

***Trans-lation, Poetics and Politics: Reflections on Clinton  
B. Seely's *The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from  
Colonial Bengal* and William Radice's *The Poem of the  
Killing of Meghnād****

***A Thesis Submitted to the University of North Bengal  
for the Award of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English***

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled *Trans-lation, Poetics and Politics: Reflections on Clinton B. Seely's The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal* and William Radice's *The Poem of the Killing of Meghnād* has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Binayak Roy, Assistant Professor of English, University of North Bengal. No part of this thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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**CERTIFICATE**

I certify that Peenaz Khan has prepared the thesis entitled *Trans-lation, Poetics and Politics: Reflections on Clinton B. Seely's The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal and William Radice's The Poem of the Killing of Meghnād*, for the award of Ph.D degree of the University of North Bengal, under my guidance. She has carried out the work at the Department of English, University of North Bengal.

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## A B S T R A C T

One of the tasks of Translation Studies is to examine how far, and with what effects, the Target Language Text (henceforward abbreviated to TLT) adheres to and deviates from the Source Language Text (henceforward abbreviated to SLT). The case becomes rather intriguing with poetry translations, as poetry generically deploys defamiliarization more than prose does. When a translator embarks upon translating a grand-scale poem like the epic, the task becomes even more arduous as its ‘grand style’, which is far removed from the stylistic features of the lyric or the ballad, entails greater problems of what Roman Jakobson calls ‘interlingual transposition’ in translation . So, to translate Milton’s *Paradise Lost* into a target language is much more demanding than to translate his sonnets or elegies. Things become even more interesting for a researcher in the domain of Translation Studies when an SLT is translated into the same target language by different hands.

Clinton B. Seely, as we know, has translated *inter alia* Jibanananda Das’s poetry, and William Radice is a well-known Tagore translator. Seely’s translation of Jibanananda’s poetry and Radice’s of Tagore’s have already been taken up for study by researchers. In 2004 Seely completed his 25 years’ project of translating Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s *magnum opus*, *Meghnadbadh kabya*, and it was published by OUP under the title, “The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal”. By then Radice, too, had completed the first draft of his translation of the same epic, but delayed its publication until 2010, under the title – “The Poem of the Killing of Meghnād”. These translations have not yet been taken up by anyone for a comparative study in the light of translation theories. Hence a juxtapositional reading of them, which is the main object of this study, may not be either trite or superfluous.

It transpires from the excerpts used in the present study that the SLT – TLT movement in Seely is different in many respects from that in Radice. Rendering

Madhusudan's Bengali blank verse in English is a big problem, and a close, comparative reading of TLT<sub>1</sub> and TLT<sub>2</sub> makes it clear that Seely and Radice attempt very disparate solutions to their common problem. In order to negotiate with Madhusudan's *amitrakshar chhanda* (অমিত্রাক্ষর ছন্দ), Seely adheres to the fourteen-syllable, unrhymed line with enjambment although he has not forced his lines to be coterminous with the original. In other words, he frames lines based on fourteen English syllables and takes great care to end his paragraphs with a full, fourteen-syllable line.

For Radice, it appears, 'phrasing' is as much important as 'metre' (the matter of syllable) in encountering Madhusudan's Bengali blank verse. Phrasing, for Radice, means "the length and balance of phrases, the placing of pauses in the line or sentence or paragraph", and unlike Seely he never ends his lines with 'little words'. Radice's lines, on the other hand, "are based on a count of three phrases, a phrase being defined by the pause before or after it that is indicated by any kind of punctuation mark [...] even though the phrases can vary hugely in length". Incidentally, we can take into account Madhusudan; letter of 1 July 1860 to Raj Narayan Basu wherein he categorically says, "Let your friends guide their voices by the pause {...}. My advice is Read, Read, Read. Teach your ears the new tune and then you will find out what it is". It appears that Seely deviates from, while Radice tries and adheres to, Madhusudan's dictate.

The primary focus of the present study would, therefore, be on the divergence of both TLT<sub>1</sub> and TLT<sub>2</sub> from their common SLT as well as on the major differences between the two TLTs. The present study will take into its ambit a very important question – for whom is a translation done? It appears that every translation is 'forked tongue', 'Janus-faced' – speaking both to the reader wholly unacquainted with the Source Language and to the reader having adequate command of the source language who probably would rather enjoy a comparison between the TLT and its SLT.

The objective of the present study and the statement of the problem mentioned above have been articulated out of a reading of an array of important concepts / principles / theories of translation formulated down the ages. We have outlined the principal ones in Chapter-I. There are basically two diametrically opposite views on poetry translation: one proclaims that translation is not possible, translators are traitors because a poem gets killed in translation; the other vindicates possibilities of successful translations – sometimes not excluding even what came to be known in the mid – 20<sup>th</sup> century as ‘machine translation’. The present study will not take into account the former, and while focusing on the latter it will exclude the matter of machine translation which can translate ‘Out of sight, out of mind’ as ‘invisible lunatic’! It may be useful for the purpose of the present study to refer to some notable practicing translators, engaged in translating poetry from Bengali into English. *Tagore and Modernity* edited by Krishna Sen and Tapati Gupta and published in 2006 has a panel discussion, excerpts from which are reproduced and discussed in the introductory chapter of the present study.

Critical literature on both Seely and Radice as translators of *Meghnadbadh kabya* is less than scanty, limited only to interviews and book reviews. The proposed study therefore cannot make much use of what others have said on the two translations of the same SLT. Apparently, the present study’s being the first of its kind may be a disadvantage; but then there is the advantage of reading the two texts critically without being ‘critically’ influenced by others.

The present study will try and address some such questions as the following:

- (i) What does the phrase ‘the poetics and politics of *trans*-lation’ imply?
- (ii) What are the principles of translation that Seely and Radice have sought to apply to their negotiations with a common SLT?

- (iii) What similarities and differences between the two translators have surfaced in their negotiations?
- (iv) Have the two TLTs achieved the desired equipollence?
- (v) Do the issues of ‘poet-translator’ and ‘non-poet translator’ emerge in the translations?
- (vi) How are the cultural shifts registered in the translations?

As the title of my thesis indicates, the work would be sort of Qualitative Research based on case-study, the translations of Seely and Radice being the two ‘cases’. As it often happens with Qualitative Research, the hypotheses have been spelt out while discussing the conceptual framework. Equipped as much as possible with relevant theories/concepts/principles of translation, the present study would attempt both a comparative and an analytic examination of the variables, viz. the two translated texts of Madhusudan Dutt’s *Meghnadbadh kabya*. It is perhaps needless to say that all the lines of the two TLTs under survey will not, and cannot, be compared or contrasted. Following what is known as ‘Convenience Sampling’ or ‘Judgement Sampling’, the present study will choose as samples a few important lines from each of the Cantos.

This introductory chapter adumbrates the work undertaken; and in so doing it briefly discusses the crux of the research ‘problem’ which the succeeding chapters deal with, the principal principles of translation which constitute the theoretical framework of the present study, the existing critical literature on Clinton B. Seely and William Radice as translators of *Meghnadbadh kabya*, the relevant research questions to be addressed, the methodology adopted, and lastly, a capsule summary of the chapters that follow this.

Any critical appreciation of a translated text should begin with a discussion of the SLT. The second chapter titled “REFLECTIONS ON THE SLT: *Meghnadbadh kabya*

(1861)” discusses the background and the uniqueness of Dutt’s epic poem which generated as many as five English translations: two in the twentieth century and three in the present.

Why has the word ‘trans-lated’ in the title of the present work been partially italicized? What do we mean by the poetics and the politics of translation? Answers to these questions are attempted in Chapter III, with special reference to Umberto Eco, Spivak and Derrida.

Chapter-IV is brief comparative study of Seely’s and Radice’s translations. Specimen lines from each of the nine Cantos (Books) from both the TLTs and their common, corresponding SLT have been juxtaposed for this purpose. The two translators’ prefaces are also extensively used with a view to tracing the similarities and differences between them as translators.

The concluding chapter (i.e. Chapter V) titled “IN(CON)CLUSIVE CONCLUSION” discusses the most recent translation of Dutt’s *Meghnadbadh kabya* done by Biswas and Gupta (2017), and tries to see, with some examples, how it differs from Seely’s and Radice’s translations.

A text gets regenerated through its receptions and translations continuously over time, and no single evaluation of it or its translation(s) can be conclusive. A text has to be evaluated and reevaluated in all its inclusiveness. Hence the fifth and last chapter of the present work has been titled, with a tinge of oxymoron, “In(con)clusive Conclusion”. Structurally, this is the concluding chapter; but that it is *not* ‘conclusive’ but rather ‘inclusive’ (of what is to come) is made clear from our decision to bring in the latest translation of *Meghnadbadh kabya* for a comparative discussion in this chapter itself. The present thesis, therefore, is only part of a continuum; and as we all know, no continuum can have an exclusive conclusion as it always remains in a state of flux to be explained, extended, debated and interrogated, and therefore, supplemented by newer scholarships to come.

## P R E F A C E

To feel liberated, one needs to seek freedom out of the shackles of the cage and open the prisoner in oneself. We cannot live in the quantum interconnected global village unless our hearts embrace the marvels of the infinite minds. Captivating prodigious intellects, endless contemplation and unfulfilled verses painted on the canvas of literature have always been incredible gifts to this global village. This freedom is the fascinating and remarkable essence of poetry and prose through the minds of the bards who chose to think and sail beyond the course of their solitary exiles.

The publication of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Meghnadbadh kabya* in 1861 heralded a revolution, a renaissance and a paradigm shift that permeated the first wave of modern Bengali literature, liberating as it did Bengali poetry forever from the bondage of the medieval poetic fashion known as 'payar' (the self-contained rhyming couplet) as well as opening up the boundless and marvelous possibilities of the blank verse. The epic poem is still hailed as a solitary peak in the entire landscape of (modern) Bengali literature. Its subversion too, of the canonical *Ramayana*, was entirely a subject unattempted yet in prose or rhyme in any Indian language. Bengali critical literature, obviously, teems with studies on Michael's life and works; overseas Bengali departments niche him in their syllabuses; William Radice undertook his PhD on Michael's life and masterpieces at the University of Oxford in the late 1980s. The classic *enfant terrible* of the early Bengali Renaissance is still an incandescent into the spectrum of every gleaming eyes of Bengali poetry lovers.

*Meghnadbadh kabya* has till date been translated into English five times since 1926. But although Translation Studies is now more popular than ever the world over, these translations have not yet been adopted for comparative studies. The present thesis is a humble pursuit along that untrodden path as well as a homage to such a classic.

I heartily and sincerely thank the Department of English, University of North Bengal, for granting permission to carry out my research work, thus providing all necessary facilities to complete the thesis and submit it for adjudication. I would take this opportunity to specially thank my professors A. Sengupta, R. Ghosh and Z. Mitra for enlightening me with their vast insightful knowledge and also adding worth to my work at various stages of research.

Words fail me to express my gratitude towards Prof. B. Roy, my supervisor, who has generously accepted me as his research student and has been a constant and patient supervisor for this work to come to a fruition.

To Prof. C. Laha, my former teacher, I owe more than I can recount. Munificence towards every student seeking guidance and knowledge has always been his passion. Prof. Laha has been too helpful in rendering response to my queries, either across the table or over the phone (like from behind the clouds!).

I would like to thank both my parents for their benevolence, kindness and endowment that helped keep my hopes and dreams alive. I would also like to thank my extended family for their unwavering love and support.

I am equally grateful to the authors and the publishers of the primary and secondary materials used in this thesis.

I accord most humble indebtedness to the frontline doctors, nurses, paramedical staffs and others associated with COVID-19 providing healthcare to all risking their lives. As the last three chapters of the thesis were written during this pandemic, I pay my respect and honour to these superhumans for their continuous efforts to heal the world. I also salute and pay homage to all the healthcare workers who have laid down their lives while saving others. We are passing through a catastrophic crisis and all of us need to stand united to fight this virus following medical protocols. May the world heal soon.

## **C O N T E N T S**

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## CHAPTER-I: INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter adumbrates the work undertaken; and in so doing it briefly discusses the crux of the research ‘problem’ which the succeeding chapters deal with, the principal principles of translation which constitute the theoretical framework of the present study, the existing critical literature on Clinton B. Seely and William Radice as translators of *Meghnadbadh kabya*, the relevant research questions to be addressed, the methodology adopted, and lastly, a capsule summary of the chapters that follow this.

One of the tasks of Translation Studies is to examine how far, and with what effects, the Target Language Text (henceforward abbreviated to TLT) adheres to and deviates from the Source Language Text (henceforward abbreviated to SLT). The case becomes rather intriguing with poetry translations, as poetry generically deploys defamiliarization more than prose does. When a translator embarks upon translating a grand-scale poem like the epic, the task becomes even more arduous as its ‘grand style’, which is far removed from the stylistic features of the lyric or the ballad, entails greater problems of what Roman Jakobson calls ‘interlingual transposition’ in translation (238). So, to translate Milton’s *Paradise Lost* into a target language is much more demanding than to translate his sonnets or elegies. Things become even more interesting for a researcher in the domain of Translation Studies when an SLT is translated into the same target language by different hands. The point becomes patent once we remember that Tagore’s “Karna-Kunti Samvad” was translated into English not only by Tagore himself but by at least five others, too, including Sturge Moore, Humayun Kabir and Ketaki Kushari Dyson. Multiple translations of the same SLT invite two basic questions: first, as Laha (*Karna-Kunti Dialogue* 71) indicates, how does each of the translations stand as translation *per se*, and secondly, how do the translations differ from each other and with what effects? (Khan and Roy 131-32)

Clinton B. Seely, as we know, has translated *inter alia* Jibanananda Das's poetry, and William Radice is a well-known Tagore translator. Seely's translation of Jibanananda's poetry and Radice's of Tagore's have already been taken up for study by researchers. [E.g. Dr. S.C. Dasgupta of Raiganj University worked on Radice as a Tagore translator, and Ms. S. Das worked under him on Seely as a translator of Jibanananda's poetry, to name two near at hand.] In 2004 Seely completed his 25 years' project of translating Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *magnum opus*, *Meghnadbadh kabya*, and it was published by OUP under the title, "The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal". By then Radice, too, had completed the first draft of his translation of the same epic, but delayed its publication until 2010, under the title – "The Poem of the Killing of Meghnād". These translations have not yet been taken up by anyone for a comparative study in the light of translation theories. Hence a juxtapositional reading of them, which is the main object of this study, may not be either trite or superfluous. (Khan and Roy 132)

Needless to say, the difference between the two translations starts right from the titles themselves. While the subtitle to Seely's work takes on an interpretive mode with the words "A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal", 'Slaying' in Radice's becomes 'Killing', and 'Meghanada' becomes 'Meghnād' with the addition of 'The Poem' which probably is due to Radice's desire to retain the word 'kabya' of the SLT. It can be guessed from the two titles that deviations in translation are likely to tell us a lot about the 'poetic engineering' (Radice's phrase, used in his *Poetry and Community* published in 2003) of the translator concerned. [Here it may be said in passing that Seely spells Madhusudan's surname as 'Datta', while Radice sticks to the poet's own choice 'Dutt' while signing in English. The present study picks up the latter]. (Khan and Roy 134)

In order to slightly amplify the statement of problem and thereby to justify it, a small part of the SLT (the Bengali Text) can be quoted first and then its corresponding translations

by Seely and Radice (henceforward referred to as TLT<sub>1</sub> and TLT<sub>2</sub> respectively) can be juxtaposed to demonstrate how the two TLTs individually differ from each other in negotiating with their common SLT. This demonstration is crucial for the statement of the problem because, to quote Laha again, “How a TLT ... negotiates with its SLT, and with what effects, have remained central to the questions concerning the art of translation and the field of Translation Studies” (*Karna-Kunti Dialogue ix*). (Khan and Roy 134)

SLT:

হেন কালে চারিদিকে সহসা ভাসিল  
 রোদন-নিনাদ মৃদু; তা সহ মিশিয়া  
 ভাসিল নুপুরধ্বনি, কিঙ্কিণীর বোল  
 ঘোর রোলে। হেমাঙ্গী সঙ্গিনীদল-সাথে,  
 প্রবেশিলা সভাতলে চিত্রাঙ্গদা দেবী।  
 আলু থালু, হায়, এবে কবরীবন্ধন!  
 আভরণহীণ দেহ, হিমালীতে যথা  
 কুসুমরতন-হীন বন-সুশোভিনী  
 লতা! অশ্রুস্রব আঁখি, নিশার শিশির-  
 পূর্ণ পদ্মপর্ণ যেন! বীরবাহু-শোকে  
 বিবশা রাজমহিষী, বিহঙ্গিনী যথা,  
 যবে গ্রাসে কাল ফণী কুলায়ে পশিয়া  
 শাবকে। শোকের বাড় বহিল সভাতে!  
 সুর-সুন্দরীর রূপে শোভিল চৌদিকে  
 বামাকুল; মুক্তকেশ মেঘমালা, ঘন  
 নিশ্বাস প্রলয়-বায়ু; অশ্রুবারি-ধারা  
 আসার; জীমুত-মন্দ্র হাহাকার-রব!  
 চমকিলা লঙ্কাপতি কনক-আসনে।

ফেলিল চামর দূরে তিতি নেত্রনীরে  
 কিঙ্করী; কাঁদিল ফেলি ছত্র ছত্রধর।  
 ক্ষোভে, রোষে, দৌবারিক নিষ্কামিলা অসি  
 ভীমরূপী; পাত্র মিত্র সভাসদ যত,  
 অধীর, কাঁদিলা সবে ঘোর কোলাহলে। (Sanyal I.322-344)

TLT<sub>1</sub>:

... Suddenly

at that time, there drifted in from all directions soft sounds  
 of weeping blended with anklets' tinkling, jingling girdles,  
 and ominous outcries. Escorted by the golden-limbed  
 women of her retinue, Queen Citrāngadā stepped to  
 the floor of that assembly – hair, alas, disheveled! her  
 arms, naked, without bangles, like forest-ornamenting  
 vines when, in snow, they lack gemlike blossoms! Her tear-filled eyes  
 were as the dewy lotus pads at night! The queen was quite  
 beside herself, lamenting over Vīrabāhu, as  
 does a mother bird when some fell snake slips inside her nest  
 and swallows up her fledglings. A storm of woe blew into  
 that assembly hall! The womenfolk stood there, appearing  
 comely as the wives of the divines, their loose and flowing  
 hair seemed a swirl of clouds, their heaving sighs Pralaya-like  
 heavy winds, their streams of tears torrential rains, their wailing  
 moans the thunder's rumble! Lañkā's sovereign on his gold throne  
 was startled. Maidens in attendance, tear-soaked, dropped their yak-  
 tail whisks; the umbrella bearer let slip the parasol  
 and wept; angry and confused, the guardsman unsheathed his dread

sword; and the ministers, the counselors, and members of  
the court, alarmed, broke down crying, causing utter havoc. (Seely 1.289-310)

TLT<sub>2</sub>:

Then, suddenly, the sound of feminine weeping flooded  
in from all sides,

Mingled with the tinkling of anklets, and the sonorous  
jingling of girdle-bells. Chitrāngadā-devi came into  
the chamber,

With her gold-complexioned attendants. Her hair was  
unplaited, alas,

Loose and dishevelled! Her body was without ornament,  
like a forest-adorning creeper in the snow,

Bereft of its jewel-like blossoms! Her eyes were full of  
tears, like petals of a lotus brimming with night's dew!

