

Global/Local: Satyajit Ray's Transcreation of *NONSENSE RHYMES**Sukumar Ray***Dr. Sumana Dey**

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ABSTRACT

The centenary year of the myriad-minded genius, Satyajit Ray may be a fitting opportunity to explore and unearth previously untrodden vistas of research to fathom the unsurmountable spectrum of his genius. This paper will venture to focus on Ray as a translator, with reference to the ten poems he translated from his father Sukumar Ray's masterpiece, "Abol Tabol" a collection of Bengali Nonsense rhymes; and is a humble tribute to the maestro Satyajit Ray on his Centenary year. Though, at present, various versions of the Bengali masterpiece by different translators are quite popular and acclaimed, the first such done by a gifted son himself and published from Calcutta Writers Workshop, famous for their unique binding which smacks of a quintessentially Bengali flavour, in a limited signed edition (1970) will always remain specially noteworthy. Moreover it will be worthwhile to note that a rare photograph of infant Satyajit Ray in his mother's lap at the beginning of the copy gets nuanced at once with the mention of Satyajit Ray as a "Transcreator", a concept which was perhaps introduced by another gifted litterateur and publisher-editor P Lal, who familiarized readers of Indian English Literature with the concept of transcreation much before the word got authorized by the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary. (first pub. 1948; 5th edition. 1996). This paper will try to analyse how Satyajit Ray captures the quintessence of his father's magnum opus in the ten translations done by him of the total 46 poems collected in the Bengali volume of Nonsense Verse Abol Tabol.

Keywords-word-to-word translation, sense-for-sense transference, invariable core, regional grain, Thick translation)

That the translation of a poem from Bengali to English may more often than not become a transcreation, a sort of rewriting of the source text was long ago pointed out by none other than the patron saint of Bengali literature, Rabindranath Tagore when, in a letter written to Ajit Kumar Chakravarty, dated March 1913 he remarked that such an endeavour will involve, ‘...a wide divergence from the original (since)...the English language has a beauty and splendour of its own and my poems will also attain a class if they achieve the rebirth of my being invested with the virtues of English language.’ (Sarkar 76) The same stands true of literature composed in any language. Each work of literary creativity definitely gets nuanced by beauty and splendour of the original language. In the same letter Tagore insinuates a clear distinction between a word-for-word translation and sense-for-sense transference while referring to the self-translation of Bengali poems to English alone involving, ‘Repeatedly, repetitively...erasing and striking out, brushing up and chiseling’ (Sarkar 76). Sujit Mukherjee in *Translation as Recovery* opines that Tagore in this letter may have been recommending a new process of translation. (Mukherjee 86)

Comprehension of Satyajit Ray’s concept of Transcreation may become all the more fruitful by a brief overview of his adherence to the concept of Transcreation followed in his film-making. Sujit Mukherjee’s article *Translation as Testimony* throws ample light on the issue by presenting a comparative study of the three English translations of Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay’s Bengali novel *Pather Panchali* after it aroused a worldwide interest with the astounding success of the film version which also brought worldwide recognition for Satyajit Ray as a film-maker. Mukherjee comments, ‘In each of these English versions of *Pather Panchali*, the translator has done more than translate-along with how to translate (i.e. tackled problems such as fidelity to original, culture-transfer, proper names, forms of address, etc.) he has also decided how much to translate (i.e. the whole or in parts) (Mukherjee 29). Mukherjee continues to elaborate how the translators of these three English versions, namely T.W. Clark and

