

¹ Fifty Years of the Song of the Road: A 'Good' Translation or a ² 'Successful' One?

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6 Abstract

7 Introduction-What is a translation -a product or a process? For us, who are in the field of
8 academics and who try to engage often with the activity called translation, it is a process. But
9 for the reader, it is a product and products can either be good or bad. Yet, when we were
10 taught Translation Studies as part of our curriculum at the Department of Comparative
11 Literature at Jadavpur University, we were told that there is nothing called a 'good'
12 translation or a 'bad' translation, translations can only be either successful or
13 unsuccessful. Translations have a sociology of their own, more so in case of Indian texts being
14 translated into English and/or other foreign languages. One may be reminded of Andre
15 Lefevere's 'Introduction' to Translation/History/Culture: A Source Book which says,
16 "translations are made by people who do not need them for people who cannot read the
17 originals." It complies with the age-old Italian concept of posing the traduttore (translator) as
18 a traditore (traitor). The imposition of one language and culture considered to be 'superior'
19 on an 'inferior' one is an old colonial practice. How do we, then, determine the 'success' of a
20 translation? One sure-shot way of determining lies in the reception and survival of the text.

?? *Index terms*—

23 1 Introduction

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The year 2018 marked the fiftieth year of the publication of Pather Panchali-The Song of the Road (1968), the English translation of Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's Bengali novel of the same name Pather Panchali, first published in 1929. Till date it is the best known and widely circulated English translation of the novel though another version was published in 1976 translated by Kshitish Roy and Margaret Chatterjee. Survival of a text for fifty long years is indeed an achievement in itself. It is a great marker of the success of the book. As academic practitioners we know that the survival of a work depends to a great extent on its reception. If we are to answer the question how well was this English translation of Pather Panchali received, or, how did Clarke-Mukherjee's translation manage to remain the best translation of the Bengali novel, we have to ask first-to whom did the

45 English text cater and why? These questions shall serve as the entry-point as I delve deeper into the discussion
46 of the text and analyse what actually is meant by a 'good' or a 'successful' translation.

47 **2 II.**

48 **3 The Task of Translation**

49 In the words of Alexander Fraser Tytler, a 'good' translation is that-In which the merit of the original work is
50 completely transfused into another language, as to be as distinctly apprehended, and asstrongly felt, by a native
51 of the country to which that language belongs, as it is by those who speak the language of the original work.
52 (Lefevere 1992: 128) Paul St.-Pierre feels-

53 The very purpose of translation -its 'carrying across' texts between cultures-raises the question of the extent to
54 which communication is possible from one culture to another and of what is or can be communicated...translation
55 remains difficult, since the negotiation of cultural, temporal and linguistic differences...always takes place in a
56 space which is never neutral. ??1997: 186) This remark might bring to our minds the extreme example of Edward
57 Fitzgerald, translator of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, who had written to his friend Reverene Cowell in 1851,
58 "It is an amusement for me to take what Liberties I like with these Persians, who (as I think) are not Poets
59 enough..." ??Lefevere 4) A 'good' translation is one which aims for a perfect balance of fidelity to the source
60 language text and readability in the target language. That is to say a 'good' translation is one which is able
61 to convey the meaning of the original text in the target language and that too in the current usage. As Perrot
62 d'Ablancourt has stated-I do not always stick to the author's words, nor even to his thoughts. I keep the effect
63 he wanted to produce in mind, and then I arrange the material after the fashion of ourtime...ambassadors usually
64 dress in the fashion of the country they are sent to, for fear of appearing ridiculous in the eyes of the people they
65 try to please. ??Lefevere 6) Translation always sets a goal for itself. Its literal meaning contains this goal. To
66 translate is to carry forward or to carry across-to whom is the big question.

67 **4 W**

68 The intended readership, the target audience of a translated text is the ultimate yardstick to judge how 'good' a
69 translation is. On the other hand it must not be forgotten that "translations are made by people who do not need
70 them for people who cannot read the originals." (Lefevere 1) In the 'Introduction' to Translation/History/Culture
71 the two basic questions are asked—"Who makes the text in one's own culture 'represent' the text in the foreign
72 culture?" and "How do members of the receptor culture know that the imported text is well represented?" (1992:
73 1)

74 **5 III. Who Represents Whom and How**

75 These questions shall help us in analysing the English translation of Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's Bengali
76 classic Pather Panchali by T.W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. The translated text is a part of the 'UNESCO
77 Collection of Representative Works-Indian Series'. The English copyright is held by UNESCO and the Copyright
78 page shows, 'This Book has been accepted in the Indian Series of the Translations Collection of the United Nations
79 Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)'. This probably answers the second question-how
80 do members of the receptor culture know that the imported text is well represented-since it is a part of UNESCO
81 project, it is bound to be "well represented". But the first point which comes to our minds whenever we discuss
82 Clark-Mukherji's text is that it is an incomplete translation of the original. Hence some critics have even
83 considered the text as not a translation but an abridged version of the original. However, while K. Roy and
84 Margaret Chatterjee's 1976 translation was officially declared as an abridged version, nowhere is it mentioned
85 that Clark-Mukherji's translation was abridgement too. This is because Clark-Mukherji's intention was clearly
86 not abridgement. Rather they have their own explanation for leaving out the third part of the novel 'Akrur
87 Sambad'.