The queen was benumbed with grief for Virbāhu, like a  
mother-bird after a deadly snake enters her nest and  
devours her young! A storm of grief swept through  
the court!

The golden skin of her women flashed all around like  
lightning; their unbound hair was a bank of clouds;  
their heavy sighing was a hurricane wind;

Their tears streamed like a cloudburst; their weeping  
and wailing boomed like thunder! The lord of Lankā  
on his golden throne started!

Handmaidens dropped their fly-whisks as their eyes

moistened; the weeping umbrella-bearer dropped his  
 umbrella; shocked,  
 Angered, fearsome guards at the door unsheathed their  
 swords; councillors,  
 Ministers and the rest of the court were all alarmed, all  
 in tears, all sobbing noisily! (Radice I.322-344)

It transpires from the quotes above that the SLT – TLT movement in Seely is different in many respects from that in Radice. Rendering Madhusudan’s Bengali blank verse in English is a big problem, and a close, comparative reading of TLT<sub>1</sub> and TLT<sub>2</sub> makes it clear that Seely and Radice attempt very disparate solutions to their common problem. In order to negotiate with Madhusudan’s *amitrakshar chhanda* (অমিত্রাক্ষর ছন্দ), Seely adheres to the fourteen-syllable, unrhymed line with enjambment although he has not forced his lines to be coterminous with the original. In other words, he frames lines based on fourteen English syllables and takes great care to end his paragraphs with a full, fourteen-syllable line. In order to maintain the 14-syllable structure, Seely often has to end his lines with little words like ‘to’, ‘as’, ‘of’ – words that perform grammatical, rather than lexical, functions. Seely was not unaware of the problem of putting a non-stressed language like Bangla into a stressed language like English – “So what do you do?” You try a little bit, if you lose a little bit, then you compromise a little bit and it’s one – not the only – solution” (Khan and Roy 136). (“Clinton B. Seely: ‘In Nature the most beautiful is usually the hybrid thing’ in *The Daily Star*, vol.5, no. 467, September 17, 2005).

For Radice, it appears, ‘phrasing’ is as much important as ‘metre’ (the matter of syllable) in encountering Madhusudan’s Bengali blank verse. Phrasing, for Radice, means “the length and balance of phrases, the placing of pauses in the line or sentence or paragraph” (Reflections), and unlike Seely he never ends his lines with ‘little words’. Radice’s lines, on

the other hand, “are based on a count of three phrases, a phrase being defined by the pause before or after it that is indicated by any kind of punctuation mark [...] even though the phrases can vary hugely in length” (Reflections). Incidentally, we can take into account Madhusudan; letter of 1 July 1860 to Raj Narayan Basu wherein he categorically says, “Let your friends guide their voices by the pause {...}. My advice is Read, Read, Read. Teach your ears the new tune and then you will find out what it is” (Radice, Reflections). It appears that Seely deviates from, while Radice tries and adheres to, Madhusudan’s dictate. (Khan and Roy 136-37)

The primary focus of the present study would, therefore, be on the divergence of both  $TLT_1$  and  $TLT_2$  from their common SLT as well as on the major differences between the two TLTs. The present study will take into its ambit a very important question – for whom is a translation done? It appears that every translation is ‘forked tongue’, ‘Janus-faced’ – speaking both to the reader wholly unacquainted with the Source Language and to the reader having adequate command of the source language who probably would rather enjoy a comparison between the TLT and its SLT.

The objective of the present study and the statement of the problem mentioned above have been articulated out of a reading of an array of important concepts / principles / theories of translation formulated down the ages. We will here outline the principal ones.

There are basically two diametrically opposite views on poetry translation: one proclaims that translation is not possible, translators are traitors because a poem gets killed in translation; the other vindicates possibilities of successful translations – sometimes not excluding even what came to be known in the mid – 20<sup>th</sup> century as ‘machine translation’. The present study will not take into account the former, and while focusing on the latter it

will exclude the matter of machine translation which can translate ‘Out of sight, out of mind’ as ‘invisible lunatic’!

Even when the art of translation was passing from the Greeks to the Romans, “[the] appropriation of the original without any real concern for the stylistic and linguistic idiosyncrasies of the original [...]” and “[...] transformation in order to mould the foreign into the linguistic structures of one’s own culture” was adequately recognized (Friedrich 12). The Renaissance empiricist Roger Bacon talks about two modes of translation: vertical and horizontal. In vertical translations, we have ‘a word for word rendering’ while “the horizontal mode of translation welcomes deviations from SLT” (Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 53). In Etienne Dolet’s opinion the translator, while negotiating with SLT has to achieve ‘harmonic cadences’ that ‘ravish the reader’s ear and intellect’ (Steiner 263). The same kind of ‘cadence’ or the horizontal mode can be perceived in North’s translation of Plutarch (Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 56). George Chapman, too, believes that “[the] work of a skilfull and worthy translator is to observe the sentences, figures and forms of speech proposed in his author [...] to adorne them with figures and forms of oration filled to the original in the same tongue to which they are translated [...]” (Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 61). Steiner (253) categorizes the principles of translation prevalent during the ‘great’ period (of Cowley, Dryden, Pope, Johnson *et al.*) into three phases: literal translation, translation ‘by means of faithful but autonomous restatement’, and translation as ‘recreation, variation, interpretative parallel’. The third of these is described by Dryden as ‘translation with latitude’ (Dryden 17). What is interesting in Dryden’s ‘theory’ of translation is that a translator, “if he is to translate poetry, he must be a poet” (Dryden 20). This is a crucial statement to bear in mind as far as the present study is concerned, since Seely is not a recognized poet but Radice is.

In later centuries, too, the autonomy of the translator has been recognized, and sometimes emphasized, notwithstanding the cautious stance taken by Alexandar Fraser Tytler in his famous *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (1791) which sought to look for a ‘golden mean’ between adherence and departure. Goethe (60), Wilhelm Von Humboldt (57), Schlegel (qtd. in Frenz 99) advocate similar kind of balance in the transference of SLT to TLT. Schleiermacher has it that the translation is “supposed to be, as much as possible, the same thing for its readers as the original was for its own readers” (41).

When we talk about translation as transcreation, Edward Fitzgerald, the great translator of Omar Khayyam’s *Rubaiyat*, comes in. He is of the view that “the text must live at all cost with a transfusion of one’s own worst life, if one can’t retain the Original’s better” (Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 70). In this connection we may add that Matthew Arnold was the first to raise the issue of the Janus-faced condition of a translation, which we mentioned at the end of the ‘statement of the problem’. Arnold’s advice is: “Let [the translator] ask how his work affects those who both know Greek and can appreciate poetry [while reading Homer in translation]” (Arnold 247).

Roman Jakobson is of the opinion that “there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units, while message may serve as adequate interpretations of alien code units or messages [...]. When there is deficiency, terminology may be qualified and amplified by loan words or loan translations, neologism or romantic shifts and finally by circumlocutions” (Jakobson 233-234). This of course tilts towards ‘transcreation’ which is allied to the question of originality, and here is Octavio Paz putting forward his view on the matter: “Translation had once served to reveal the preponderance of similarities over differences; from this time onward translation would serve to illustrate the irreconcilability of differences [...]. All texts are original because each translation has its own distinctive character. Up to a

point each translation is creation and thus constitutes a unique text” (Paz 153-154). Paz’s opinion can be a rider for us in the comparative study we have proposed to undertake.

Since the time of I.A. Richards and Ezra Pound the principles of translations have assumed a more technical character than ever, often with the deployment of jargons or esoteric terminologies so much so that the art of translation has given way to the science of translation. And so we have Eugene A. Nida’s book *Toward a Science of Translating* published in 1964. Workshops on translation soon came into vogue, and they – as workshops should – focused on the practical problems and guidelines, for translation. Richards came up with ‘encoder/decoder’ model, while “Ezra Pound’s theory of translation focused upon the precise rendering of details, of individual needs and a single or even fragmented images ...” (Gentzler 19). Academics went so far as to formulate a kind of transformational – generative model for translation, basing on – as Nida has done – the famous Chomskyan ‘deep structure – surface structure model, although Chomsky was never very sure about the efficacy of the application of his linguistic model to translation studies. For Nida ‘deep structures’, becomes ‘kernel structures’ but the question how the so-called ‘kernel structures’ in an SLT can be used by the translator to “generate the stylistically and semantically equivalent expression in the receptor language” (Nida 68) remains rather nebulous. The same can be said of Wolfram Wilss’s *The Science of Translation: Problems and Methods* published in 1982.

Translation studies owes its name to James S. Holmes’s essay “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies” in which, as well as in his other works, he basically champions approximation in the transference of an SLT to its TLT. André Lefevere’s *Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint* (1975) and Anton Popovič’s essay “The Concept of “Shift of Expression” in Translation Analysis” (1970) concede that “The translator [...] has the right to differ organically, to be independent” (qtd. in Holmes, *The Nature of Translation* 80).

We should also briefly mention Foucault, Heidegger and Derrida in chalking out a conceptual framework for the proposed study. Foucault interrogates the authorial position of both SLT and TLT; Heidegger views translation as “an interpretation of thought, a translation of ourselves into the thought of other language” (qtd. in Gentzler 155); and the all-too-known Derridean phrases like ‘trace’, ‘aporia’ and ‘différance’ are sometimes used in order to give a rather sophisticated turn to the principles of translation. It is true that when a translator ‘listens’ to an SLT, he may ‘miss’ and ‘miss-hear’ certain things, as well as finding ‘what is there not in the text’. “The letter is mourned to save the sense”, said Derrida implying that the reader’s interpretation cannot be identical with the translator’s in relation to the source text. Derrida’s essay “What Is a “Relevant” Translation?” (2001) is often cited while talking about the ‘philosophy’ of translation, just as it has become almost customary to refer to Walter Benjamin’s influential essay “The Task of the Translator” (1923) in which he stresses the ‘recreational’ value of a translation. Benjamin categorically insists that “[it] is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work” (qtd. in Venuti, *The Translation Studies* 22).

It may be useful for the purpose of the present study to refer to some notable practicing translators, engaged in translating poetry from Bengali into English. *Tagore and Modernity* edited by Krishna Sen and Tapaty Gupta and published in 2006 has a panel discussion, excerpts from which are reproduced below with emphases added:

**MARTIN KÄMPCHEN:** How do I do my poetry translation? There is a poem in the beginning, and there is a poem at the end of a long tedious process [...]. I [have to] absorb the various layers – linguistic emotional, cultural, religious – of that poem [...] I try to **reconstruct the poem** [by combining] philological correctness and literary value. (228)

**KRISHNA DUTTA:** [...] what I find the most difficult thing is that whenever I try to translate, the beauty and grace of Rabindranath's Bengali hums in my ear, and however much I try to put it across into English, I find it is inadequate [...] Translations, however clever, can only transfigure dancing into acrobatic tricks, in most cases playing treason against **the majesty of the original** [...] but I am also optimistic that it can be done. (229-32)

**SUKANTA CHAUDHURI:** There is a sentence which I wrote a few years ago in a preface [...] "The semiotics of poetry exceeds its semantics" – which is an unnecessarily complicated way of saying the full meaning of a poem is not conveyed simply through its words, but through its overall formal impact [...]. Any word is impossible to translate, fully, out of one language into another [...]. But for the practising translator, the bigger problem usually [...] is to think of **how to devise a sort of formal structure for the entire translation** [...] I feel that the translation of a poem should make some attempt to indicate the total formal structure – **The stanza form, the rhyme scheme – of the original.** [...] I don't say reflect entirely. Of course **it is not possible to reflect entirely,** but in fact, sometimes it may be possible to reflect it more than you may think at first sight. [...] to preserve the seriousness of the original, and the other non-prosodic aspects of the original, you have **to tone down the effect,** especially if you are trying to render a language like Bengali where rhymes and alliteration and repetition come much more easily in verse as compared to a language like English. We have to tone it down [...]. This might mean compromising the details of the form, leaving out some things, putting a few extra things, trying, as it were, for **a kind of general principle of equipollence,** of equal weight, not precise correspondence. (234-36)

**KETAKI KUSHARI DYSON:** I feel that **if I didn't write some poetry in English, I** wouldn't have the courage to translate from Bengali into English [...] **you really have to know the craft skills** [...]. Poets like Buddhadeb Bose [...] had this capacity as poets to make new poems on the models of the given source texts [...]. I think the whole point of translation is to bring out **the flavour of something which is different**. If it was the same, I wouldn't be translating it. **It's the difference that makes the art of translation so exciting and so challenging.** (239-42, 247)

To make a gist of the extracts above, we can say that (i) Kämpchen wants to reconstruct the SLT; (ii) Krishna Dutta would struggle to capture the majesty of the original; (iii) Chaudhuri is in favour of devising a formal structure for the entire translation, a structure that will answer to a general principle of equipollence; and (iv) Dyson implies that in order to be a good translator one needs to be a poet because a poet knows the craft of writing poems – the craft of transcreation. Notwithstanding the various positions (often supplementary or complementary to each other) of the practising translators, the fact probably remains that “[a]ny translator is faced with the competing demands of the desire, on the one hand, to be as faithful as possible to the original and, on the other, to produce a version which communicates well and is a pleasure to read” (France 167). (Khan and Roy 132-34)

Reduced to its bare essentials, the art (or ‘Science’?) of translation, therefore, has to depend on both ‘reflection’ and ‘refraction’, and engineered by the translator’s poetic sensibilities which can create a poem out of a source-poem, with traces of similarities and differences (Khan and Roy 134). The present study would try and rest on the basic conceptual framework that views translation as an arduous negotiation between SLT and TLT.

Critical literature on both Seely and Radice as translators of *Meghnadbadh kabya* is less than scanty, limited only to interviews and book reviews. The proposed study therefore cannot make much use of what others have said on the two translations of the same SLT. Apparently, the present study's being the first of its kind may be a disadvantage; but then there is the advantage of reading the two texts critically without being 'critically' influenced by others. While treading along an untrodden path, the present study will depend mainly on Radice's 'Reflections' (on Seely's translation) published in *Parabaas* in 2004 and the interview Seely gave to *The Daily Star* in 2005. Reviews like those by Dipesh Chakrabarty of the University of Chicago, Romila Thapar of J.N.U., and Rachel Fell McDermott of Columbia University, and also those published in *Journal of Religion*, *Journal of Asian History*, and *CHOICE* are important and hence they will also be utilised in the study undertaken. It may be said that all the works already referred to can be brought under the heading 'Review of Literature', since the present study is by and large built on what may be called a 'theory-praxis' paradigm.

The present study will try and address some such questions as the following:

- (i) What does the phrase 'the poetics and politics of *trans*-lation' imply?
- (ii) What are the principles of translation that Seely and Radice have sought to apply to their negotiations with a common SLT?
- (iii) What similarities and differences between the two translators have surfaced in their negotiations?
- (iv) Have the two TLTs achieved the desired equipollence?
- (v) Do the issues of 'poet-translator' and 'non-poet translator' emerge in the translations?
- (vi) How are the cultural shifts registered in the translations?

As the title of my thesis indicates, the work would be sort of Qualitative Research based on case-study, the translations of Seely and Radice being the two ‘cases’. As it often happens with Qualitative Research, the hypotheses have been spelt out while discussing the conceptual framework. Equipped as much as possible with relevant theories/concepts/principles of translation, the present study would attempt both a comparative and an analytic examination of the variables, viz. the two translated texts of Madhusudan Dutt’s *Meghnadbadh kabya*. It is perhaps needless to say that all the lines of the two TLTs under survey will not, and cannot, be compared or contrasted. Following what is known as ‘Convenience Sampling’ or ‘Judgement Sampling’, the present study will choose as samples a few important lines from each of the Cantos.

Any critical appreciation of a translated text should begin with a discussion of the SLT. The second chapter titled “REFLECTIONS ON THE SLT: *Meghnadbadh kabya* (1861)” discusses the background and the uniqueness of Dutt’s epic poem which generated as many as five English translations: two in the twentieth century and three in the present.

Why has the word ‘trans-lated’ in the title of the present work been partially italicized? What do we mean by the poetics and the politics of translation? Answers to these questions are attempted in Chapter III, with special reference to Umberto Eco, Spivak and Derrida.

Chapter-IV is brief comparative study of Seely’s and Radice’s translations. Specimen lines from each of the nine Cantos (Books) from both the TLTs and their common, corresponding SLT have been juxtaposed for this purpose. The two translators’ prefaces are also extensively used with a view to tracing the similarities and differences between them as translators.