Tarapada Mukherjee, Monika Verma and Kshitis Roy and Margaret Chatterjee has stuck to a a partial, truncated translation or a remodelled form or an abridged version, thus leaving out considerable portions from the original Bengali text, since as Mukherjee explains all of them have stuck to Satyajit Ray's film translation and illustrates his point by elaborating how Satyajit bases his film version of *Patther Panchali* on the first two parts of Bibhutibhushan's Bengali text, namely, "Ballai balal" and, "Aam antir bhempu" leaving out the third part, "Akrur Sambad" from Bibhutibhushan's *Patther Panchali* which however got accommodated in the next film of Satyajit's Apu trilogy *Aparajito*. A pertinent issue of making the both ends—that of popularizing a translated text amongst its target audience in a different language and also securing financial viability of the translated volume for the publisher—may be met by a considerable editing and pruning of the original text. Mukherjee also mentions of the licences taken by the maestro, rightly assessed as the most literary of Bengali film-makers, while translating many literary pieces to celluloid. Mukherjee further refers to the the explanations Ray himself penned down to justify such a selective treatment, later collected in the volume *Bishay Chalachitro* (On the subject of Cinema). Perhaps, Ray, a one-time student at Tagore's *Shantiniketan* endeavoured to accentuate the particular, " beauty and splendour " as mentioned by Gurudev Rabindranath by eschewing portions of the original while transforming and accommodating them in his oeuvre.

It will also be worthwhile to note that Ray himself in an untitled forward to, "Torai Baddha Ghorar Dim," mentioned, "If Nonsense works are translated verbatim the spirit of the original cannot be retained more often than not. So liberties had to be taken with some of the poems translated." (Satyajit Ray World.org). This paper will venture to analyse how far Ray had taken such, 'liberties' to create sense-for-sense translations, i.e. a creative translation or transcreation without accounting for a word-to-word translation to showcase "the invariant core" of the original poem (Bassnett 26). Recreating this invariant core may have also played a part in Satyajit Ray's selection of only ten poems for translation from the Bengali original of Sukumar Roy's, *Abol Tabol*.

Before starting a discussion on the ten transcreated poems of *Abol Tabol* it will be worthwhile to consider why Satyajit Ray chose to translate only ten of the forty-six poems of the

Bengali *Abol Tabol*. Andre Lefevere and Susan Bassnett in the preface to, *Translation, History and Culture* equates all translations to a rewriting and opines, “All rewritings whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. “(Lefevere ii) Herein comes a point of critical consideration since Sukumar Ray published his Nonsense Verse in 1923 and the forty-six poems of *Abol Tabol* was written between 1915-1923 by Sukumar who was a resident of a turbulent Calcutta society mauled by the cross-currents of the First World War, immediate Post War years, the Swadeshi Movement, the inhuman wrongs perpetrated by Colonial rule in India. The city of Calcutta, the one-time capital of British India till 1911 had always been a seat of cultural and political movements along with the Bengal Renaissance of Nineteenth Century. All these plethora of events played a part in, ”the given society “ of Sukumar Ray’s world of Nonsense. Critics, more often than not, have underlined a palpable presence of a covert critique of the viles wreaked by the Colonial masters on a nation desperately demanding political independence. But when Satyajit Ray’s copy of translated *NONSENSE RHYMES Sukumar Ray* was published first in 1970, decades after India's Independence, “that given society “of Post Colonial Calcutta and its goals have got transformed from the Pre Independence society of Sukumar Ray’s Calcutta society. So, definitely it was an ace move of Satyajit Ray to select only ten of the total *Abol Tabol* poems as representative of Sukumar Ray’s adept handling of the genre of Nonsense and thus leaving out a bulk of equally outstanding poems from the volume, perhaps because as a transcreator he was residing in and targeting the translated poems for, ”a given society “which was far removed from any agenda of hitting at the yoke of Colonial rule.

A close perusal of the translations of the ten Nonsense Rhymes of Sukumar Ray done by his son showcases the conscious alertness of Ray to remove any hindrances the target readers may feel about the cultural specificities due to their inability to access the original work. This justifies Ray’s substitution of, ”chocolates” in, ”The King of Bombardia” (Ray10) instead of such word-for-word translation like, ”to fry mango jelly” (Chaudhuri 22) found in another translation of the same poem, “The Customs of Bombagarh” in another much-circulated edition of translation, *The Select Nonsense of Sukumar Ray* done by a prominent academician Sukanta

