

## Translating Shankha Ghosh's Bangla poem '*Kabar*' into English

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**Abstract:** Poetry, like the other genres of literature, is very difficult to translate. Robert Frost once said that poetry is lost in translation. Frost's argument cannot be totally denied because each and every language has its own rhythm, melody, sonorousness and beauty which are not only difficult but also almost impossible to translate completely into a different language. Yet, translations are needed, and must be carried out. The article is basically about the translation of Shankha Ghosh's one of the earlier poems entitled '*Kabar*', and it shares my own experience as a translator in translating the Bangla poem into English. Both the Source and the Target Texts are placed together to highlight the difficulties in translating Ghosh's Bangla poem into English.

**Key words:** Shankha Ghosh, poetry, translation, problems.

Of all genres of literature, poetry, though fascinating, is the most difficult literary mode to translate. Translating poetry poses a good deal of challenge for a translator. Poetry abounds in several figures of speech, rhyme, alliteration and the other poetic devices which are really problematic and challenging for a translator. Mere change of words from Source Language to the Target Language does not work here. A poem contains the best words in the best order of the poet's best moments. The sounds, images, symbols, rhythm etc. not only present together, but also act one another. There is a good deal of controversies among the critics about the translation of poetry. Robert Frost once said that poetry is lost in translation. Schopenhauer argued that poems cannot be translated; they can only be transposed. However, such views against the translation of poetry are strongly dismissed by the poet translator Octavio Paz. According to him, a good translator of a poem, may be the poet himself or the translator who should intend to provide an analogous to the original poem. However, what makes the translations of poetry so unique is the simultaneous importance given to both the form and substance of poetry. The success of poetry translations depends on the rendering of both these two elements as close as possible to the Source Language Text. May be in some cases the proper equivalents are not

available due to the linguistic limitations and the cultural complexities. Yet, the translator must try to provide the target readers the ‘feel’ of the ST. An effort has been made here to translate Shankha Ghosh’s poem “Kabar” into English from the Bangla collection “*Shankha Ghoser Shrestha Kabita*” (*The Best Poems of Shankha Ghosh*), and to find out its difficulties.

Shankha Ghosh, born in 1932, is the sixth Bangla writer to win India’s highest literary award, namely Jnanpith after Mahasweta Devi, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, Ashapura Devi, Subhas Mukhopadhyay and Bishnu Dey. He is one of the most prolific living poets in Bengal now. While awarding Ghosh for the 52<sup>nd</sup> Jnanpith Award, it was declared that “Ghosh is a poet with an eye to the social milieu and his poems record both his time and space in a rare poetic style” (The Hindu). *Adim Lata – Gulmomay* (Ancient Vines and Trees), *Murkho Boro Samajik Noy* (Big Fool, not Social), *Babarar Prarthana* (Babur’s Prayer), *Mukh Dheke Jay Bignapane* (Faces are Hidden by Advertisements) and *Kabir Abhipray* (The Poet’s Intention) are his creations which have established his greatness and creative artistry as a poet. In his poetry he has portrayed a deep sense of anguish towards the superficiality and callousness of the society and our existence. His poems have been translated into English and several Indian languages including Hindi, Assamese, Punjabi, Marathi, Malayalam and also some foreign languages. Ghosh’s poem “Kabar” (The Grave) reflects the poet’s earnest appeal to the mother earth to allow the poet a small place to be buried in the solitary grave. The poet always feels blessed to receive the touch of the soil of this earth. He scolds himself as his purposeless short-lived life does not come any help to the earth. His life like every human being is full of sorrows and sufferings, pains and humiliations. But he has accepted it as his own fate, and does not blame anybody. He condemns the foolishness of the people who have made the earth bloody and full of horrors. There is a note melancholy throughout the poem. It ends with the poet’s appeal to the earth to forgive him, and to make weapons from his bones in the sacrificial rite of making ‘human’.