The concluding chapter (i.e. Chapter V) titled “IN(CON)CLUSIVE CONCLUSION” discusses the most recent translation of Dutt’s *Meghnadbadh kabya* done by Biswas and Gupta (2017), and tries to see, with some examples, how it differs from Seely’s and Radice’s translations.

## CHAPTER – II: REFLECTIONS ON THE SLT: *Meghnadbadh kabya* (1861)

Any research on a translated literary work should begin with some reflections on the original, that is the SLT, taking into account chiefly its background and its uniqueness, if any. This chapter, therefore, will first discuss the *zeitgeist* that produced *Meghnadbadh kabya* (1861) as its background, and then its uniqueness as an epic poem.

### The Background

The main story of *Meghnadbadh kabya*, Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *magnum opus*, is taken from the canonical *Ramayana*. It basically narrates the 'killing' (William Radice's translation) or 'slaying' (Clinton B. Seely's translation) of Ravan's valiant son Indrajit or Meghnad by Lakshman rather surreptitiously. But this olden occidental tale found an unprecedented and extraordinary turn in Dutt's hand, so much so that Seely would later be tempted to subtitle the work as '*A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal*'. Seely has aptly remarked, "It is an extraordinary piece of literature, a sophisticated verse narrative in nine cantos; it is utterly representative of the cosmopolitan culture of mid-nineteenth-century India" (*The Slaying* 3). There is no gainsaying that in *Meghnadbadh kabya*, the East and the West meet, and the nature of this meeting, as finely pointed out by Radice, can be traced in the mysterious heraldic emblem present in the frontispiece of the early editions of the poem:

Presumably designed by Madhusudan himself, the emblem consisted of a shield with a cross of St. George, surmounted by an elephant, lion, sun and *śatadal* (lotus), and a Sanskrit scroll underneath with the inscription: *śarīraṃ vā pātayeyam kāryaṃ vā sādhayeyam* ('I would rather die than fail to achieve what I have set out to do'). [...] The Sanskrit inscription is illuminated by the emblem above, for 'anyone who has read Madhusudan's poetry and plays will know that they are a literary fusion of east and west', and the emblem expresses that fusion. The elephant is India, the

lion is Europe, the sun symbolizes Madhusudan's own personality and creative genius, and the *śatadal* is the work, the [poem] that he was determined to complete even if it killed him. (Radice, *The Poem* xiii)

This fusion was of course the product of contemporary politics. Here is Thomas Babington Macaulay's project:

In one point I fully agree with the gentlemen to whose general views I am opposed. I feel with them, that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (qtd. in Seely, *The Slaying* 12)

Outrageous though Macaulay's language might appear, the Company's educational policy proved successful to a considerable degree. To quote Seely again:

Hindoo College, in a sense, had pre-empted Macaulay's minute. It was already producing those persons described by Macaulay. Michael Madhusudan Datta epitomizes the perfect Macaulayan product, acculturated to English tastes, notably in literature. Little wonder, then, that Datta began his literary career writing in English. (Seely, *The Slaying* 12)

This East-West interface becomes patent enough in Book or Canto VIII of *Meghnadbadh kabya*, the Canto that can be regarded as the most derivative as far as the Western influence on the poet is concerned. It is in this Canto that we get the description of Ram descending

into the netherworld, with the goddess Maya as the guide. This has no counterpart in the canonical *Ramayana*, but is quite reminiscent of the Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Inferno*. This is how the goddess Maya is urging Ram to visit the world of the dead:

রাঘবের কর্ণমূলে কহিলা জননী,-  
 “মুছ অশ্রুবারিধারা, দাশরথি রথি,  
 বাঁচিবে প্রাণের ভাই; সিন্ধুতীর্থ-জলে  
 করি স্নান, শীঘ্র তুমি চল মোর সাথে  
 যমালয়ে; সশরীরে পশিবে, সুমতি,  
 তুমি প্রেতপুরে আজি শিবের প্রসাদে।  
 পিতা দশরথ তব দিবেন কহিয়া  
 কি উপায়ে সুলক্ষ্মণ লক্ষ্মণ লভিবে  
 জীবন। হে ভীমবাহু, চল শীঘ্র করি।  
 সৃজিব সুড়ঙ্গপথ; নির্ভয়ে সুরথি,  
 পশ তাহে; যাব আমি পথ দেখাইয়া  
 তবাত্রে!” (Sanyal VIII.134-45)

Reproduced below are the translations of the passage cited above, the first being by Seely and the second by Radice:

1. At Rāghava's ear, Mother whispered, “Wipe away your streams  
 of tears, charioteer Dāśarathi, your beloved  
 brother shall revive. Bathe in the sea's sacred waters, then  
 come with me at once to Yama's quarters. Noble one, you  
 will enter bodily the land of spirits by virtue  
 of Śiva's favor. Your father Daśaratha will make  
 known how well-marked Lakṣmaṇa will again live. O fierce-armed  
 one, come now. I shall excavate a tunnel. Fearlessly,

fine charioteer, proceed through it. I shall go ahead  
of you to show the way. (Seely 8.128-37)

2. Māyā said in Rāghav’s ear: ‘Wipe away your flow of  
tears, son of Dasarath –

Your brother will live; bathe in the sea-waters, then  
come with me quickly to Death’s abode;

In your mortal frame, wise Rām, you will enter the city  
of ghosts today through Siva’s grace.

Your father Dasarath will tell you how well-favoured  
Lakshman will come back to life. O great-armed one,  
come quickly with me.

I shall make a tunnel; go down it fearlessly, hero!

I shall go ahead of you, showing you the way. (Radice VIII.134-45)

Even a lip-deep acquaintance with Dante’s description of Hell reminds us of the inscription  
written on the Hell Gate in *Inferno*: ‘Abandon all hope, ye who enter here’. Dutt’s Ram has  
the same experience:

আগ্নেয় অক্ষরে লেখা দেখিলা নৃমণি

ভীষণ তোরন-মুখে, - “এই পথ দিয়া

যায় পাপী দুঃখদেশে চির দুঃখ ভোগে;”

হে প্রবেশি, ত্যজি স্পৃহা, প্রবেশ এ দেশে!” (Sanyal VIII.217-220)

Seely translates the lines as follows:

[...] On

the face of that imposing gate, the jewel of men saw  
written there in fiery letters, “By this path sinners go

to suffer constant sorrow in the realm of sorrows – you  
 who enter, give up all hope as you step inside this land!” (Seely 8.205-209)

Radice’s translation of the lines, too, retains the Dantesque evocations present in the  
 SLT:

[...] The jewel of men saw on that awesome  
     gate, written in flaming letters,  
 The message: ‘By this road go sinners to a land of  
     torment to suffer eternal torment; you who enter here  
     must abandon all hope!’ (Radice VIII.216-20)

As one of the brightest students of Hindoo College, Dutt well knew that “in Dante’s  
 Hell souls are not deadened, as they mostly are in life; they are actually in the greatest  
 torment of which each is capable” (Eliot 166).

All told, *Meghnadbadh kabya* is a repository of the East-West interface, a  
 representative product of Colonial Bengal. As Seely aptly comments:

[...] *Meghanada* is a text wherein East meets West, where literary traditions  
 blend in Datta’s adept hands to become the epitome of the cultural assimilation,  
 selective as it was, taking place in the elite Bengali population of nineteenth-century  
 Calcutta. The period has been labeled the Bengal Renaissance for its reinvigoration  
 and reconfiguration of the Hindu past and for the florescence of the literary arts. [...] *Meghanada*  
 and its author are, each in his [*sic*] own way, perfect metonyms for their  
 times. (*The Slaying* 33)

### **The Uniqueness**

If ‘uniqueness’ implies the quality of being unprecedented, of being unrivalled in  
 essence and existence, *Meghnadbadh kabya* remains in the firmament of modern Bengali

literature as a star that dwells apart. Like *The Waste Land*, it has no precursors or successors in the language in which it is written. The uniqueness of the poem led the noted Bengali critic and historian Romesh Chunder Dutt to lavish eulogy on the poem and the poet in the following manner:

The reader who can feel and appreciate the sublime, will rise from a study of this great work with mixed sensations of veneration and awe, with which few poets can inspire him, and will candidly pronounce that bold author to be indeed a genius of a very high order, second only to the highest and the greatest that have ever lived like Vyas, Valmiki or Kalidas; Homer, Dante or Shakespeare. (qtd. in Banerjee 122)

Primarily, two things have made the poem a unique one: first, the way the poet has transcreated the canonical *Ramayana*, and secondly, his superb use of the Blank Verse or ‘amitrakshar chhanda’ which was his own invention.

The transcreation was a kind of bravado which many of Dutt’s contemporaries could not put up with. *Chuchundaribadh kabya* (“The Poem of the Killing/Slaying of a Mole”) was written with a view to lampooning the epoch-making Bengali epic; and even a juvenile essay of Rabindranath Tagore’s did not find the poem agreeable, although he did revise his position later in his life. Be that as it may, since the beginning of the twentieth century, the poem has been given the rank of an artifice of eternity, a monument of Bengali modernity, a thing unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.

The transcreation, inversion, or sub-version – whatever be the term – of the canonical *Ramayana*, as engineered by the intrepid poet, can be understood if *Meghnadbadh kabya* is compared with some of its parent texts. Here is Seely making such a comparison:

Certainly the greatest difference [...] between Valmiki’s *Ramayana* and the later epics by Krittivasa and Tulsidasa is found in a particular aspect of the

characterization of Rama, who in the older text was essentially a mortal prince, a young warrior. The first and last books of Valmiki – considered by scholars to be later addition to the text – speak of Rama as one of the incarnations of Vishnu. In contrast, Krittivasa’s and Tulsidasa’s Rama has become inextricably the god Vishnu. No longer is the fight between Ravana and Prince Rama a fight between mighty warriors with god-given weapons and extraordinary powers. It has changed radically, into a fight between good god and bad demon. The demons become even further transformed, in these vernacular Rama tales, into devotees of sorts of Vishnu, the very god whom they battle. A transformation – transformations can be seen as part and parcel of the *Ramayana* tradition – takes place in Datta’s Rama tale as well, but in the opposite direction. Rama, the apotheosized prince of Krittivasa’s premodern text, returns to his mostly mortal persona and becomes a nineteenth-century Rama, a creation of the colonial encounter. (*The Slaying* 32)

How far is *Meghnadbadh kabya* an allegory of ‘the colonial encounter’? The question has been variously answered, and now at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century the answers can be reduced under two headings: traditional and novel. It is customary to turn to Pramathanath Bishi for a traditional answer:

Disgust toward “Ram and his rabble,” the sparking of one’s imagination at the idea of Ravana and Meghanada – those attitudes were not peculiar to Datta. Most of his contemporaries had the very same feelings. [...] Ravana and his son stood as the symbolic embodiments of such a scenario. Ravana’s grandeur, Ravana’s heroic nature, Ravana’s golden Lanka, Ravana’s animus toward Rama – all of these utterly captivated the educated elites. Though Datta may have written Lanka, he was thinking England. [...] He built up Ravana to such proportions that none could be greater – hence, by comparison, Rama and Lakshmana appear diminutive. (Bishi 25)

A novel kind of interpretation is offered by Radice who has traced a mix of xenophilia and xenophobia:

The shift from the reformers of the first half of the nineteenth century in Bengal to the nationalists of the second, which occurred largely as a result of the Mutiny and the change from East India Company rule to full imperialism, has been described as an antithesis between xenophilia and xenophobia. Madhusudan, in his personality and in his writing, is on the cusp: xenophilia was there aplenty [...] but xenophobia, 'fear of the stranger', was there too. (Radice, *The Poem* lxxxiii)

In Radice's opinion, the xenophilia was due to the view that the West could civilize the East, and that the more of Englishness the better. The xenophobia, on the other hand, was an offshoot of nationalism. In Radice's reading, Lanka is 'home' with the Rakshasas as 'us' or 'insiders', 'Ram and his rabbles' are 'them', the 'outsiders'. 'The insiders' means the Hindu India whose surrogate is Meghnad who is dastardly killed while worshipping the Hindu god Agni. To quote Radice again:

We have, in short, in Book VI of Madhusudan's masterpiece, an intense and impassioned projection of the shameful and humiliating defeat of the champion of the 'insiders' by the dastardly and immoral tactics of the 'outsiders'. Is it too far-fetched to suggest that this reflects the shameful subjugation of Hindu India by the alien, outcaste British? (qtd. in Seely, *The Slaying* 56)

Allegory or not, *Meghnadbadh kabya* lent a unique voice for the defeated. So long the canon would roar in the active voice: 'Ram killed Ravan'; the Milton of Bengal altered the focus, and recast the voice into the passive: 'Ravan was killed by Ram'. Ravan was made more important than Ram, and the way the canon was fired would go a long way to foster the colonial and early postcolonial tristesse.

In a secondary epic *what* is narrated gains in weight by virtue of *how* it is narrated. The grand style of a literary epic is so language-specific that it may often look untranslatable. How can the sonority of a language be caught in another? The task of the translator becomes all too heavy if the SLT bears some special metrical features which are very conducive to the meaning of the SLT but are insuperably difficult to be transferred to the TLT. The biggest impediment for any translator of *Meghnadbadh kabya* is the Bengali blank verse which Dutt invented and named ‘amitrakshar chhanda’ / ‘amitrakshara chanda’ (‘unfriendly letter meter’ i.e. unrhymed meter). It will be our task in a later chapter to see how both Seely and Radice negotiate with Dutt’s blank verse.

Dutt’s blank verse was born out of his deep dislike for the medieval Bengali *payar*. Arguably the commonest metre of the time, the *payar* was a rhyming couplet with fourteen syllables in each line. The manacled nature of the *payar* is registered in the fact that caesuras or pauses are fixed: they come after the eighth syllable and at the end of the line. Dutt’s blank verse allows for constant enjambment or ‘a striding-over’ of the lines (often termed run-on lines). An enjambment occurs “because the pressure of the incompleting syntactic unit toward closure carries on over the end of the verse-line” (Abrams 115). The first and foremost feature of Dutt’s blank verse is that pauses or caesuras do not control the idea and the sentence; the case is just the other way round: caesuras remain under the control of the idea/emotion and syntax. Hence, the variety of caesuras in the verses.

It is indeed difficult to fully analyze Dutt’s blank verse, but it should be remembered that fourteen *matras* (as defined by the Bengali letters) may be there instead of fourteen syllables. The celebrated opening lines show the matter clearly:

sammukh(a) samare paṛi, bīr (a) -cūṛāmaṇi

in open combat having fallen, the crest-jewel of heroes

bīr (a)bāhu, cali yabe gelā yam(a)pure  
 Virbāhu, when he went to Yama’s city  
 akāle, kaha, he debī amṛt(a) bhāṣiṇī,  
 untimely, say, O ambrosia-speaking goddess,  
 kon(a) bīr(a)bare bari senāpati-pade,  
 which hero of heroes having appointed as general  
 pāṭhāilā raṇe punaḥ rakṣaḥkul(a)nidhi  
 did (he) send once more into battle the fount of the  
     Raksha race  
 rāghabāri?  
 Rāvan (the enemy, *ari*, of the descendant of King Raghu,  
     i.e. of Rām)                      (Radice, *The Poem* xxxvi-vii)

Any attempt to analyse Dutt’s Blank Verse has to overcome such factors as have been outlined by Radice:

[...] the ‘holding’ of double or conjunct consonants in Bengali (as in *sammukh*, the very first word of the poem) to produce a syncopated effect, the way some vowels are longer than others, the way in which some syllables in Bengali words are stressed more than others, and the way the meaning of a phrase or sentence will also impose stress on particular words. (*The Poem* xxxvii)

The main vigour of *amitrakshar chhanda*, therefore, lies in the phrasing and pausing. On being requested by his friends to explain the structure of the new verse, Dutt said, “[...] I find that the *yati* [caesura] instead of being confined to the 8<sup>th</sup> syllable, naturally comes in after the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>” (Murshid 145). Seely has excellently summarized the tradition and the individual talent that gave birth to Dutt’s Blank Verse:

Datta took [the] basic *payar* structure, retained the fourteen-syllable line, discarded end rhyming, and allowed for enjambment. That is to say, his poetic lines flow across the weak boundaries within a line [...] not just at the end of one. (*The Slaying* 64)

Dutt was ever confident that the use of Blank Verse in Bengali poetry was not a mere possibility but only a matter of time, and also that the glory of Bengali poetry would reside in the proper deployment of this novel metre. The quick, sudden genesis of the metre at the hands of the prodigious poet is as fascinating as his supernova-like life and career. It first came to him as a challenge. Raja Jatindra Mohan Tagore, one of the founders of Belgachia Theatre, took note of but objected to Dutt's stray remark that Bengali drama would not really improve without the introduction of Blank Verse in it. Jatindra Mohan Tagore was rather skeptical about it and argued that Bengali still seemed to be a weakling though born of a healthy and robust mother, that is, Sanskrit. Dutt at once took up the gauntlet. This is how Radice reproduces the wager scene as reminisced by the Raja:

'Write me down as an ass,' said he laughingly, 'if I am not able to convince you of the error within a short time.' Then looking sharply at me he added 'and what if I succeed in proving to you that the Bengali is quite capable of the blank verse form of poetry?' 'Why then,' I replied, 'I shall willingly stand all the expenses of printing and publishing any poem which you may write in blank verse.' 'Done' said he, clapping his hands, 'you shall get a few stanzas from me within three or four days', and as a matter of fact within three or four days the first canto of *Tilottamāsambhab kābya* was sent to me. (qtd. in Radice, *The Poem* xxxv-vi)

Great poetry is not for our eyes or brains alone; it is for the ear as well, even when read silently: the sound supplements the meaning. Dutt's Blank Verse, along with his a-

typical use of words and phrases including coinages, contributes to the poem's 'grand style' through our reading experience. Dutt's advice to one of his friends was categorical:

[...] Let your friends guide their voices by the pause (as in English Blank-verse) and they will soon swear that this is the noblest measure in the Language. My advice is Read, Read, Read. Teach your ears the new tune and then you will find out what it is. (Seely, *The Slaying* 63)

If proper attention is given to the sense and the punctuation of the lines the rhythm would come out as a matter of course. But this prosodic feature causes, as has been mentioned earlier, great problems for translators in their negotiations with the source text. It will soon be our task to see how Seely and Radice, in their translations of *Meghnadbadh kabya*, have striven to tackle the issue.

