the flower is also called keteki. Thus it is a magnificent substitution in the target text; the translator has chosen the equivalents which are very central to the target culture and unique to it. In the original the young student is in need of a red rose to have the girl he loves to dance with him in the ball next night. While he is voicing out his despair to himself, the nightingale hears it and wishes to help him by all means because, for the bird, it is the true love that she has been singing throughout her life. After its failure to get all but a red rose, it pierces its heart to the thorns of the bare red rose tree so that it can produce a red rose out of the bird's life-blood that flows into the tree's vein. After the night is over following the beautiful and melodious songs of the nightingale, a magnificent red rose blooms out of the tree. The student, for whom the nightingale's singing is just meaningless sounds, does not get to know how the flower blossoms at his window overnight. The girl rejects the student saying that the rose will not match her dress; the student throws the red rose on the road and moves back to his study of philosophy and metaphysics, as love for him is impractical and mere bookish imagination. In the TT in Assamese, Duwerah transcreates the story where a prince is in utmost grief as his wife is in serious illness. The king's physician suggests a very rare thing as medicine- it is the pollen of a keteki flower to survive the wife of that prince. There is no keteki (flower) in the country; while the keteki (bird) sees the prince sullen; it asks the cause for his sorrow. The keteki consoles him that it will grow a flower for him. The prince is hesitant to go ahead initially thinking about the bird's end, but the bird says that she can be easily taken back to life, if the prince takes her in his bosom with a warm feeling of love. Following day dawns with a beautiful keteki flower, and the prince rushes to his wife forgetting the little poor bird that is lying dead pierced into the keteki tree. In both the stories the sacrifices for love is insensitively denied, willingly or unwillingly. To that extent they are thematically identical. But the concluding part of the ST is completely omitted in the TT. It unfolds crucial issues if one looks into why such a change has been done in the TT.

The student, after the girl's rejection, comes to a conclusion that love is a silly thing invented in the story books and therefore he will rather 'go back to philosophy and his study of metaphysics'. This reign of intellect over emotion, brain over mind as shown in Wilde could have been something indigestible for Duwerah's contemporary Assam. This is why he chooses to eliminate this part. Wilde's association with Walter Pater and 1980's aesthetic movement and its emphasis on 'art for art's sake' influenced his way of living- 'to invent life as one wants'. Again his decadent tendencies to go against the grain and reject the existing morality and humane principles are witnessed as responsible for the ST conclusion. In the ST, the author does not make any judgment on the nightingale's tragic death; neither does he glorify it as a heroic death for the cause of love. Thus we find the author very indifferent of standards of morality. It overtones what once Wilde says: "There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well-written or badly written. That is all." (as quoted. in Birch, 1932-2009. p.1068)

Jatindranath Duwerah on the other hand is concerned about how the text is going to be accepted in the target culture. He does not make an unexpected conclusion by merely letting the prince go away from the dead little bird, to make the tragedy of the bird unpurged and to let the bird's sacrifice go unacknowledged altogether; instead, Duwerah concludes the poem with the Nature's cremating the dead bird by gathering dry leaves on it. But the ST, in two factors can be called negatively ended with a shocking conclusion: firstly the bird's sacrifice goes unnoticed; secondly, the student is negated of the girl's love. On the contrary, Duwerah's rendering tries to resolve both issues as much as possible. This is partly due to the cultural differences among linguistic groups; the differences in moral standards between the ST and the TT have played an important role in shaping the Assamese version. In addition, literary convention of a particular language comes with its ideological construct that stands out as different from another literature group. However one should not forget that Wilde himself is a dandy and a non-conformist by refusing to adhere to the moral standards and

ways of life of his time. A. K. Ramanujan suggests "A translation should be true to the translator no less than to the originals" (as quoted. in Mukherjee, 1994. P. 24). This is true as far as cultural structures are concerned. Duwerah, as a result chooses to omit the concluding part of the ST where the student prefers to study metaphysics rather than weeping for what he has been deprived of. This sentiment, as Dr. Bormudoj asserts is not an issue for the TR (Target Reader). The human qualities like sacrifice, love, etc. are introduced to the extent where the TR has been accustomed to. To balance the original situation of heartlessness and indifference, Duwerah has fabricated the story to a positive end; here sacrifice for love is not a total loss. It reflects Ramanujan's point that a translation, to a considerable extent is shaped by the translator, his culture, and beliefs. Thus, it is seen that the translator has recreated the story of Oscar Wilde with all its foreignness and dissimilarities into a completely local (Assamese) prose poem where the story rests at Assamese heart without any foreign blood in it. This seems to have been done by the translator's innovation upon the ST, eliminating unnecessary elements in the TT and introducing stereotypical things in the TT so that it can produce an acceptable response in the receiving culture.

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