Let me here transcribe the Source Text in Roman Transliteration symbols:

### ***Kabar***

*āmār janya ektu kabar khnoṛo sarbasaha*

*lajjā lukoi knācā mātir tale –*

*gopan rakta jā-kichutuku āche āmār sarire, tār*

*sabtukutei sasya jeno fale.*

*kathin mātir chnoyā bātās payechi ei samasta din –*

*nice ki tār ektuo nai bhije?*

*charie debo du-hāte tār prānānjali basundharā,  
jetuku pāi prāner disā nije.*

*khinaū ei jiban āmār chilo sudhui āgle rākhā  
tomār kono kājei lāge ni tā –  
pather kone bharsāhārā pore chilām sārātā din:  
āj āmāke grahan karo mitā.  
ār kichu nai, tomār surya ālo tomāri thāk  
amai sudhu ektu kabar dio  
cai nā āmi sabuj ghāser bharā nibiṛ dhāknātuku  
marāghāsei miluk uttario.*

*lajjā byathā apamāne upekhāte bharā ākās  
bheñeche kon jibanpātra khāni –  
e jadi hay dukhya āmār, tomāi nai to e abhijog  
marme āmār dirgha bojhā tāni.  
sedin geche jakhan āmi bobā cokhe cayechilām  
simāhin oi nirmamatār dike –  
abhisāp je nai e barañ nirmamatāi āsīrbād  
he basudhā āj tā sekheni ke.*

*raktabharā bibhatsatāi bhareche tār sirna māti  
rikta sudhu āmāder ei gā-tā  
tānātānā cakhu chñiṛe upce paṛe sukno knādā*

*thāmla nā ār marubālur hnātā!*  
*je path die surya gela chāyāpath o tār pichane*  
*hārie jāi lukie jāi mise*  
*ghoṛār khure thñitālo buk alajja-se ālor dhārā*  
*dipta dāha bhareche cokh kise!*

*Kundalito rātritā āj jābār samai bollo āmāi*  
*‘tumei sudhu birjahārār dale,*  
*riju kathin sab prithibi hārehāre ghasā lege*  
*akhamatā tomār cokher pale’.*  
*nibei jakhan gelām āmi, nibte dio he prithibi*  
*āmār hāre pāhār karo jamā –*  
*mānus habār janya jakhan jānga habe, āmār hāre*  
*jaṅga goṛo, āmāi koro khamā. (Ghosh 13-14)*

Here the translation follows:

### **The Grave**

Dig a small grave for me, you all-enduring earth  
Let me hide my shame under thy wet soil -  
Whatever the blood remains hidden in my body  
Let crops grow all.  
Breathed in the air of thy solid earth all these days –  
Is it not least wet in the grave?  
Would offer my life in joined palms to you earth,  
Whatever the trace of life I have.

My short-lived life was merely to live  
It came to you no need –  
Hopelessly remained in the corner of the path all day long:  
Now receive me my friend.  
Nothing more, let the sunlight remain in your possession  
In the grave let me lie  
Hope not the solitary green grasses to cover it  
Enough is scarf of grasses dry.

The sky is full of shame, sufferings, humiliations and rejections  
The cup of life is broken–  
If this is the sorrow of my life, to you I do not lament  
Let me carry in my heart the prolonged burden.  
The days gone when I looked with dumb eyes  
To that cruelties beyond limit –  
Not a curse, rather those are blessings to me.  
O earth, who has not yet learnt it.

Thy barren soil is filled with blood and horror  
Our body only looks helpless  
The dried cries overflow from the widened eyes  
Walking does not stop on the hot desert hopeless!  
The way Sun shines, the shadow follows

Gets lost, disappears and merges

The shameless rays get struck by the horse's hoof

What fills those brightened eyes!

The twisted parting night now says to me

'You're only in the band of the spiritless

Repeatedly struck in the bones of this solid earth

The eyes show your helplessness.'

As my life gets extinguished, let it extinguish o earth

Build hills with the bones I have –

When the sacrificial rite to make human will begin, take my bones

Make weapons, and me forgive. (my trans.)