### CHAPTER – III: THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF TRANSLATION

As the title of my thesis begins with the words ‘*Trans*-lation, Poetics and Politics...’, it is necessary that the partly italicized word ‘*Trans*-lation’ be explicated as well as discussing the matters of what have come to be known as the poetics and politics of translation.

#### ‘*Trans*-lation’

The (Gayatri) Spivak-type hyphenation in the opening word of the title can be acquitted of any charge of abstruseness on the very ground that the word actually points to the etymological meaning of ‘translation’ rather than to any esoteric implication. In Latin ‘trans’ means ‘across’ or ‘beyond’, while ‘latus’ means ‘borne’ or ‘carried’. The Latin form of the English ‘translation’ is, ‘translatio’ meaning, therefore, ‘carried across’, and by extension, ‘to remove from one place to another’. The word ‘lacion’ is still extant in English, meaning ‘transportation’ or ‘conveyance’. The rather obsolete Latin meaning of the word is ‘the motion of a celestial object from one place to another’. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) has given the following example in support of the astronomical sense of the word: “Copernicus placed the Sun at the centre of the Universe, exempt from any sort of lacion”. It is interesting to note that Physics, too, makes use of the word ‘translation’ to mean “motion of a body in which all the points in the body follow parallel paths” (*Oxford Dictionary of Physics* 561). Two of the five meanings of the German word ‘Übersetzen’ comply with the etymological meaning of ‘translation’: ‘ferry across’ and ‘cross over’. Put simply, the act of translating an SLT into a TLT is basically a ‘motion’, a ferrying across, a crossing over, a transportation, a removal from one domain of language to that of another. Physics, of course, is rigorous about the ‘motion’: it stipulates ‘parallel paths’; and, as applied to the art of translation, this rigor would imply word-for-word kind of translation which may not be welcome in the domain of literature in general and poetry in particular. Instead, it may be

argued that the very next word to ‘translation’, as given in the *Oxford Dictionary of Physics*, i.e. ‘translucent’ could be more appropriate in the description of the *modus operandi* of literary translation in that it allows for a kind of diffusion of meaning as the text travels from one linguistic medium to another, not very peacefully but rather anxiously.

### ‘Poetics’

There are certain words that undergo semantic changes, and yet continue to retain their kernel or nuclear meanings. One such word is ‘poetics’. Traditionally thought of as a systematic theory or doctrine of poetry, the term is derived from Aristotle’s fragmentary work commonly known as *Poetics* which discusses the principles that – as he saw them – govern the art of writing poetry. The pluralisation of adjectives like ‘poetic’, ‘dynamic’, ‘architectonic’ and their ilk has yielded convenient nouns like ‘poetics’, ‘dynamics’, ‘architectonics’, and so on. When applied to the domain of translation studies, the phrase ‘poetics of translation’ broadly means the architectonics or aesthetics of the activity known as translation. It may, therefore, be useful to embark upon brief reflections on how the ‘poetics’ operate in both prose and verse translations. The reflections that follow are heavily drawn *inter alia* on two books, namely, Umberto Eco’s *Experiences in Translation* (2001) and Susan Bassnett’s *Translation Studies* (1991).

#### (i) Equivalence in meaning:

Eco has rightly pointed out the problematic of equivalence in meaning rather categorically:

Equivalence in meaning cannot be taken as satisfactory criterion for a correct translation, first of all because in order to define the still undefined notion of translation one would have to employ a notion as obscure as equivalence of meaning,

and some people think that meaning is that which remains unchanged in the process of translation. (*Experiences* 9)

Eco argues that it is difficult to believe that equivalence in meaning is granted by synonymy, as no two words in any language are completely synonymous with each other. By way of giving an example, Eco says, “*Father* is not a synonym for *daddy*, *daddy* is not a synonym for *papà*, and *père* is not a synonym for *padre* ...” (*Experiences* 9). One solution to this problem is to postulate that notwithstanding the non-availability of synonymous lexical items the propositional value of a sentence in a particular language can be obtained from even a near-identical sentence in another. Of course, constant propositions can be expressed in metalanguages, but – as Eco asks us to remember – “[such] a metalanguage would meet the requirements of that Perfect or Adamic or Universal Language that so many have dreamt of over the centuries” (*Experiences* 10).

A perfect language can be conceived of in two ways: mystically and logically. Walter Benjamin held the mystical point of view and argued that translation implies a pure language. As a TLT can never reproduce the meaning of its SLT, we are to take it axiomatically that all languages somehow converge, and that all languages have mutually complementary intentions. Benjamin makes the point in the following way:

If there is a language of truth in which the final secrets that draw the effort of all thinking are held in silent repose, then this language of truth is true language. And it is precisely this language – to glimpse or describe it is the only perfection the philosopher can hope for – that is concealed, intensively, in translations. (qtd. in Eco, *Experiences* 10)

But the question remains if this kind of very esoteric feeling can be used as yardstick to judge the degree to which a translation is successful.

To move from a private feeling to public commandments is to pass from the mystical to the logical. The logical model should be rooted in the universalized human mind and its utterances should be couched in a formalized language. Many machine-translation scholars share this kind of postulate. As Eco puts it:

There must be a *tertium comparationis* that allows the passage of an expression from language A to language B by ensuring that both are equivalent to an expression in metalanguage C. This mental language, made up of pure propositions is [...] called Mentalese. (*Experiences* 11)

A strong objection to this kind of postulate, however, is that it does not hold good for poetic utterances. It may be argued that word-for-word translation, based on the criterion of synonymy, would render Paul Verlaine's famous lines 'il pleure dans mon coeur comme il pleut sur la ville' as 'it weeps in my heart as it rains over the town' (*Experiences* 11), and the two could hardly be deemed equivalent from a poetic viewpoint. Notwithstanding the propositional content the translation here lack the phonic suggestions of the original.

We can conclude this section by quoting Eco's caveat:

It would follow that the notion of propositional content is applicable only to very simple utterances that (unlike rhetorical figures) unambiguously represent states of the world and that are not self-reflective – that is, they do not focus our attention more on the expression than on the content level. (*Experiences* 12)

'To whom it may concern' is not 'যাঁর ব্যাপার, তাঁর' any more than 'through proper channel' is 'যথোপযুক্ত খাল বরাবর!'

## (ii) Incommensurability vs. Comparability:

Faced with a lack of equivalence in meaning, one may tend to fall back on the Humboldtian idea that every language has its own genius. To do so is to rely on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that the structure of a language determines a native speaker's perception and categorization of experience – or, in other words, that languages define our perceptions. Now, if every language has its own concomitant world-view, the search for equivalence in meaning is doomed to failure. There is no exact way to translate the Bengali word অভিমান into English or the word 'coy' in, say, 'to his coy mistress' into Bengali keeping the English playfulness intact. For one thing, 'ব্রীড়া' and 'coyness' are not the same. At the same time, it may be borne in mind that incommensurability does not imply incompatibility. Which is why different linguistic systems can be compared: the English 'wood' / 'timber' / 'woods'; the German 'Helz' / 'Wald'; the Italian 'legno' / 'bosco'. Translation, therefore, does not wholly depend on linguistic competence, but with what Eco calls "intertextual, psychological, and narrative competence" (*Experiences* 13).

To get over the hurdle of incommensurability and to gain comparability the translator has to assume the role of an interpreter. It is from this angle that Eco describes translation as "a special case of interpretation" (*Experiences* 13). A translator can better be described as an interlocutor in that he or she effects a communication between two languages. Eco's words in this regard are worth quoting:

Translations do not concern a shift from a language A to a language B (as happens with phrase books for tourists, which tell us that *home* can be translated as *maison*, *casa*, *Haus*, and so on). Translations are not about linguistic *types* but rather about linguistic *tokens*. Translations do not concern

a comparison between two languages but the interpretation of two texts in two different languages. (*Experiences* 13-14).

This leads us to refer to Willard Van Orman Quine (1960) who holds that the indeterminacy of translation stems from the fact that the same sentence can be translated differently but legitimately by rival systems of analytical hypotheses. To quote Quine:

Just as we meaningfully speak of the truth of a sentence only within the terms of some theory or conceptual scheme [...] so on the whole we may meaningfully speak of interlinguistic synonymy only within the terms of some particular system of analytical hypotheses. (II, 16)

The description of the art of translation would have remained incomplete if Quine had focused only on the comparison between two languages. In fact what are involved in the process of translation are not two languages alone but two cultures, too. Hence, translation warrants interpretation.

(iii) Referential sameness:

Referential sameness, is exactly what Eco terms ‘Sameness in Reference’ (*Experiences* 14). The illocutionary or even perlocutionary effect of an utterance requires a culture-specific interpretation. “Can you pass me the salt?” is not a question but a request. But to interpret the utterance as a request is to presuppose a cultural habit where the rules of etiquette dictate the required/desired sentence-pattern. The illocutionary value of the repetitive use of ‘yes’ (‘হ্যাঁ’) in the Bengali language is not the same as in English. In poetry, the problem becomes all the more apparent: it is difficult to attain sameness while translating Lear’s ‘Never, never, never, never’ into Bengali or, for that matter, Jibanananda Das’s ‘ব্যবহৃত, ব্যবহৃত, ব্যবহৃত - ব্যবহৃত হয়ে’ into English. The translator, therefore, has to “express an

evident ‘deep’ sense of a text by violating both lexical and referential faithfulness” (*Experiences* 14).

In the chapter titled “Translating and Being Translated” of his *Experiences in Translation*, Eco narrates how he advised the translators of his *Foucault’s Pendulum*, even in such a small matter of translating the phrase ‘al di là della siepe’ into ‘beyond the hedge’:

I told my various translators that neither the hedge nor the allusion to Leopardi [who uses the word ‘siepe’ in his poem “L’infinito” to mean ‘hedge’] was important, but I insisted that a literary clue be kept at all costs. I told them that the presence of a castle or a tree instead of a hedge made no difference to me, provided that the castle and the tree evoked a famous passage in their own national literature, in the context of the description of a magical landscape. (*Experiences* 15)

What Eco implies here is that translators are at liberty to change (if required, radically) the literal meaning of the original text as well as its reference, with a view to preserving the psychological sense of the text and rendering it lisible within the structure of the receiving cultures.

Translators have to find and preserve or recreate the sense of an SLT, and this sense is not transcendental in nature. Hence, the act of interpretation on the part of a translator looks like a kind of bet on the sense of the text. In Eco’s words again, “It is just the outcome of an interpretative inference that can or cannot be shared by other readers” (*Experiences* 16). But the translator’s bets are not always wild ones: the cultural history around the SLT chosen helps the translator in making relatively safe bets, just as the whole theory of probability may come to assist a gambler.

## (iv) Cultural transference in translation:

The narrowly linguistic approach to translation stresses the transfer of ‘meaning’ harboured in one set of semiosis into another through linguistic supplements like the dictionary and grammar. Most translation theorists, however, do not endorse such a narrow view but hold instead that “[...] the process involves a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria also” (Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 13) and often assert that “[a] translator must take into account rules that are not strictly linguistic but, broadly speaking, cultural” (Eco, *Experiences* 17). Edward Sapir’s views on the semiotic mechanism of culture are worth quoting in this context:

No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different label attached. (69)

The Russian semiotician Yu. M. Lotman declares quite categorically that “No language (in the full sense of the word) can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture ...” (212). Similarly, the French theorist Georges Mounin “[...] perceives translation as a series of operations of which the starting point and the end product are *significations* and function within a given culture” (qtd. in Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 15).

Let us imagine, by way of an example, that a translator has been asked to translate “স্যার, এই যে আমার ছুটির দরখাস্ত” (a student speaking to a teacher, or a junior officer to a senior officer, in West Bengal or for that matter in India) into English. A native Bengali / Indian would find it all right if the translation is: “Sir, here’s my application for leave”, which is an immaculate literal translation of the original. But for a British or an American reader the translation is likely to sound as an ironical utterance owing to the retention of the word ‘Sir’

in compliance with the SLT. The use of ‘Sir’ in English (or regional languages) in India is a deep-rooted colonial legacy that chimes well with the ancient Indian practices. A student shall not call his/her teachers by their first names, or by their surnames prefixed with Mr/Mrs/Miss etc, while it is quite normal to do so in the UK or the USA. The over-use of ‘Sir’ by a subordinate officer speaking to his superior is generally perceived as an office etiquette. Similarly, polite French people can, even today, address a taxi driver as ‘Monseur’ which is equivalent to ‘Sir’ in English. The cab passengers in the UK or the USA seldom use this vocative, unless they are irritated by the driver’s service. In India, the commonest vocative for strangers is ‘Brother’ (‘দাদা’/‘ভাই’ = elder brother / younger brother, depending on the age-difference between the conversants) and ‘Uncle’ (if the age-difference is quite bigger).

What the examples given above point to is the fact that “translation is always a shift, not between two languages, but between two cultures [...]” (Eco, *Experiences* 17). The translator, therefore, should be cautious about the semiotic transaction between two cultures – one, of the SL and the other, of the TL. Translations may require formulation of new techniques, new devices to make the culture-specific words acceptable or even intelligible in the TL culture. We may here in passing note that the famous Bengali poet-translator Bishnu Dey keeps an alert eye on the matter of cultural transference when he renders T.S. Eliot’s ‘Ash Wednesday’ as ‘চড়কের গান’, ‘The Journey of the Magi’ as ‘রাজর্ষিদের যাত্রা’ (Rabindranath Tagore chose ‘তীর্থযাত্রী’ as the title of his own translation of the Eliot poem), ‘Virgin’ as ‘দেবকী মাতা’, ‘Exile’ as ‘দ্বারকায় নির্বাসন পালা’. We can easily see that Dey is trying to maintain the religious overtone of Eliot’s poetry.

There are certain words which are not merely lexical items in that they signify the customs of a society. The more elegant the ferrying across the cultures, the more lisible the translation becomes for the target reader. Eco focuses on this issue (*Experiences* 19-20) when

he talks about the possible difficulties that might face a French or a Chinese reader of the first few pages of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* containing a good deal of dialogue in French. Tolstoy deployed such dialogues only to show how the upper-class Russians talked in French for reasons of snobbery although France was Russian's sworn enemy. The retention of those speeches in the French translation of the book, or, for that matter, the translation of them into English (or the Chinese language) for a Chinese reader would do away with the irony Tolstoy intended to bring into play. It must at this point be mentioned that most of the translation theories in vogue have not taken into account the multilingual / multicultural reception of a given translated text. At the moment, it appears that only glosses or footnotes can help the translator to tide over the problems of cultural transference in translation.

There is no gainsaying that certain words transcend their mundane meanings due to cultural shift. The word 'witness' is a convenient case at hand. In order to perceive the connotation of the word as used in *Murder in the Cathedral*, we have to cross the Protestant culture and get into the olden Greek culture where 'witness' meant 'co-sufferer'. Of course, a translator may suddenly find himself or herself in some unknown zones of cultural encodings, which are apparently too fuzzy or amorphous to be translated straightaway. As far as the issue of cultural transference is concerned, a translator's journey is indeed a perilous one as Bassnett puts it metaphorically:

In the same way that the surgeon, operating on the heart, cannot neglect the body that surrounds it, so the translator treats the text in isolation from the culture at his peril. (*Translation Studies* 14).

(v) The Source-Target interface:

In his widely acclaimed book titled *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (2003), Eco describes the art of translation as "[...] the version from a text A in a verbal language

Alpha into a text B in a verbal language Beta” (1). Eco’s equation should be read with Bassnett’s illucidation:

What is generally understood as translation involves the rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that (1) the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and (2) the structures of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted. (2)

Both the writers’ introductory and rudimentary statements regarding what happens in translation indirectly emphasize the matter of negotiation in translation. The very title of Eco’s book mentioned above of course speaks volumes in this regard. The negotiation takes into account such issues as fidelity, beauty, lisibility, and cultural shifts as an over-all package. To quote Eco at some length:

Negotiation is a process by virtue of which, in order to get something, each party renounces something else, and at the end everybody feels satisfied since one cannot have everything. In this kind of negotiation [i.e. in negotiation between the source text and the target text] there may be many parties: on one side, there is the original text, with its own rights, sometimes an author who claims right over the whole process, along with the cultural framework in which the original text is born; on the other side, there is the destination text, the cultural milieu in which it is expected to be read, and even the publishing industry, which can recommend different translation criteria [...]. (*Mouse or Rat* 6)

While carrying out negotiations, translators need to bear in mind that their ‘target’ readers are not the people who are closely acquainted with the SLT and have more than

ordinary command of the target language at the same time. For such readers translations are only matters of comparative evaluations of how far the translators have succeeded or failed in their work. And it is never very easy to satisfy such readers, as far as the poetics of the original is concerned. A Nirad C. Chaudhuri can by no means be a target reader of Seely's or Radice's translation of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Meghnadbadh kabya*. Book reviewers, copy editors and academics, with sufficient knowledge of the Bengali and English languages, can be their formal readers. It is just funny to guess that Bishnu Dey's target readers for his translation of Eliot's poetry include Radice and Seely, notwithstanding their good grasp on the nuances of the Bengali language.