88 **6 Clark says,**

89 The climax surely is reached when Opu and his parents leave Nishchindipur; and what follows, if the readers go
90 on with it, is something of an anticlimax. ...As the train draws away from the station the last chords of symphony
91 are struck, and the rest should be silence. ??Clark-Mukherji 1968: 15) Here the word "should be" is noteworthy.
92 It brings back the question who represents the text of one culture into the other? Again the answer is probably
93 the fact that T.W. The film must have impressed Clark/Mukherji so much that they had to concoct a justification
94 for leaving out the third part of the original work. Also, thereby they fulfilled what a British publisher expected
95 would go down best with his readers ??Mukherjee 1994: 97-8) The fact remains that the Clark-Mukherji text
96 was published mainly for those western audiences who have seen and probably admired the cinematic version of
97 Pather Panchali made by Satyajit Ray in 1955 (in Bengali). It was considered to be Ray's masterpiece, a movie
98 that shot him instantly to international limelight. Hence the English translation ends where Ray's film ends, here
99 has been no attempt to venture further since the audience has not seen anything further in the movie and might
100 not be familiar with. This is a queer instance of faithfulness not to the original text but to its cinematic version.
101 One might safely conjecture that it was so because of the film's world-wide acclaim and admiration especially

102 from the Western audience. From the question of the power of the language, the debate here shifts to the power
103 of the medium because cinema has by then already become a more powerful medium than literary text.

104 IV.

105 **7 Fidelity vs Readability**

106 The truncated English text, however, shows an attempt to maintain fidelity and balance it with readability for the
107 Western reader. In spite of his bitter criticism about the incompleteness of the text, Sujit Mukherjee has this to
108 say about Clark-Mukherji', "Except for minor aberrations, they have kept close to the original and yet achieved
109 readability." (91) But the problem starts with the title itself. Clark confesses, "The title is untranslatable" (1968:
110 13) 'Panchali' is a very culturespecific word and it has no English equivalent. Clark-Mukherji has retained the
111 title 'Pather Panchali' probably because Satyajit Ray had so advised and used 'Song of the Road' as a subtitle.
112 Clark has stated, " ...it is the nearest one can get by way of translation; but were I free...to choose...I should
113 prefer 'Bends in the Road',...It retains the symbolism." (13) The same problem has been faced by the translators
114 while translating the names of the first two chapters (the third has been left out)-'Ballali-Baalai' (The System
115 of Multiple Marriages) and "Aam Aatir Bhepu' (Flute from Mango Stem) respectively. In the case of the first
116 chapter there is no attempt to translate the title word for word or even sense for sense. Ballal Sen who ruled
117 Bengal in the 12 th century had supposedly introduced the 'Kulin' system which placed the Brahmins at the top
118 of the social hierarchy in terms of prestige. They were also entitled to marry as many women as they wanted.
119 Since it is extremely difficult to make foreign readers (who are obviously unfamiliar to such a practice) understand
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122 system of multiple marriages in the Kulin communities of Bengal which continued as late as in the
123 eighteenthnineteenth centuries, the translators have opted instead for the subject matter of the first chapter-
124 Indir Thakuran, a 'Kulin' widow whose husband had never cared for her even when he was alive and for whose
125 death she had to observe all the austerities prescribed by the society for widows. Thus Chapter One is titled
126 'The Old Aunt'. The second chapter is called 'Children Make Their Own Toys' which goes with the sense of the
127 chapter and is again, not a literal translation of 'Aam Aatir Bhepu'.

128 Since the text is meant for readers unfamiliar with the source language culture, what happens is that the
129 translated text often needs to add extra sentences or phrases to convey the meaning properly. For example, the
130 second paragraph of the first chapter of the Bengali text begins with a simple sentence—"Purva din chhilo ekadasi"
131 (It was ekadasi yesterday) [Bandyopadhyay 1] 1 V.

132 **8 Domesticating v.s Foreignising**

133 The translation is "It was the day after her fast-this was the fast all widows are required to observe on the eleventh
134 day of each fortnight" (Clark-Mukherji 23) or, "Shona jay, purvadesiya ek namjada kuliner sange Indir Thakruner
135 vivaha hoiyachhilo" (3) has to be translated as "There is a story that Indir Thakrun had been married to a Kulin
136 Brahmin. Kulins had been notorious for multiple marriages and Indir's husband who apparently had many
137 wives..." (25) What is noteworthy here is that in an effort to explain 'Kulin' (upper-caste as well as upperclass),
138 the word 'Purvadesiya' (Originally from East Bengal) gets deleted in the translation since it is of not much
139 importance to the Western reader.