Let me first focus on the title of the poem. 'Kabar' has several meanings in English like 'grave', 'tomb', 'burial ground', 'cemetery', and 'graveyard'. In the translation 'grave' is chosen as the title because it seems to me more appropriate in the context of the poem. In Ghosh's text, the word 'kabar' appears at the very opening line of the poem, and in the sixth line of the second stanza. But in the translation the word 'grave' appears thrice. The extra one appears in the sixth line of the poem where Ghosh writes "*kathin mātir chnoyā bātās payechi ei samasta din –/nice ki tār ektuo nai bhije?*" (13). The translation follows: "Breathed in the air of thy solid earth all these days –/ Is it not least wet in the grave?" Here the word 'grave' appears not only to 'carry on' the contextual meaning, but also to harmonize it with the eighth line of the poem to continue the rhyme.

Translating the rhyme of a poem from one language into another is the most problematic one for a translator, and this is the biggest problem that appears to me time and again in translating Ghosh's poem here. The poem consists of five stanzas, and each stanza consists of eight lines. Ghosh does not maintain any metrical pattern here. But the second and the fourth lines, and the sixth and the eighth lines of each stanza rhyme together in different rhythmic patterns, and this add to the melody of the poem. And translating both the Bangla meaning and form into English equivalents is really problematic due to the linguistic and cultural difference

between the two languages. Let us put the rhymes of Ghosh's poem and the translations side by side:

Source Text	Target Text
<i>tale, fale</i>	soil, all
<i>bhije, nije</i>	grave, have
<i>tā, mitā</i>	need, friend
<i>dio, uttario</i>	lie, dry
<i>khāni, tāni</i>	broken, burden
<i>dike, ke</i>	limit, it
<i>gā-tā, hñātā</i>	helpless, hopeless
<i>mise, kise</i>	merges, eyes
<i>dale, pale</i>	spiritless, helplessness
<i>jamā, khamā</i>	have, forgive

The above comparison clearly hints at the problem of translating and harmonizing the rhyme of the poem. No 'word for word' translation does not work because the English equivalents of those Bangla words in most cases do not rhyme together. So emphasis needs to be given on the 'sense for sense' translation to reproduce the rhyme as far as possible. It is true that in some cases the sonority and spontaneity of the ST are missing, but it is inevitable due to the linguistic differences and their limitations. The major difficulty is found in translating the ending of the poem where Ghosh alludes to the Hindu myth of the killing of the demon Virtra by Deva with the powerful weapon 'vajra', the thunder, made from the very bones of the sage Dadhichi. The poet here prays to the mother earth to forgive him for the loss of his vigour to help the people of the world, and wishes to be born again to destroy the injustices of the world. Translating the mythical spirit and keeping intact the rhyme of the poem pose huge difficulties here.

Let me give one more instance to highlight the problem of translating the imagery of the poem. In the poem Ghosh reflects on the troubles and conflicts of the world which have made the people's life miserable on earth. The people's sufferings and their endless journey of life continues on this desert-like earth. Ghosh writes: "*raktabharā bibhatsatāi bhareche tār sirna māti/ rikta sudhu āmāder ei gā-tā/ tānātānā cakhu chñire upce pare sukno knādā/ thāmla nā ār marubālor hñātā!*" Translation follows: "Thy barren soil is filled with blood and horror/ Our body only looks helpless/ The dried cries overflow from the widened eyes/ Walking does not

stop on the hot desert hopeless!” Here at the end of the second and fourth lines ‘helpless’ and ‘hopeless’ have been placed to ‘carry on’ the rhyme of the poem.

Let me conclude with Robert Frost again with whom the article began. It cannot be totally denied to Frost’s argument that the spirit of a poem gets lost in translation. Every language has its own rhythm, melody, sonorousness and beauty which are really difficult to translate into a different language. What we need and must try to resituate the Source Text into the Target one remaining close as far as possible to the source one.

### Works Cited

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**Bionote:** Dr. Arun Pramanik, formerly Part-Time Lecturer of the Dept. of English, Raja N. L. Khan Women’s College, Midnapore, has translated the poems and stories of Rabindranath Tagore, Mahasweta Devi, Sankha Ghosh, Anil Gharai and Jatin Bala into English.