(vi) Translating poetry: the limits of translation:

The phrase 'poetics of translation' assumes more importance in translating poetry than in translating prose or dramatic texts. Even a layman can easily see that it is far more difficult to translate a poem than to translate a prose piece. The reason is not far to seek. Poetry, more than prose or drama, tries to 'By indirections find directions out' (to use Polonius's words) and hopes that the reader will read between the lines. This is how Eco ends the introduction to his *Experiences in Translation* (2001): "[...] translations of poetry [represent] *abnormal cases*. [...] However, I also have taken into account many examples of *abnormal cases*" (x) (emphases added). The 'abnormality' that Eco is speaking about stems from the event of what the Russian formalists described as 'defamiliarisation' embedded in the language of poetry unlike in that of everyday life. Unfamiliarity is summoned only to enhance the perception of the familiar. To compound the problem for poetry translators there are such seductive and perilous verdicts as 'a poem should not *mean* but *be*', 'poetry is best arrangement of best words', and so on. With the denunciation 'traduttore – traditore' ('translator is traitor') almost always in chase, translators may throw in the towel believing that transmigration of 'souls' from an SLT to its TLT in poetry is not possible.

Detractors of translation and worshippers of poetry in the original, therefore, do not hesitate to pass the judgement that poetry defies translation. As the late Professor T.N. Sen observed in his *A Literary Miscellany* (1972):

[...] while it is possible to transfer the logical entity of a poem to another language, it is physically impossible to transfer its sensuous entity; and that is precisely what constitutes the burden, as Shelley would call it, of the curse of Babel. (101)

It is argued that a significant word in a poem has not only a meaning-value but a sound-value too, and that “[...] in poetry the two values, the semantic and the sonic, the logical and the sensuous, are so closely integrated to each other as to be inseparable” (101). Mere semantic equivalence cannot make for the lack of phonetic and rhythmic equivalence in poetic translations. Sen’s comments, again, on a tentative translation of the opening line of *La Divina Commedia* are interesting:

“Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita” [can easily be] Englished as “In the middle of the path of our life”. The meaning, the notional content, of the line, i.e. its logical entity, is completely transferred in the English version, not a particle of it being lost in the process. Yet the poetry of the line is as completely lost in the transfer, because the sensuous entity of the line cannot be transferred. (102)

Even so, “Let the dogs bark and cats mew” (Hamlet), translations will have their days: all best poetry the world over will forever be enjoyed through translation. People at large will have the pleasure of reading literature written in languages other than their own only through translation. And, of course, translating poetry has now become a key area in Translation Studies, because the matter of negotiation is all the more complicated here.

During the last fifty years, translation theorists have tried to discuss methodological problems of translating poetry from a non-empirical position. In his *Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint* (1975), André Lefevere catalogues as many as seven types of poetic translation which can be summarized as under:

- (i) *Phonemic translation*, which seeks to preserve the sonic effects of the SLT along with its semantic sides. Lefevere, of course, warns us that too much attention to sound may produce clumsiness or even meaninglessness. An unforgettable example of this kind of clumsiness is William Radice's use of 'ululation' for the Bengali 'উল্লু'! When pointed out that the two are a light year apart, Radice adamantly retained 'ululation' on the ground of its identical sound-value!
- (ii) *Literal translation*, which makes use of word-for-word method of translation so much so that both the sense and the syntax of the original get distorted.
- (iii) *Metrical translation*, which attempts to reproduce the SL metre often, as Lefevere concludes, at the cost of the SL text's wholeness.
- (iv) *Poetry into prose*, which – albeit less than literal or metrical modes of translation – distorts the original. Here we may note in passing that Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, which won him the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913, was a prose rendering of his original Bengali poems contained in the anthology bearing the same title. W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and others were impressed by the thought-content of the poems and did not care for the poetic value of the original probably because they did not know the Bengali language enough.
- (v) *Rhymed translation*, which may end up as a 'caricature' or 'mimicry' of the original, owing to the translator's double obligation to metre and rhyme.

- (vi) *Blank verse translation*, which apparently imposes restrictions on the translator, but fits well with the SLT that itself is written in the blank verse as in *Meghnadbadh kabya*.
- (vii) *Interpretative translation*, which is actually an amalgamation of what Lefevere terms as ‘versions’ and ‘imitations’ where the substance of the source text is retained but the form undergoes such a change as to make the translation appear a new poem.

Eco, as a translator and a translated author, has some important points to make about such aspects of poetic translations as metre, rhyme, rhythm, and interpretation. He argues that the metric values, rhyme and the rhyme scheme “[...] are perceptible only as phenomena of the substance of the expression [...]” (*Experiences* 89) even if they exploit elements already provided by the lexical system. Like writing a poem, the translation of a poem, too, should allow a kind of shuttling between expression and content. Eco repeatedly reminds us of the role of interpretation in translation. Even while critiquing Roman Jakobson’s essay on the linguistic aspects of translation, he does not forget to point out that Jakobson himself uses the word ‘interpretation’ three times while categorizing translation into three types: intralinguistic, interlinguistic and intersemiotic. Eco then concludes: “[...] translation is a species of the *genus* interpretation, governed by certain principles proper to translation (*Experiences* 80). The interpretative modes in a translation begin to surface as the translator starts violating both lexical and referential faithfulness in his or her quest for the deep sense underlying the SLT.

Poetry indeed more often than not posits insuperable hurdles and limits for a translator. No translators of Jibanananda Das’s poetry can be able to reproduce the *sadhucalit* mix in pronouns and verbs as in the lines like “হাজার বছর ধরে আমি পথ হাঁটিতেছি” and “আবার তাহারে কেন ডেকে আনো” only because the English grammatical systems have nothing to support

them with in this respect. Even a simple rural incident can defy translation, as may be evident in the following translations of “হয়তো খইয়ের ধান ছড়াইতেছে শিশু এক উঠানের ঘাসে ...” (Gupta 157-58):

- (a) Perhaps a child is strewing puffed rice on the grass of some home’s inner courtyard. (Seely, *The Scent of Sunlight* 95)
- (b) A little child toss rice-grains on the courtyard grass. (Chaudhuri 3)
- (c) Perhaps, a baby is sprinkling paddy of parched rice. (Ahmad 23)

In a section titled “When the text has us see things” of his *Experiences in Translation*, Eco points out that “[...] verbal texts often bring into play processes of hypotyposis; in other words, they lead the language to ‘stage’ something that the reader is virtually led to *see*” (50-51). By definition, hypotyposis is the rhetorical effect by which words succeed in rendering a visual scene. Any scrutiny of the translated versions of the Bengali poet’s line, as collated above, will conclude that they lack the hypotyposis of the original.

Word play or puns, too, may stand beyond the reach of a translator. When Hamlet says that his uncle-father is “A little more than kin, and less than kind”, he is actually making an effective use of the pun on the words ‘kin’ and ‘kind’. Translators shall have to work very hard to find a matching pun in the target language. Similarly, an out and out word play like the following simply resists translation:

হরির উপরে হরি,  
হরি বসে তাই;  
হরিকে দেখিয়া হরি  
হরিতে লুকায়।

Equally untranslatable are much of what is known as ‘concrete poetry’ or ‘figure poems’, although they should be deemed only extreme cases like the nonsense verses of Lewis Carroll or Sukumar Ray. Eco has proposed a solution in this regard:

Instead of speaking of equivalence of meaning [and structure] we can speak of *functional equivalence*: a good translation must generate the same effect aimed at by the original [...]. Obviously this means that translators have to make an interpretative hypothesis about the effect programmed by the original text.” (*Experiences* 44-45)

It may therefore be concluded that the activity known as ‘translation’, in spite of its great importance in the dissemination of world literature in a multilingual world, cannot follow any hard and fast ‘poetics’ (i.e. aesthetic rules like say, Aristotle’s commandments given in *Poetics* and Horace’s in *Ars Poetica*). A translator has to be eclectic, as everything of the SLT cannot be retained in fact in the TLT. To quote Eco again:

In translating we must isolate various substantial levels. An insensitive, inattentive or superficial reader may miss or disregard many of them: one can read a fairy tale to enjoy the story without paying attention to its moral meaning, one can read *Hamlet* purely in order to see if Hamlet will succeed in avenging his father [...]. Translators are in theory bound to identify each of the relevant textual levels, but they may be obliged to choose which ones to preserve, since it is impossible to save all. (*Mouse or Rat* 30)

The basic dilemma that dogs a translator, the basic modes of translation, and the existence of good translation have been lucidly discussed by Laha (2017):

A piece of the lovers’ quarrel between Hamlet and Ophelia probably adumbrates the dilemma that dogs a translator:

Hamlet. Ha, ha! Are you honest?

Ophelia. My lord?

Hamlet. Are you fair?

Ophelia. What means your lordship?

Hamlet. That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty. [Act 3, Scene1]

People who have thought that poetry is untranslatable would juxtapose “*Quam multa silvis autumnni frigore lapsa cadunt folia*” (Virgil) with “Thick as autumnal leaves that stow the brooks” (Milton) and argue that “Leaves, it seems, must fall differently in Italian and English” (Tarak Nath Sen).

But it is often forgotten that Keats’s sonnet “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” is not only a tribute to Homer but to the art of translation, too. It was, again, not for nothing that Pound translated Chinese poetry. Nor is it true that ‘honesty’ and ‘beauty’ can never exist in harmony. When Tagore is translating Donne’s line “[f] or God’s sake hold your tongue and let me love” into “দোহাই তোদের একটুকু চুপ কর / ভালোবাসিবারে দে মোরে অবসর” the English knowing Bengali readers have an exemplary coexistence of the faithful and the beautiful. I think a whole array of sound, sense, rhyme and rhythm go to create a true image of the SLT.

But it is all easier said than done. In the ultimate analysis there are two modes of translation: the reflective mode and the refractive mode. If Tagore’s own translation of Gitanjali poems is likely to belong to the former, William Radice’s (for example) dose belong to the latter. (*Karna-Kunti Dialogue* 71-72)

### ***‘Politics’***

The phrase ‘the politics of translation’ constitutes the title of the ninth chapter of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s book *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, and it has become one

of the fond jargons in critiques of postcolonial translation in particular and Translation Studies in general, since the publication of the book in 1993. Hence, this section will draw heavily on what Spivak means by the phrase as well as looking at the use of the word ‘politics’ by Derrida in his *The Politics of Friendship* (1997) and by Toril Moi in her *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985); Derrida’s 2001 essay entitled “What is a ‘Relevant Translation’” will also be referred to as and when required.

Spivak’s essay has three parts following a brief introduction. The subtitles of the three parts are enough to indicate what she is up to: ‘Translation as Reading’, ‘Translation in General’, and ‘Reading as Translation’. By collating feminist, postcolonialist and poststructuralist approaches, this seminal essay basically hovers around an apparently contradictory set of questions: ‘why is translation necessary?’ and ‘why is translation impossible’? Spivak welds the two with her perceptive point that is the error of reading lying at the core of translation which makes translation both necessary and impossible.

Globalisation is helplessly dependent on language as a communicative thread which cannot be dispensed with. Translation, thus, becomes the grammar of globalization by connecting tongues, minds, cultures, and worlds. Yet, why is translation impossible? It is so because of what she calls ‘translatese’, that is, the quirkiness of translation due to overly literal translation of ideas and syntax. In other words, unthinking translations will always be flawed as they have to rest on flawed ground.

Taking a cue from “[...] the British sociologist Michèle Barrett’s feeling that the politics of translation takes on a massive life of its own” (Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching* 179) if language can be seen as the process of meaning-construction, Spivak admits that making sense of things through language is “one of the seductions of translating” (*Outside in the Teaching* 179). The SLT is the self and the TLT is the ‘other’. The ‘othering’ involves

‘politics’ because “Politics involves the resolution of conflict” (Hoffman 143). The ‘politics’ of translation can be perceived if we ponder “[...] the role played by language for the *agent*, the person who acts [i.e. the translator], even though intention is not fully present to itself” (*Outside in the Teaching* 179).

How does a translator respond to the ‘specificity of the language’ (*Outside in the Teaching* 180) he or she is translating, given that “[...] the rhetorical nature of every language disrupts its logical systematicity” (180). The translator may like to remain safe by not taking the risk of doing violence to the translating medium. And ‘safety’ belongs to the domain of ‘politics’. As a practising translator, Spivak was taking those risks while translating some eighteenth-century Bengali poetry:

I must resist both the solemnity of chaste Victorian poetic prose and the forced simplicity of “plain English”, that have imposed themselves as the norm [...] *Translation is the most intimate act of reading. I surrender to the text when I translate.* [...] The translator earns permission to transgress from the trace of the other [...] in the closest places of the self. (*Outside in the Teaching* 180) (emphases added)

According to Spivak, rhetoric or figuration disrupts logic and thereby generates the possibility of random contingency beyond the control of the translator. Yet, although there is the risky fraying of the language – textile the translator’s “[...] stake in agency keeps the fraying down to a minimum [...]” (*Outside in the Teaching* 180). Spivak further adds:

The task of the translator is to facilitate the love between the original and its shadow, a love that permits fraying, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or actual audience at bay. The politics of translation [...] too often suppresses this possibility because the translator

cannot engage with, or cares insufficiently for, the rhetoricity of the original.

(*Outside in the Teaching* 181)

The difference between logic and rhetoric in the act of translation has been pithily pointed out by her:

Logic allows us to jump from word to word by means of clearly indicated connections. Rhetoric must work in the silence between and around words in order to see what works and how much. (*Outside in the Teaching* 181)

The weedy relationship between rhetoric and logic is a relationship warranted by the politics of translation. Translation as a negotiation must be founded on an agreeable model for the agent to follow. Which is why Spivak categorically says: “Unless one can at least construct a model of this for the other language, there is no real translation” (*Outside in the Teaching* 181). And she is rather unhappy to see that many a construction of the non-Western scene is afoot, without a proper sense of the rhetoricity of language beyond the matters of synonym, syntax, and local colour. We may, however, stop and think about the efficacy of Spivak’s poststructuralist approach to the postulated submission of the translator (to the SLT he or she is translating) with a view to having a good command of the rhetoricity of language for building a ‘model’. The moot question is: how to ‘surrender’ to a text when all reading is misreading (Derrida’s famous/notorious phrase)?

Anyway, it is interesting to see what Spivak says about the two translations of the title of Mahasweta Devi’s story “স্বন্দ্যদায়িনী”: one by Spivak herself, and the other by another translator. Spivak translates the title as “Breast-Giver”, and Devi has approved of the aptness of the translated title. The alternative translation is “The Wet-Nurse”. And here is Spivak’s comment on the two possible translations of the same Bengali title:

[The phrase “The Wet-Nurse”] neutralizes the author’s irony in constructing an uncanny word; enough like “wet-nurse” to make that sense, and enough unlike to shock. It is as if the translator should decide to translate Dylan Thomas’s famous title and opening line as “Do not go gently into that good night”. The theme of treating the breast as organ of labor-power-as-commodity and the breast as metonymic part-object standing in for other-as-object [...] is lost even before you enter the story. (*Outside in the Teaching* 182-83)

What Spivak says is important if we juxtapose Seely’s and Radice’s translations of the title of Dutt’s epic মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য: Seely titles his book “The Slaying of Meghanada”, and Radice “The Poem of the Killing of Meghnād”. The rhetorical difference between the two translated titles, with special reference to the two verbal nouns – ‘Slaying’ and ‘Killing’ – will be discussed at the beginning of the next chapter.

Spivak’s idea of ‘translation as reading’ hinges on her belief that

[...] the translator must surrender to the text. [...] translation is the most intimate act of reading. Unless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text. (*Outside in the Teaching* 183)

Spivak is, of course, simpler here than elsewhere in the essay. But she gives a sudden twist – as is her wonted – to her argument as she characterizes the nature of surrendering in translation as “more erotic than ethical”. But her contention/intention/implication becomes clear once we understand that eros, in the Freudian sense of the term, pertains to the rhetoric of the body and ‘ethics’ acts as a containment against the invasion of the rhetorical virus. Surrender to sexual desire transgresses the limits of language: it enacts the gravitational pull

‘to love before being loved’ (Derrida’s fine phrase used in *The Politics of Friendship*), so much so that the ‘otherness’ tends to submerge in the ‘self’. A translator should begin by loving the SLT “not wisely but too well” (just as Othello loved Desdemona).

Now the question is: how to make the surrendering (to the text) total and effective so as to draw out of it not only plaisir but jouissance. It appears that Spivak insinuates that the arousal and fulfilment of the desire to surrender oneself to the text largely depends on one’s relationship with the language being translated. Spivak herself has given an apt example of ‘lack of intimacy with the medium’ (*Outside in the Teaching* 183). Here is she speaking out against her rival translator of Mahasweta Devi’s story:

In the text Mahasweta uses proverbs that are startling even in the Bengali. The translator of “The Wet-Nurse” leaves them out. She decides not to try to translate these hard bits of earthy wisdom, contrasting with class-specific access to modernity, also represented in the story. In fact, if the two translations are read side by side, the loss of the rhetorical silences of the original can be felt from one to the other. (*Outside in the Teaching* 183)

For safety’s sake, Spivak’s rival translator ignored certain things and thereby left marks of a lip-deep relationship with the SLT – with the language of the original. Radice taught Bengali at the SOAS, UK, and Seely at the University of Chicago. Their intimacy with the Bengali language will obviously surface in the comparative study of their translations of Dutt’s epic which will form the bulk of the next chapter of the present study. Spivak’s categorical caveat is: “[...] she [a translator] does not have a real advantage as a translator if she is not strictly bilingual, if she merely speaks her native language” (*Outside in the Teaching* 187).

Spivak does not lose sight of the fact the politics of translation is more often than not related to the economics and politics of publication. As she perceptively comments: “Good and bad is a flexible standard, like all standards. [...] these decisions of standards are made anyway” (*Outside in the Teaching* 188). What controls here is the attempt to justify the decisions adequately. “Publishing houses routinely engage in materialist confusion of those standards” (188). Hence, “The translator must be able to fight that metropolitan materialism with a special kind of specialist’s knowledge, not mere philosophical convictions” (188). In the case of third world writing, the translator must be wary about “the fact that there is so much of the old colonial attitude, slightly displaced at work in the translation racket” (*Outside in the Teaching* 189). It may be argued that the politics of publication was responsible for Seely’s addition of the subtitle “A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal” to the main title of his translation of Dutt’s epic. ‘Ramayana’, ‘Colonial Bengal’, etc. still sale well! (Why not “A Postcolonial *Ramayana*”, one might wonder.)