140 There are also ample illustrations of splitting one sentence of the original text into several in the target
141 language. For example, "Nishchindipur graamer ekebare uttarprante Harihar Ray-er kshudra kothabari" (1)
142 becomes "Horihor Roy was a Brahmin. He lived in a small brick-built house in the village of Nishchindipur. It
143 was the last house at the extreme northern end of the village." (23) or "Satya-i se bhule nai" (??74) is split into
144 "It was true. He had not forgotten, and he did not forget." (303) It is in this way that the translation has been
145 able to retain fidelity while being readable in English.

146 There are attempts at domesticating Bengali months 'Baisakh' and 'Kartik', for example, into 'May' and
147 'November', the Bengali year '1240' into Roman '1833' and the Bengali measure of weight 'mann' into English
148 'pound'. Thus "ek mann chaal" becomes "eighty-ninety pounds of rice". But the element of foreignising is also
149 present with the retention of culture-The village folklores have been attempted to translate literally—"O Lolita
150 and Champo, I've a song to sing-o/Radha's thief wore his hair in a ring-o" (29) or "Oh, holy pond; oh, holy
151 flower!/I worship you 'neath the noon-day sky/A maiden's purity is my dower;/My brother lives and blest am
152 I" (92) The word 'phulot' (181) is used along with the explanation that "that was the nearest he could get to
153 'flute' to convey the proper meaning of 'phulot banshi'". But the dialect of the old Indir Thakrun, different from
154 that of the rest of the adults, as well as sentences spoken by baby Durga, also different from adults, could not be
155 captured in the translation. Besides, as readers we feel it would have been better to retain 'Ma' instead of using
156 'Mummy' which is perhaps too foreignised for Bengali village people.

157 The translated text has the very useful Index at the end which lists al the 'foreign' words in the English
158 alphabetical order, explaining elaborately their meanings and even trying to help the reader by providing the
159 closest English/Latin word possible. For example, 'chatim' is explained as "name of a tree, also known as
160 saptaparna (seven-leaved), Alstonia scholaris. The chatim tree referred to here is that which grows on the village
161 cremation ground, and is therefore associated with death." (309) This was absolutely necessary because of their

162 policy of retention of culture-specific words which had lend the translation an air of familiarity for Bengalis.
163 Alternatively, for the rest the Index was indispensable. This way, Clark-Mukherji's translation aimed to satisfy
164 both the native and the foreign reader because translation is no longer required only by those who "cannot read
165 the original". Though it has already been argued that this translation had intended to reach out mainly to foreign
166 readers, the need for a market of translations in its native place must have been foreseen by the translators. The
167 book had had quite a good fortune in India and is still regarded as one of the pioneer works in the field of
168 translation of Bengali specific words such as 'kokil' (cuckoo), 'bokul' (a flower), 'luchi' (dough of flour fried in
169 ghee or oil which used to be a Bengali delicacy), 'aalta' (the red liquid with which married Bengali women used
170 to adorn their feet), 'jatra' (open-air theatrical performance, a renowned folk-form of Bengal) and 'neem' (a
171 kind of tree) for example. The names of trees and fruits typical of the Bengal soil such as 'sajne', 'sonamukhi',
172 'sindurkouto', 'nata phal', etc have mostly been kept untranslated while 'nilkantha pakhi' becomes 'bliuthroated
173 jay' and 'harichacha', 'magpie'. Certain Bengali culture-specific words such as 'chandi-mandap', 'poush-parvan',
174 'basar', 'pithe', 'kansar jaambaati', have been rendered into their closest English meanings. 'Chorok Pujo' is
175 retained while 'Swing Festival' and 'Chariot Festival' replace 'phool dol' and 'ratha' respectively, overlooking
176 their religious connotation.

177 classics. It has often been criticized but could never be altogether neglected! VI.

178 9 Conclusion

179 In the Introduction to Pather Panchali Clark had stated "Whatever therefore has been deemed necessary to
180 bridge the divide between Bengali and English culture has been written into the text." (19) But has the divide
181 really been bridged? Clark-Mukherji's Pather Panchali has been a success with its intended readership. This can
182 lead only to a conclusion that there cannot be a universally accepted definition of a 'good' translation. It can
183 only be a successful or an unsuccessful one. If the targeted readers are satisfied, the translation can be termed
184 successful and judging by that standard, Clark-Mukherji's Pather Panchali was and has remained a success.

185 10 Works Cited

186 1 2 3

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²Fifty Years of the Song of the Road: A 'Good' Translation or a 'Successful' One?

³In the 'Introduction' to their text, Clark and Mukherji have acknowledged Satyajit Ray who "lent his advice in the difficult problem of providing a title and a subtitle for the translated work" (p 19)

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