Chaudhuri. However the latter was probably meant for readers who can read both the original and the translation to gauge how much the translation has adhered to or deviated from the original. But plainly Ray had a different target audience at mind while translating the Nonsense rhymes. Gentzer has rightly summed up the issue by mentioning, “if an expressive feature does not work in the receiving culture, then the translator must replace it or invent a new feature so that the overall quality is not lost.” (Gentzler 88). Without making the issue of fidelity in translation one of controversy it may be regarded as one of translator’s preference whether to provide what Nida refers to as, ‘a formal equivalence translation (which does not approve of adjustments in idioms, but tries to reproduce such expressions ---along with the meaning of the original.’ (Nida 166) or to focus on the notion that a translation, “...issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife...i.e. continued life of the original in the target language” (Benjamin 71). A similar justification lies in Ray’s selection of words like, “custard pies” “bread” “canister” etc. in the same poem to acclimatize the global English-speaking readers with the ethos of the original poem by creating a near, “equivalent effect” harped on by Nida. (Nida 166). Thus, it hardly becomes detrimental for ensuring the quality of Ray’s translation when deviations like, “distant cousin” in, “Odour in the Court” (Ray 16) instead of, “brother-in-law”; a word often having a derogatory undertone in Bengali parlance or Ray’s use of, “chops”, “Aunt Pity” “pigeons, eggs, figs, cloves, honey” in “Old Tickler” (Ray 20-21), “cobwebs in the air” in, “The Old Woodman” (Ray 22), “butcher” instead of, “milkman” in, “The King of Bombardia” (Ray 10) are used by the transcreator. Such transformations may have brushed aside the agenda of, “preserving the regional grain” (Tharu xxxii) of Sukumar Ray’s Nonsense Rhymes but they seem to establish Theo Herman’s emphasis on thick translation stemming from an impossibility of total translation but instead flaunting” the translator’s subject position...and introducing a narrative voice into the account. “(Hermans 387).

Another issue to be considered while gauging Satyajit Ray’s translation of Sukumar Ray’s *Abol Tabol* is the fact that Nonsense rhymes, more often than not take recourse to the linguistic effect of sound-over-sense to secure its effect for which onomatopoeic words are often used.. But those may mostly remain untranslatable in the target language. So gone are the humour ingrained in, “*Ddhush Ddhash*” in “Odour in the court”, (Ray 16) and “*myao myao*” in, “Old

Tickler”(Ray20).Language,undoubtedly remains loaded with socio-cultural specificities.So a considerable amount of adaptation,omissions,modifications and reworking on the part of a translator can never be overlooked.Herein lies the importance of,”the translator’s unconscious”(Venuti30).therefore it is no wonder that Satyajit leaves out many such expressions like,”*bapu re*”in”Odour in the Court”(Ray16),”*byamo*”in,”The Missing Whiskers”(Ray12),”*Jatra Dol*”and ”Kongsho raaj”in”Groomy Tidings”(Ray24).Similarly a global reading community may be unable to read the significance ingrained in many loco-specific details and parameters of quantifications used in the original.So the,”translator’s unconscious” omits the mentions of”*Posta*”and”*Bonogram*”in,”Groomy Tidings”(Ray24),converts the time specifications to distance,”a mile walk seem like only one”in “Uncle’s Invention”(Ray26),or the amount of a reward of one thousand *Takas* to,”a sack of gold”in,”Odour in the court”(Ray16)for a better sense-comprehension .

It is the,”translator’s unconscious”again which remains sincere in efforts to lay a finger on Sukumar Ray’s clarity of vision,universal outlook and scientific bent of mind.So while untranslatable portions get pruned,the incorporation of such expressions like,”*mazurkas*,”*Bicarbonate*” in,”The King of Bombardia”(Ray11) establishes the prudence and finesse of the ace Transcreator redefining the concept of fidelity of a proper translation to ensure that a translation,”should have all the ease and comfort of the original work”(Tytler128)and the original author.Friedrich Schleiermacher once commented,”A translator either leaves the author as much as alone as is possible and moves the reader towards him;or leaves the reader as much alone as is possible and moves the author towards him.”(Lefevere ed 149)Satyajit Ray in,*Sukumar Ray Nonsense rhymes* definitely and deftly has adhered to the second technique in his translations of the ten Nonsense Rhymes of his father Sukumar Roy and thus has justly clinched the global acceptance of these poems.

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