A translator’s desire to remain ‘safe’, a desire which is part and parcel of the politics of translation, may become inordinate if he or she has no fear of being accurately judged by his or her target readership. And this intrepidity or audacity makes the task of a translator more dangerous and more risky. Spivak very aptly remarks:

The status of a language in the world is what one must consider when teasing out the politics of translation. [...] If you want to make the translated text accessible, try doing it for the person who wrote it. [...] If you are making anything else accessible, through a language quickly learned with an idea that you transfer content, then you are betraying the text and showing rather dubious politics. (*Outside in the Teaching* 191)

In the penultimate section of her essay – the section titled “Translation in General” – Spivak dwells “on the politics of translation in a general sense” (*Outside in the Teaching* 194) and refers to a couple of ‘cultural translations’ in English. With the help of the examples she cites, Spivak focuses on the need for the renaissance “of the native imagination as not merely trans-lation but the trans-substantiation of the species” (*Outside in the Teaching* 196). The rather facile accessibility of translation as transfer of substance generates from the politics of translation with the result that the hegemonic language makes translation impossible.

The final section of “The Politics of Translation” reverses her stance taken in the first: in the first she looks into translation as ‘reading’, and in the last into reading as ‘translation’. What she obviously wants to imply that the two matters are the obverse and subverse of the same coin. Translation entails reading into the text to be translated, and that in-depth reading facilitates translation which is always already there in the act of reading. Reading as translation, however, can be counter-productive, as Spivak observes:

[The reader as translator] finds a kind of comfort in Mahasweta Devi’s livid figuration of the woman’s body as body rather than attend to [the] history of the English body “as a dis-figurative device in order to return to [it] [*sic*] its lost literality. Reading as translation has misfired here. (*Outside in the Teaching* 199)

We would here refer in passing to Toril Moi’s *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) and Derrida’s *The Politics of Friendship* (1997) to see how the two writers have used the term ‘politics’ for their respective purposes. We turn to these books because like sexuality and friendship, translation, too, is a kind of representation/re-presentation. Moi points out the limitations in the Anglo-American representation of sexuality in texts dealing with women. There is, therefore, a constant slippage between the self and the other, which the self refuses

to acknowledge. If the translator misrepresents the SLT, the same kind of slippage may take place, making the translation forever elusive. Derrida locates the politics of friendship in the dynamics of the Aristotelian “O my friends, there is no friend” and the Nietzschean “O enemies, there is no enemy”. Derrida postulates that the only way to resolve the conflict between the two propositions is to “love before being loved” and to extend hospitality to the ‘other’. The resolution of the two verdicts, namely, that *there is no thing as translation* and *there is nothing but translation* (i.e. everything is translation) is very much like the Derridian attempt to resolve the two opposite axiomatic claims: that there is no friend and that there is no enemy. This leads us to take a glance at Derrida’s essay “What Is a “Relevant” Translation?” (2001).

The essay in question is actually Lawrence Venuti’s translation of a lecture delivered by Derrida in French in 1998. The essay was subsequently published in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.27, No.2 (Winter, 2001). Derrida begins by saying that he is not eligible enough to talk about translation because he lacks experience in translation and has always shunned

[...] the translator’s *métier*, his beautiful and terrifying responsibility, his insolvent duty and debt, without ceasing to tell himself “never ever again” : “no, precisely, I would *never* dare, I should *never*, could *never*, would *never* manage to pull it off”? [...]. (Derrida and Venuti 174)

At the same time he acknowledges the fascination that translation has for him:

[...] this declaration of insolvency before translation was always, in me, the other face of a jealous and admiring love, a passion for what summons, loves, provokes and defies translation [...] an admiration for those men and women who, to my mind, are the only ones who know how to read and write – translators”. (Derrida and Venuti 174-75)

The concept of a ‘relevant’ translation is not novel: various formulations of it have been discussed by translation theorists over the last three centuries. “For Schleiermacher, relevance was questionable because it meant assimilation or domestication [...]” (Venuti, Introduction 170). This domestication was for him nothing but “[...] an erasure of the foreignness of the foreign text by rewriting it in the terms of the receiving language and culture” (170-71). In the twentieth century, the idea of relevance became predominant in translation theory and practice. Eugene Nida, for example, supported the concept of ‘dynamic equivalence’ “[...] in which the translator [...] tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture” (Venuti, Introduction 171).

It can easily be seen that Derrida’s view is based on his critique of the sign. In his opinion, the relevant translation “[...] present itself as the transfer of an intact signified through the inconsequential vehicle of any signifier whatsoever” (Venuti, Introduction 171). On the one hand Derrida, like Schleiermacher, questions relevant translation, and on the other,

Unlike Schleiermacher, Derrida sees this practice as inevitable insofar as every translation participates in an “economy of in-betweenness,” positioned somewhere between “absolute relevance, the most appropriate, adequate, univocal transparency, and the most aberrant and opaque irrelevance.” (Venuti, Introduction 171)

Derrida, in fact, is addressing here one of the recurrent themes in the history of translation: the antithesis between ‘word-for-word’ and ‘sense-for-sense’ translations.

Derrida is famous for his propensity for infusing double or even multiple meanings into a word which he often coins to make his point. The most well-known one is of course ‘Différance’ which is an amalgam of ‘difference’ and ‘deferral’ (of meaning). The French

word for 'relevance', as used by Derrida, is 'relevante' into which he infuses three meanings drawn out from the root word 'relever' : 'relever' as a French culinary term meaning supplementation of taste and flavor [the translator retains as well as adds to the taste of the original text]; 'relever', as an architectural term meaning 'elevation' or transcendence [a translation has to transcend itself "by rising and thus lifting itself above itself" (Derrida and Venuti 196)]; and finally, 'relever' as a verb meaning justification or appropriateness which, in Derridian verbal jugglery, is 'more appropriate than appropriate' (196).

In the chapter that follows this, we will try and assess how successfully Seely and Radice have, in their respective translations of Dutt's epic, attempted "[...] at appropriation that aims to transport home [...] in the most relevant way possible, the most proper meaning of the original text [...]" (Derrida and Venuti 179).

#### CHAPTER – IV: ‘SLAYING’ Vs ‘KILLING’

In Chapter III, we have referred to how Gayatri Spivak reacts when she finds that Mahasweta Devi’s “স্বন্দ্যায়িনী” was titled by a translator as ‘The Wet-nurse’: she sharply points out that her own translation of the Bengali title as ‘Breast-Giver’ is far more appropriate than ‘The Wet-Nurse’. Before we attempt a textual comparison between Seely’s *The Slaying of Meghanada* and Radice’s *The Poem of the Killing of Meghnād*, it may be useful to reflect on the difference between the two titles. The verbal noun Seely uses is ‘Slaying’, and Radice has ‘Killing’. Although, as translation theorists often argue, no two words can be fully synonymous, translators by necessity have to make an appropriate selection from the synonyms of a given word.

‘Slaying’ and ‘Killing’ ordinarily means the same; yet, the former is more literary than the latter. ‘Killing’ is perhaps less ‘epical’ than ‘Slaying’. That is why we have such phrases as ‘The Slaying of Grendel [by Beowulf]’, ‘[Perseus] Slaying the Gorgon’ and the like. We may also recall here what Laertes says in his dying speech: “It is here, Hamlet, Hamlet, thou art *slain*” (Davies 321) (emphasis added). These references do support Seely’s use of the verbal noun ‘Slaying’ more than Radice’s ‘Killing’, in the respective titles of their translations. The reason why Radice chose ‘Killing’ might be that he was translating under a kind of ‘anxiety of influence’ – an anxiety which breeds a desire to be different. The sad death of Meghnad at the devious hands of fate and Laxman forms the core of Dutt’s narrative, and ‘Slaying’ or ‘Killing’ is the most important keyword in the translated titles as much as ‘বধ’ is in the Bengali title ‘মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য’ which Radice retains in English transliteration as the subtitle to his book. ‘Killing’ is more akin to ‘হত্যা’ than ‘বধ’, if the culture of the source language is taken minutely into account. Radice probably had no alternative but to choose ‘Killing’, as other available synonyms for ‘Slaying’ would be even less literary.

This penultimate chapter of the present work basically compares Seely's *The Slaying of Meghanada* (2004) with Radice's *The Poem of the Killing of Meghnād* (2010) with a view to looking at the similarities and differences between the two as translations of Dutt's *Meghnadbadh kabya* (1861). In doing so it of course will discuss how far the two TLTs have succeeded in approximating, reflecting or refracting, and negotiating with their common SLT. In the very first chapter we have already discussed the translations of the opening verse-paragraph of the poem in the light of the TLT-SLT interface. Hence, this chapter will, for the purpose of the comparative study, take into account select lines from each of the remaining eight Books or Cantos. The textual discussion or scanning – the dissection of the specimens, so to say – will be preceded by a brief discussion of the prefatory remarks made by both Seely and Radice in their works. How they defend their respective actions as translators are indeed as important as their acts of translation.

### *Seely's Apologia*

It is in the last five pages of his 67-page 'Introduction' (Seely, *The Slaying* 63-67) that Seely talks about his translation process. The biggest hurdle for him – as it is likely to be with all translators of Dutt's verse – was to find an agreeable negotiation with the meter of the SLT. He knows well that Dutt both retained and rejected the premodern Bengali meter called 'payar':

Datta [*sic*] took [the] basic *payar* structure, retained the fourteen – syllable line, discarded end rhyming, and allowed for enjambment. (64)

Seely also has in him mind what Dutt suggested in a personal letter:

Let your friends guide their voices by the pause (as in English Blank-verse) and they will soon swear that this is the noblest measure in the

language. My advice is Read, Read, Read. Teach your ears the new tune and then you will find out what it is. (*The Slaying* 63)

In handling the matters of meter, Seely therefore makes a “compromise between the original Bangla and the manner in which Datta [*sic*] suggests [...] that his meter should be read” (63). The metrical features of his translation have been clearly outlined by Seely himself:

In my translation, I hold to the fourteen-syllable, unrhymed line displaying enjambment, though I make no effort to force my lines to be coterminous with the original. (*The Slaying* 64)

Seely has consciously avoided Miltonic iambic pentameter because the Bengali language does not have stressed and unstressed syllables. But at the same time his lines do not strive to capture the sonority of Dutt’s simply because that would be a futile exercise. He clearly states his adherence to and deviation from Dutt’s ‘poetics’:

I have adhered to Datta’s [*sic*] own paragraph divisions. He does indent, and so do I. In most cases I have reproduced his punctuation, also. All parentheses in my translation are to be found in his original. I must admit to diminishing slightly the number of exclamation marks, however. Datta [*sic*], in his letters, in his poetry, and in life, is exuberantly exclamatory. (*The Slaying* 65-66)

We know that Latinism in words and syntax, and deployment of sonorous proper names conjoin to produce what we call Milton’s ‘Grand Style’, the elevated kind of style which is a sine qua non for a secondary or literary epic. In *Meghnadbadh kabya*, the grandeur is achieved through the use of Sanskritic words, compressed compound words, and also through the liberal use of epithets as appellatives and modifiers. But Seely is careful enough

not to double-translate the epithets: he writes ‘Virabahu’ (which itself means ‘whose arms are strong’) instead of double-translating the word as “strong-armed Virabahu”.

The English language, or perhaps any other foreign tongue, cannot subsume all of Dutt’s poetic techniques and ornamentations. The embedded variety in epithets like ‘Ratnakara’ (both ‘mine of gems’ and ‘sea’) “[...] adds a lushness to the text, their tonal qualities often provide alliteration, and their literal meanings can transform these epithets into metaphors in their own right” (Seely, *The Slaying* 66).

### ***Radice’s Apologia***

In the section titled “About this translation”, which constitutes the last part of the ‘Introduction’ (Radice, *The Poem* c – cvii) to his translation of *Meghnadbadh kabya*, Radice talks not only about the ways he negotiated with the SLT but also about how his techniques of versification differ from Seely’s. Radice has to refer to Seely’s techniques because his translation was published six years after Seely had published his.

Having admitted that an epoch – making poem like *Meghnadbadh kabya* is not at all an easy stuff for translators, Radice argues that any translation of it should “[...] do justice to its language, its subject, its tone and its structure” (c – ci). He argues that the translation should be limpid and accessible in the English language, but at the same time the reader should be made to feel that “[...] he or she is gaining a new kind of linguistic experience” (ci). As the language of the original may be at odds with most Bengalis’ command of their own mother-tongue, Radice does not mind if the English he has used sometimes seems odd too. What Radice wants to imply is that an English translation of the Dutt’s poem can necessarily make occasional use of rarified English. In order to make the subject matter of the poem accessible to non-Bengali readers, he has provided copious notes and annotations both at the bottom of each page and at the end. As a poet-translator, Radice is quite alive to the use

of the *rasas* in the poem, and therefore, to the required shifts in the style in tune with the various *rasas*. Dutt, we have already noted, wished his poem to be read for a proper appreciation of its poetic novelty and beauty, Radice, too, wishes his translation to be read aloud: “[...] if the translation is read aloud it should ring out even more strongly” (ci).

Quite conscious of Dutt’s mastery of phrasing, pause and enjambment, Radice has in his translation “[...] adopted a simple form based on three phases per line, a phrase being defined by a punctuation mark” (ci). The result is that the translated lines “[...] vary greatly in length, from the short to the very long” (ci) contrary to the evenness of the length of the Bengali lines. Visually, then, Radice’s lines look different on the page from Seely’s or Dutt’s, as will be clear from the excerpts utilized in this chapter. In this connection, Radice argues:

[...] I know no better way of conveying the pace, energy and music of his verse. The discipline of the form lies in the need always to end a paragraph at the end of a line, as in the blank verse of Milton and Madhusudan himself.  
(cii)

The basic difference between the two translators’ prefatory self-defence is that the poet in Radice seeks to control his poetics of translation, while Seely tries to negotiate with the SLT from the vantage point of a non-poet academic. Seely’s syllabic verse is therefore less experimental than Radice’s phrasal verse. But there are some small differences as well. For example, readers of the Bengali original can trace the corresponding English lines in Radice more quickly than in Seely. Further, Radice’s unorthodox Sanskritic transliterations are more reader-friendly than Seely’s orthodox ones. Here is Radice’s apologia in this context:

[...] I feel that in the twenty-first century we need a new approach to transliteration in some circumstances, and if they [Sanskritists] do complain I

can always quote Madhusudan's own 'intention to throw off the fetters forged for us by a servile admiration of everything Sanskrit'. (*The Poem cv*)

### Canto / Book – II (দ্বিতীয় সর্গ)

Dutt: অস্তে গেলা দিনমণি; আইলা গোধূলি,--

একটি রতন ভালে। ফুটিলা কুমুদী;

মুদীলা সরসে আঁখি বিরসবদনা

নলিনী; কূজনি পাখী পশিল কুলায়ে ;

গোষ্ঠ-গৃহে গাভী-বৃন্দ ধায় হাম্বা রবে।

আইলা সুচারু-তারা শশী সহ হাসি,

শর্করী; সুগন্ধবহ বহিল চৌদিকে,

সুস্বনে সবার কাছে কহিয়া বিলাসী,

কোন্ কোন্ ফুল চুম্বি কি ধন পাইলা।

আইলেন নিদ্রাদেবী; ক্লান্ত শিশুকুল

জননীর ক্রোড়-নীড়ে লভয়ে যেমতি

বিরাম, ভূচর সহ জলচর-আদি

দেবীর চরণশ্রমে বিশ্রাম লভিলা। (Banerjee II.1-13)

Seely:

The sun set, and Twilight appeared – a gem upon her brow.

Night-blooming lotuses now blossomed; in ponds the wan-faced

lotuses of day closed fast their eyes; warbling birds returned

to nests; and cattle, lowing, shambled toward their cow sheds. With

the moon and her radiant stars came Night, smiling. Flirting,

fragrant breezes, blustering about – to all they whispered

sweetly, "What riches did you win kissing which of several

flowers?” The goddess Sleep arrived. And, as tired children  
 curl up in their mother’s lap, just so the many creatures  
 of land and sea took refuge at that goddess’s two feet. (Seely 2.1-10)

Radice:

The sun set; twilight fell; a jewel-like star hung on the  
 brow of evening.  
 Night-lotuses burgeoned; day-lotuses closed their tired dry  
 eyes on the lake; twittering birds returned to their nests;  
 Cattle hurried lowing to their byres. Gracefully-  
 starred Night arrived, smiling,  
 Together with the moon; a perfumed breeze stirred all  
 around, whispering amorously to all,  
 Stealing, oh! What riches by kissing flower upon flower.  
 The goddess of sleep came; like tired infants seeking rest  
 in the nest of their mothers’ laps, creatures of land  
 and water took refuge at her feet. (Radice II.1-13)

It is interesting to note that both Seely and Radice use the word ‘sun’ and thereby avoid the periphrasis contained in ‘দিনমনি’ (‘the pupil of the day’, like ‘the eye of the day’ in *Beowulf* or in Homer. Since ‘একটি রতন ভালে’ implies the evening star (cf. “When only one is shining in the sky” of Wordsworth), Seely’s ‘a gem upon her brow’ is more compact than Radice’s “a jewel-like star hang on the brow of evening” which actually splits the metaphor into a simile. ‘সরসে’ has been translated by Seely and Radice as ‘in ponds’ and ‘on the lake’ respectively. Seely seems to have attained equipollence a bit more than Radice here: the plural ‘ponds’ yields a sense of generalization which ‘the lake’ does not, and the enlargement

of ‘pond’ into ‘lake’ pixelates the image for the reader to capture in his/her mind’s eye. It is not clear why Seely puts a possessive pronoun before ‘cow sheds’ and none before ‘nests’ in the same line. Seely’s birds ‘warble’ (‘warbling birds’) while Radice’s ‘twitter’ (‘twittering birds’), both in response to Dutt’s ‘কুজনি’. Radice readily reminds us of Keats’s ‘twittering swallows’ (“To Autumn”) but Seely uses a rather removed word to suit the grand style. Radice’s description of the arrival of night is more poetic than Seely’s. It is also more accurate: in “With/the moon and her radiant stars came Night”, ‘her’ may be erroneously taken by some as ‘the moon’s’! Again, Radice’s ‘amorously’ is less colloquial than Seely’s ‘Flirting’, and therefore caters better for the epic style. Seely slips into a syntactical mistake as he converts “কোন কোন ফুল চুম্বি কি ধন পাইলা” into an interrogative locution – “What riches did you win kissing which of several flowers?” Radice’s half – exclamatory “Stealing, oh! What riches by kissing flower upon flower” is a better negotiation with the SLT. It can be understood that Radice uses the verb ‘came’ in respect of the arrival of ‘the goddess of sleep’, because he has already used the verb ‘arrived’ (‘Night arrived’) in the same verse paragraph. Radice, however, goes word for word to negotiate with Dutt’s compound word ‘ক্রেড়-নীড়ে’, translating it into ‘in the nest of their mothers’ laps’. Seely goes sense-wise, and rather paraphrases the compound word as ‘curl up in their mother’s lap’, doing much away with the beauty of the original. Interestingly, both Seely and Radice have failed to ‘ferry across’ the sense of peacefulness conveyed in Dutt’s ‘চরণশ্রমে’, as they translate it into ‘goddess’s two feet’ and ‘her feet’ respectively.

### Canto/Book – III (তৃতীয় সর্গ)

Dutt:

প্রমোদ-উদ্যানে কাঁদে দানব নন্দিনী

প্রমীলা, পতি-বিরহে কাতরা যুবতী।

অশ্রুআঁখি বিধুমুখী ভ্রমে ফুলবনে

কভু, ব্রজ-কুঞ্জ-বনে, হায় রে, যেমনি  
 ব্রজবালা, নাহি হেরি কদম্বের মূলে  
 পীতধড়া পীতাম্বরে, অধরে মুরলী।  
 কভু বা মন্দিরে পশি, বাহিরায় পুনঃ  
 বিরহিণী, শূন্য নীড়ে কপোতী যেমতি  
 বিবশা! কভু বা উঠি উচ্চ-গৃহ-চূড়ে,  
 এক দৃষ্টে চাহে বামা দূর লঙ্কা পানে,  
 অবিরল চক্ষুঃজল পুঁছিয়া আঁচলে!  
 নীরব বাঁশরী, বীণা, মুরজ, মন্দিরা,  
 গীত-ধ্বনি। চারি দিকে সখী-দল যত,  
 বিরস-বদন, মরি, সুন্দরীর শোকে!  
 কে না জানে ফুলকুল বিরস-বদনা,  
 মধুর বিরহে যবে তাপে বনস্থলী? (Banerjee III.1-16)

Seely:

In Pramoda Park wept Pramīlā, that youthful daughter  
 of a Dānava, pained because apart from her dear spouse.  
 The moon-faced one, eyes filled with tears, paced constantly about  
 the flower garden, just like the maid of Vraja, ah me,  
 when she, in Vraja's flower groves, failed to find her Kṛṣṇa,  
 yellow-clad, under a *kadamba* tree, flute at his lips.  
 That lovesick woman, time and again, would step inside her  
 home, then reemerge, like a pigeon, inconsolable  
 in her empty pigeon house. Anon, she would climb to the  
 roof of her dwelling and gaze toward distant Laṅkā, dabbing  
 with the loose end of her sari her ceaseless tears. Mute were

the flute, *viṇā muraja* drum, finger cymbals, and the strains of song. The faces of her retinue turned somber at the sorrow of their pretty mistress. And who is there who has not seen the sullen faces of the flowers when their forest mistress burns in separation from her Spring? (Seely 3.1-16)

Radice:

The youthful Pramilā, daughter of the Dānavas, weeps  
in her pleasure –garden,  
Distraught at her husband’s absence. Sometimes she  
tearfully roams through its groves of flowers, like the  
women of Vraj,  
Deprived, alas, of the sight of Krishna in his yellow loincloth,  
At the foot of the *kadamba*-tree, flute on his lips!  
Sometimes she goes indoors,  
Only to emerge again, mournful as a dove on finding an  
empty nest! Sometimes she climbs the turret of her home,  
To stare fixedly at distant Lankā, dabbing at her  
ceaseless tears with the end of her sari! Silent are the  
flute and *viṇā*,  
The drum and cymbals, the sounds of song! Glum-faced  
are her companions around her,  
Grieving for her, wilting, ah!  
Like flowers burnt up, at spring’s departure, by drought. (Radice III.1-16)

Seely's translation of 'প্রমোদ-উদ্যানে' into 'In Pramoda Park' is not at all a very good example of cultural negotiation on the part of the translator. The capitalization worsens the matter because the words, with initial upper cases, look like a proper name in total violation of what Dutt meant. Radice's 'in her pleasure-garden' is indeed a good rendering. Moreover, a period-mark after Seely's adverbial clause of reason – "because apart from her dear spouse" – renders the first two lines grammatically incomplete. Radice's 'Distraught at her husband's absence' is a much better and poetically charged translation of Dutt's 'পতি-বিরহে', a very common Bengali phrase. Seely's 'paced constantly' makes Pramila's impatience rather mechanical. The addition of the name of Krishna by both the translators can be seen as a means of tiding over the problem caused by cultural shift. 'Vraj' is well supplemented by 'Krsna' or 'Krishna'. Sometimes indigenous words are retained in translation, and that is why both Seely and Radice retain the Bengali word 'kadamba' and do not translate it as 'burflower' or 'laran'. For one thing, translation or retention of 'kadamba' demands a footnote. Radice's 'yellow loincloth' is a grievous mistranslation of Dutt's 'পীতবড়া'. Seely has managed to remain rather acceptable with his 'yellow-clad'. It may be noted here that 'chadar' / 'cadar' has already entered the Anglo-saxon vocabulary, and even 'shawl' or 'scarf' or 'maniple' would do the job. Radice's 'goes indoors' is both more fair and faithful than Seely's 'would step insider her home'. Ornithologically, there may be little difference between a pigeon and a dove but insofar as cultural shifts in translation are concerned the two birds are generally perceived differently. In, at least, Bengali culture a pigeon is associated with amorousness, and hence the phrase 'কপোত-কপোতী', meaning a pair of lovers. The dove, on the other hand, is reserved for negative perceptions, as in the common Bengali parlance like "ঘুঘু দেখেছ, ফাঁদ দেখনি" "ও একটা বাস্ত ঘুঘু", "তোমার ঘরে ঘুঘু চরবে", and the like. Conversely, the English perceptions take a dove positively ("O my dove I" and *not* "O my pigeon", the "dove-like brooding" as mentioned in the exordium of *Paradise Lost* Book I, and farther back

to the Greek identification of dove with Aphrodite) and a pigeon rather negatively : for example, Hamlet – as he delays and delays to avenge his father’s murder – criticizes himself as being ‘pigeon – livered’, that is, a coward. Given this difference in perceptions, it appears that Radice has intelligently translated Dutt’s ‘কপোতী’ into ‘dove’, while Seely runs the risk of being misread by his target readers when he translates the Bengali word as ‘pigeon’. This is the danger of word for word translation. We may here refer in passing to Ketaki Kushari Dyson’s translation of Tagore’s “প্রিয়ার কপোতগুলি ফিরে এল ঘরে” as “All her pet doves / returned to their devocot...” (Dyson 120). Dyson’s own note on ‘pet doves’ is interesting: “The original word can mean either dove or pigeon [...]. This was an instance when I had to make a local decision to suit the sonic needs of the English poem” (246).

The translation by Seely of ‘শূন্য নীড়ে’ as ‘in her empty pigeon house’ falls short of the poetic beauty which Radice attains in his rendering: ‘on finding an empty nest’. Should ‘উচ্চ-গৃহ-চূড়ে’ be ‘roof of her dwelling’ (Seely) or ‘the turret’ of her home’ (Radice)? The implication of considerable height (‘উচ্চ’) and of a pinnacle (‘চূড়ে’) makes ‘turret’ a better alternative. It must be admitted that the Radice’s translation of the last three lines of the Bengali extract is more poetic than Seely’s. Seely simply avoids Dutt’s exclamatory use of ‘মরি’, but Radice finely answers to it with his ‘ah!’.

#### **Canto / Book – IV (চতুর্থ সর্গ)**

Dutt:

একাকিনী শোকাকুলা, অশোক-কাননে,  
কাঁদেন রাঘব-বাস্ফা আঁধার কুটীরে  
নীরবে! দুরন্ত চেড়ী, সতীরে ছাড়িয়া,  
ফেরে দূরে মত্ত সবে উৎসব-কৌতুকে-  
হীন-প্রাণা হরিণীরে রাখিয়া বাঘিনী

নিৰ্ভয় হৃদয়ে যথা ফেৰে দূৰ বনে!  
 মলিন-বদনা দেবী, হায় রে, যেমতি  
 খনিৰ তিমির-গৰ্ভে (না পারে পশিতে  
 সৌর-কর-রাশি যথা) সূর্যকান্ত মণি,  
 কিম্বা বিশ্বাধরা রমা অম্বুরাশি-তলে!  
 স্বনিছে পবন, দূরে রহিয়া রহিয়া  
 উচ্ছ্বাসে বিলাপী যথা! নড়িছে বিষাদে  
 মৰ্ম্মরিয়া পাতাকুল! বসেছে অরবে  
 শাখে পাখী! রাশি রাশি কুসুম পড়েছে  
 তরুমূলে, যেন তরু, তাপি মনস্তাপে,  
 ফেলিয়াছে খুলি সাজ! দূরে প্রবাহিণী,  
 উচ্চ বীচি-রবে কাঁদি, চলিছে সাগরে,  
 কহিতে বারীশে যেন এ দুঃখ-কাহিনী!  
 না পশে সুধাংশু-অংশু সে ঘোর বিপিনে!  
 ফোটে কি কমল কভু সমল সলিলে?  
 তবুও উজ্জ্বল বন ও অপূৰ্ব্ব রূপে! (Banerjee IV.46-66)

Seely:

In the Aśoka Grove, alone, aggrieved, the beloved  
 of the Rāghava wept silently in her darkened hut.  
 Unruly guardian matrons had abandoned that chaste  
 one and were pacing some ways off, all intoxicated  
 by the thrill of gaieties—just as the tigress leaves a  
 dying doe and, bold at heart, further prowls the forest. The  
 woman's face was pale, aha, like sunstone crystal in  
 the dark recesses of a mine (where rays of sunshine fail

to reach) or like Ramā, *bimba*-lipped beneath the waters.  
 Pavana sighed like a mourner at a distance, heaving  
 with emotions. In sorrow, leaves quaked and rustled. Birds perched  
 mutely on branches. Blossoms fell in piles round about tree  
 trunks as though the trees, consumed by burning heartaches, were of  
 themselves tearing off their finery. Afar a river—  
 the loud lapping of her ripples like snuffling cries – headed  
 for the ocean as if to tell the lord of waters of  
 this tale of woe. Moonbeams could not so much as penetrate  
 that thick forest. In foul waters does the lotus ever  
 bloom? Yet still that grove was splendid from her matchless beauty.

(Seely 4.48-66)

Radice:

Alone in the Asoka wood, distraught with grief, Rām's  
 beloved wept silently in her hut!  
 Her formidable guards had gone to join the drunken  
 festivity, like a tigress when it leaves a half-dead doe,  
 and roams far away in the forest,  
 Without fear of its escape! Sitā was wan-faced, alas,  
 Like a sun-loving gemstone deep in the darkness of a  
 mine, where the sun's rays cannot penetrate; or like  
*bimba*-lipped Lakshmi pining at the bottom of the sea!  
 A breeze wafted from afar, like a sighing expression of  
 lament! Rustling leaves wrestled with their sorrow!  
 Birds perched silently on branches! Flowers fell in clusters

to the base of trees, as if the trees were throwing off  
their garments in the heat of their distress!

Distant streams rushed towards the sea, sobbing loudly  
as they flowed, as if to tell Sitā's sad story to the lord  
of waters!

No moonshine entered that dark forest. Can a lotus  
bloom in a turbid lake? Yet the wood was lit up by  
Sitā's extraordinary beauty! (Radice IV.46-66)

Since 'কানন' implies a cultivated wood, Seely's 'grove' attains more equipollence than Radice's 'wood'. The word 'আঁধার' in 'আঁধার কুটির' is important in that the darkness is due to Sita's sorrow. Hence, it is a remiss of Radice to leave the word out in his translation. At the same time, it is a remiss of Seely to ignore the mark of exclamation given by Dutt after 'নীরবে'. Even a punctuation mark can speak volume, and therefore should be taken care of in translation. Radice has got the word 'মত্ত' wrong, and Seely right. For one thing, the guards had not joined any 'drunken festivity'; they were actually drunk with festive mood – 'intoxicated by the thrill of gaieties', as Seely puts it. But then Seely has again ignored the exclamatory mark that ends Dutt's line. It is interesting to note that Seely, translates 'দেবী' as 'the woman', while Radice renders it as 'Sita'. 'Woman' is not a happy translation, and Radice's rendering gives a directness to the identity of 'দেবী' and therefore helps the reader to glimpse the person spoken of in a better way. Seely's 'aha' for 'হায় রে' is too colloquial and open-ended to capture the solemnity of the situation which is well connotated in Radice's 'alas'. Seely's 'Rama' for 'রমা' may be misleading, and so Radice uses the synonym 'Laksmi' in order to avoid a probable confusion. Radice's 'Rustling leaves wrestled with their sorrow' is more poetical than Seely's 'In sorrow, leaves quaked and rustled', as is 'Flowers fell in clusters' (Radice) than 'Blossoms fell in piles' (Seely). For Radice the trees throw off their

‘garments’, while Seely’s trees ‘throw off their finery’. Seely is more correct here as blossoms or flowers are not ‘garments’ but additional accessories for the trees’ attire. Radice’s pluralisation ‘Distant streams’ is less accurate than Seely’s singular ‘Afar a river’ as a substitute for ‘দূরে প্রবাহিনী’ of Dutt. ‘No moonshine entered’ of Radice has the directness of Shakespeare’s ‘No birds sing’, and Seely’s ‘Moonbeams could not so much as penetrate’ sounds rather a flat paraphrase of Dutt’s ‘না পশে সুধাংশু অংশু’, as far as the felicity of phrase is concerned. Similarly, Radice’s ‘was lit up’ for ‘উজ্জল’ is more felicitous than Seely’s ‘was splendid’ as is Seely’s ‘matchless’ for ‘অপূৰ্ব’ than Radice’s ‘extraordinary’ (beauty).

### Canto / Book – V (পঞ্চম সর্গ)

Dutt :

হাসে নিশি তারাময়ী ত্রিদশ-আলয়ে।

কিন্তু চিন্তকুল এবে বৈজয়ন্ত-ধামে

মহেন্দ্র; কুসুম-শয্যা ত্যজি, মৌন-ভাবে

বসেন ত্রিদিব-পতি রত্ন-সিংহাসনে; -

সুবর্ণ-মন্দিরে সুপ্ত আর দেব যত।

অভিমাণে স্বরীশ্বরী কহিলা সুস্বরে;

“কি দোষে, সুরেশ, দাসী দোষী তব পদে?

শয়ন-আগারে তবে কেন না করিছ

পদার্পণ? চেয়ে দেখ, ক্ষণেক মুদিছে,

উন্মীলিছে পুনঃ আঁখি, চমকি তরাসে

মেনকা, উর্বরী, দেখ, স্পন্দ-হীন যেন!

চিত্র-পুস্তলিকা-সম চারু চিত্রলেখা!

তব ডরে ডরি দেবী বিরাম-দায়িনী

নিদ্রা নাহি যান, নাথ, তোমার সমীপে,

আর কারে ভয় তাঁর? এ ঘোর নিশীথে,

কে কোথা জাগিছে, বল? দৈত্য-দল আসি

বসেছে কি থানা দিয়া স্বর্গের দুয়ারে?” (Banerjee V.1-17)

Seely:

Star-studded Night smiled from her heavenly abode, but, at  
 Vaijayanta, Mahendra fretted. Arising from his  
 flower-bed, the celestial regions lord sat mute on his  
 gemmed throne—other gods lay fast asleep in golden temples.  
 Feigning wounded pride, the queen of the skies spoke coyly. “By  
 what fault, O monarch of divines, ha your thrall offended  
 you? Else why do you withhold the touch of your feet from our  
 bedchamber? See there, Menakā’s heavy eyelids droop shut  
 for a moment, then again she opens wide, startled; and  
 look at Urvaśī, practically unmoving now. Charming  
 Citralekhā seems as if a painted doll. It is in  
 dread of you, husband, that respite-giving goddess Sleep keeps  
 her distance; for whom else does she have to fear? In dead of  
 night, tell me, please, who is still awake, anywhere? Is there  
 some Daitya army camped at heaven’s gates, set to attack?” (Seely 5.1-15)

Radice:

Star-studded night smiled in the realm of the gods—but  
 the great Indra, king of the gods,  
 Was anxious now in his palace; forsaking his bed of flowers  
 he sat down glumly on his jewelled lion-throne; all the  
 other gods were asleep in their golden mansions.

Sachi, empress of the gods, murmured plaintively,  
 ‘Of what error, my lord, am I guilty of before you?  
 Why have you not set foot in our bedroom? Look at  
 how Menakā opened her eyes again immediately  
 after shutting them, alarmed at your gloom!  
 And Urvasi, see, is frozen with alarm!  
 Lovely Chitralkhā is like a painted doll! In dread at  
 your dread, the rest-giving goddess of sleep stays  
 away from you,  
 And who else does she fear but you? Tell me who would  
 stay awake anywhere so late at night; is an army of  
 demons encamped at heaven’s gate?’ (Radice V.1-17)

Dutt did not mean that Night was smiling from *her* heavenly abode, but simply that light fell on the heavenly abode of the gods. Hence, Seely’s translation of “হাসে নিশি তারাময়ী ব্রিন্দশ-আলয়ে” as “Night smiled from her heavenly abode” suffers from – to use a deconstructive phrase – ‘weak misreading’ of the location of night as personified by Dutt. In this respect, Radice indeed approximates the original, as he uses the preposition ‘in’ instead of Seely’s ‘from’ and does not put the pronoun ‘her’ after the preposition ‘in’. Again, the two-successive proper names ‘Vaijayanta, Mahendra’ makes – despite Seely’s notes – the translation less smooth than Radice’s ‘the great Indra’ and ‘in his place’. This apart, Seely is mistaken in translating Dutt’s ‘বৈজয়ন্ত-ধামে’ as ‘at Vaijayanta’, as ‘বৈজয়ন্ত’ actually means ‘celestial’, an adjective and not a noun, and therefore cannot take a preposition before it. Both Seely and Radice misread the contextual implication of the Bengali verb ‘ত্যজি’ which can mean both ‘having left or given up’ and ‘being indifferent to’. Dutt actually implies that the great Indra was so worried about impending events that he remained seated on his throne

even late in the evening instead of joining his wife, Sachi, in their bedroom for repose and sleep. Seely translate the word as ‘Arising from’, and Radice as ‘forsaking’. Both the translations presuppose that Indra had gone to his bedroom and then left it for his throne in the Court. That both the translators are wrong here is quite clear from Sachi’s remonstrance: “শয়ন-আগারে তবে কেন না করিছ/পদার্পন?” which, in Seely’s translation, is “[...] why do you withhold the touch of your feet from our/bedchamber?”, and which Radice translates as “why have you not set foot in our bedroom?” If Indra has not set foot in, or has withheld the touch of his feet from, their bedroom, how does the question of his arising from (i.e. ‘forsaking’ or leaving) the bedroom arise? The context, provided by Sachi’s loving query, adequately suggests that Indra was yet to make it to the bedroom, and was ignoring it under mental pressures. We have already observed in the previous chapter that certain source language words may not at all be translated into the target language. The examples we have given there include the word ‘অভিমান’ which Dutt uses here in the Bengali passage cited. ‘অভিমানে’ has been translated by Seely as ‘Feigning wounded pride’, and by Radice as ‘plaintively’. But it must be admitted that both the translations are workable negotiations with the source text. Dutt’s ‘সুস্বরে’ is taken by Seely as ‘cooly’, and Radice leaves the word out. ‘সুস্বরে’ simply means ‘in a melodious voice’, ‘charmingly’, ‘in a dulcet tone’ and has nothing to do with ‘coyness’ (cf. Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress”). The two translators’ renderings of Dutt’s description of Menaka and others feeling drowsy are both faithful and beautiful. Radice’s ‘In dread at/your dread’ for ‘তব ডরে ডরি’ is not as close to the original as Seely’s ‘It is in dread of you’. Radice’s translation is word for word at the cost of the idiom so much so that for him the Goddess Sleep is afraid because Indra is afraid! In fact she is afraid to see that Indra is still awake.

**Canto / Book-VI (ষষ্ঠ সর্গ)**

Dutt:

শিবির হইতে বলী বাহিরিলা বেগে  
ব্যগ্র, তুরঙ্গম যথা শৃঙ্গকুলনাদে,  
সমরতরঙ্গ যবে উথলে নির্ঘোষে!  
বাহিরিলা বীরবর; বাহিরিলা সাথে  
বীরবেশে বিভীষণ, বিভীষণ রণে!  
বরষিলা পুষ্প দেব; বাজিল আকাশে  
মঙ্গলবাজনা; শূন্যে নাচিল অঙ্গরা,  
স্বর্গ, মর্ত্য, পাতাল পুরিল জয়রবে! (Banerjee VI.196-203)

Seely:

Hastily that hero left the camp—high spirited, like  
a stallion at the sound of horns when the waves of warfare  
crest and crash! Out went that best of warriors; out with him went  
Vibhīṣaṇa attired in warrior’s garb, fearsome when in  
battle! Gods showered them with flowers; auspicious music  
rang across the skies; Apsarās danced throughout the void; earth,  
heaven, and the netherworld filled with shouts of “Victory!” (Seely 6.193-199)

Radice:

The hero strode speedily from the camp—eager, like a  
horse when it hears war-trumpets,  
And thunderous waves of battle roll. The hero emerged,  
and with him came Vibhishan,  
In warrior’s dress, fearsome in battle! The gods rained

down flowers;  
 Festive welcoming music rang out through the sky; air-  
 borne nymphs danced; heaven and earth and hell  
 filled with the noise of victory! (Radice VI.196-203)

Here we have a happy negotiation between the SLT and the TLTs of both Seely and Radice. Even for a Bengali reader with the required command of English Seely's translation is likely to appear as good as Radice's. Even so, a sort of microscopic examination of the two TLTs reveal that Seely's translation here is a shed better than Radice's for a number of small reasons. For example, Seely's 'stallion' is a more forceful translation of 'তুরঙ্গম' than Radice's 'horse' – and more appropriate too, since 'stallion' is specifically an uncastrated male horse widely used in military activities or in sports. Radice uses the generic term, while Seely makes use of the species of a genus. Similarly, Radice's 'eager' for Dutt's 'ব্যগ্র' is weaker than Seely's 'high spirited' which chimes well with the equine behavior represented. The word 'বাহিরিলা' is repeated thrice in the SLT, with the adverb 'বেগে' ('hastily'/'speedily', as translated by Seely and Radice respectively) in the first instance. The adverb is, therefore, not required to modify the verb in the second and the third instances, and the kinesis remains understood. If this reading is valid, then Radice's 'The hero emerged' appears to be less kinetic than Seely's 'Out went the best of warriors' vis-à-vis Dutt's 'বাহিরিলা বীরবর'. Seely's note on the 'Apsara' ('অঙ্গরা' in the original) well allows the retention of the Bengali word, while Radice's translation of the word as 'air-born nymphs' borders on a slight travesty of the mythological details. Even if Seely's 'shouts of "Victory!"' could be bettered, it is better than Radice's 'noise of victory'. Improvisation is sometimes needed in translation, and here Seely answers to that kind of need as he puts the word in quotes and as an exclamatory direct-speech proposition, as opposed to Dutt's pure narration.

## Canto/Book – VII (সপ্তম সর্গ)

Dutt:

উদীলা আদিত্য এবে উদয়-অচলে,  
 পদ্মপর্ণে সুপ্ত দেব পদ্মযোনি যেন,  
 উন্নীলি নয়নপদ্ম সুপ্রসন্ন ভাবে,  
 চাহিলা মহীর পানে! উল্লাসে হাসিলা  
 কুসুমকুস্তলা মহী, মুক্তামালা গলে।  
 উৎসবে মঙ্গলবাদ্য উথলে যেমতি  
 দেবালয়ে, উথলিল সুস্বরলহরী  
 নিকুঞ্জে। বিমল জলে শোভিল নলিনী;  
 স্থলে সমপ্রমাকাজ্জ্বী হেম সূর্য্যমুখী।  
 নিশার শিশিরে যথা অগবগাহে দেহ  
 কুসুম, প্রমীলা সতী, সুবাসিত জলে  
 স্নানি পীনপয়োধরা, বিনানিলা বেণী।  
 শোভিল মুকুতাপাঁতি সে চিকণ কেশে,  
 চন্দ্রামার রেখা যথা ঘনাবলী মাঝে  
 শরদে! রতনময় কঙ্কণ লইলা  
 ভূষিতে মৃগালভূজ সুমৃগালভূজা:-  
 বেদনিল বাহু, আহা, দৃঢ় বাঁধে যেন,  
 কঙ্কণ! কোমল কণ্ঠে স্বর্ণকণ্ঠমালা  
 ব্যথিল! কোমল কণ্ঠে (Banerjee VII.1-19)

Seely:

It was then Āditya showed himself upon the rising  
 hill, looking just like Padmayoni, asleep on lotus  
 petals, as he, most pleased, opened his lotus eyes and gazed

at Mother Earth. Overjoyed, blossom-tressed Mother Earth smiled,  
 a string of pearls about her throat. As propitious music  
 waxes in a temple at the time of celebration,  
 so swelled waves of sweet notes throughout forest groves. Lotuses  
 shone in splendor upon pellucid waters while on land  
 the golden sunflower coveted as much attention.

As the blossoms bathed their bodies in Night's dew, so too chaste  
 Pramīlā with shapely breasts bathed in scented waters, then  
 plaited her hair. A strand of pearls beautified that glossy  
 head, like a shaft of moonlight across a cloud in autumn.  
 That woman whose arms were delicate as lotus stalks picked  
 up gem-studded bracelets to adorn her lotus-stalk-like  
 limbs—but it was as if the harsh bonds of those bangles brought  
 anguish to her arms! and alas, her golden necklace seemed  
 to pain that supple throat of hers. (Seely 7.1-18)

Radice:

The sun arose now at dawn, like lotus-born Brahmā  
 emerging from sleep in the petals of Vishnu's lotus-navel,  
 contentedly opening his lotus-eyes of gaze at the earth!  
 With flowers in her hair, and a garland of dewy pearls  
 round her neck, Earth smiled ecstatically!  
 Like festive music filling a temple with praise, melodious  
 birdsong swelled in forest-arbours; lotuses beautified  
 pure pond-waters;  
 On land, with equal longing, golden sunflowers turned

towards the sun,

Like a flower bathing in the dew of night, chaste

Pramilā bathed in perfumed water, and plaited her

hair beside her plump breasts.

She attached a string of pearls to her glossy hair, like a

thin crescent moon amidst dark clouds in autumn! She

took a jewelled bracelet to adorn her lotus-stalk arms:

It pained her arm, alas, as if too tight!

And her delicate gold necklace pinched her delicate

throat! (Radice VII.1-18)

‘এবে’ has been translated as ‘then’ by Seely, perhaps because time and tense of the narrative belongs to the domain of the past. But it is perfectly idiomatic in English to use ‘now’ in connection with things past. Milton, too, does use ‘now’ in backshifted discourse; “Satan, whom now transcendent glory raised/Above his fellows ...” (*Paradise Lost* II.427-428). Hence, Radice’s ‘now’, which is an orthodox rendering of ‘এবে’, is more natural than Seely’s ‘then’. But, then, Radice’s ‘at dawn’ in “the sun arose now at dawn” is trite and superfluous, while Seely’s “It was then Aditya showed himself upon the rising- / hill” is all too stilted, when compared to Dutt’s “উদিল্লা আদিত্য এবে উদয় অচলে”! We may, in passing, note Horatio’s exquisite two-liner on the rising of the sun in *Hamlet*: “But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad, / Walks o’er the dew of yon high eastward hill” (Davies I.1.166-67). It may be argued that ‘high eastward hill’ could be a good poetic translation of ‘উদয়-অচল’, as it is in the east that the sun rises. Seely’s retention of the Bengali ‘আদিত্য’ and ‘পদ্মযোনি’ in the romans is sure to lead the reader to the book’s notes and glossary, while Radice’s ‘lotus-born Brahma’ and ‘Vishnu’s lotus-navel’ are more reader-friendly. It is strange that Seely should translate ‘গলে’ as ‘throat’ (in ‘about her throat’); Radice’s ‘neck’ (in ‘round her neck’) is perfect,

although his addition of the adjective ‘dewy’ to the noun ‘pearls’ is not warranted by the SLT. Dutt compares Pramila’s bathing with the bathing of a flower in the dew of night. Hence, Seely is mistaken in putting the verb in ‘As the blossoms bathed’ in the past tense, and here, too, Radice is perfect: ‘Like a flower bathing’. In a simile, the generalized part often remains in the present tense; for example, in Milton we have – “Thick as autumnal leaves that *strow* the brooks / In Vallombrosa...” (emphasis added). But Radice has boomed badly in taking that Pramila was plaiting her hair ‘beside her plump breasts’: “প্রমিলা সতী, সুবাসিত জলে/স্নানি পীনপয়োধরা, বিনানিলা বেনী” simply means what Seely puts it to be – “Pramila with shapely breasts bathed in scented waters, then / plaited her hair”. Radice’s mistranslation here is due to two factors: first, he fails to take ‘পীনপয়োধরা’ as an appellation for Pramila and reads it as the site in the very vicinity of which the plaiting was being done; and secondly he misses out the comma after the word ‘পীনপয়োধরা’ in the original – a remiss that has generated his misreading. One wonders if Seely has translated ‘চিকণ কেশে’ as ‘glossy head’ synecdochically, to make the whole stand for the part (i.e. ‘head’ for ‘কেশ’ or hair). Radice has had no recourse to such substitution, and keeps ‘কেশ’ as ‘hair’. But, then, he, unlike Seely, makes the crescent moon shine across dark clouds. Seely, in fact, makes a literal translation of Dutt’s ‘চন্দ্রমার রেখা’ as ‘shaft of moonlight’. This is an example of what is known as interpretative mode in translation. It may also be noted that Radice fails to negotiate with ‘সুম্নালভূজা’ and simply ignores it, while Seely undertakes an elaborate negotiation and ends up translating it as “The woman whose arms were delicate as lotus stalks...”. It is also interesting to see how translators make variations of similar or near-similar words. In Canto IV, as we have already seen, Seely uses ‘aha’ for ‘হায় রে’; and here in this extract from Canto VII, he translates ‘আহা’ as ‘alas’. Since both ‘aha’ and ‘alas’ are disyllabic, it cannot be argued that Seely’s use of the two variables is simply dependent on his syllable-oriented lines each of which has fourteen syllables.

**Canto / Book – VIII (অষ্টম সর্গ)**

Dutt:

রাজকাজ সাধি যথা, বিরাম-মন্দিরে,  
 প্রবেশি রাজেন্দ্র খুলি রাখেন যতনে  
 কিরীট; রাখিলা খুলি অস্ত্রাচল চূড়ে  
 দিনান্তে শিরের রত্ন তমোহা মিহিরে  
 দিনদেব; তারাদলে আইলা রজনী;  
 আইলা রজনীকান্ত শান্ত সুধানিধি।

শত শত অগ্নিরাশি জ্বলিল চৌদিকে  
 রণক্ষেত্রে! ভূপতিত যথায় সুরথী  
 সৌমিত্রি বৈদেহীনাথ ভূপতিত তথা  
 নীরবে! নয়নজল অবিরল বহি,  
 ভ্রাতৃলোহ সহ মিশি, তিতিছে মহীরে,  
 গিরিদেহে বহি যথা, মিশ্রিত গৈরিকে,  
 পড়ে তলে প্রস্রবণ! শূন্যমনাঃ খেদে  
 রঘুসৈন্য;- বিভীষণ বিভীষণ রণে,  
 কুমুদ, অঙ্গদ, হনু, নল, নীল, বলী,  
 শরভ, সুমালী, বীরকেশরী সুবাহু,  
 সুগ্রীব, বিষণ্ণ সবে প্রভুর বিষাদে! (Banerjee VIII.1-17)

Seely:

As an Indra among monarchs, his royal tasks complete,  
 removes his crown, gently sets it down, and then disappears  
 into his chamber, so too the lord of day had doffed his  
 crown jewel, the darkness-dispelling sun, on that summit  
 of the setting-hill. Night accompanied by her stars arrived

as did that soothing fount of nectar. Night's beloved moon.

Many a hundred bonfires blazed around the battlefield.

There, where charioteer Saumitri lay upon the ground,

Vaidehī's husband fell speechless. His tears flowed uncontrolled,

mingling with his brother's blood, and wet the earth like a spring

that trickles down a mountainside, dissolving ocher dust,

then seeps out on the ground below. The Raghu troops seemed stunned

by grief—Vibhīṣaṇa, wild in war, and Kumuda, and

Āṅgada. Hanumān, heroes Nala and Nīla, and

Śarabha, Sumālī, Subāhu, a lion among

warriors, and Sugriva – all condoled their lordship's sorrow. (Seely 8.1-16)

Radice:

Like an emperor finishing his day of royal work, and

carefully laying down his crown before entering his

bedroom, the sun,

Dispeller of darkness, removed the jewels from its head

at the end of the day, and laid them on the western

mountain-peak.

Night came with her company of stars, and her calm

husband the moon, fount of nectar.

Hundreds of fires burned all around on the battlefield.

Where the valiant son of Sumitrā lay on the ground,

Sitā's lord lay silently also!

His tears, ceaselessly flowing to blend with his brother's

blood, dampened the earth,

Like a spring mixing with ochre-coloured earth as it  
flows down a mountainside! Empty of heart, the  
Rāghav army mourned;  
Vibhishan (fearsome in battle), Kumud,  
Angad, Hanumān, Nala,  
Nila, the mighty Sarabh, Sumāli  
(Strong-armed as a lion) and Sugriv; all were sorrowful,  
at their lord's sorrow! (Radice VIII.1-17)

To translate 'राजेन्द्र' as 'an Indra among monarchs' (as Seely has done) is to invite a kind of linguistic problem. 'राजेन्द्र' = राजा+इन्द्र, which means 'राजादेर इन्द्र', that is, 'राजादेर मध्ये श्रेष्ठ'. This 'इन्द्र' has nothing to do with the Lord 'Indra' of the mythology. As a suffix 'इन्द्र' acts as an adjective rather than as a proper name or noun. Radice's translation of 'राजेन्द्र' as 'emperor' is more reader-friendly. It is interesting to note that both Seely and Radice have wrongly arranged the sequence of events contained in the simile ('राजकाज साधि यथा, विराम-मन्दिर/प्रवेशि राजेन्द्र खुलि राखेन यतने/किरीट') with which passage begins. Much care is not needed to see that Dutt arranges the events in his simile in the following sequence: (1) the emperor or monarch finishes his royal work; (2) he enters his chamber or bedroom; (3) lays or sets down his crown. Both Seely and Radice put (3) before (2), because they have failed to read 'विराम-मन्दिर/प्रवेशि' as 'having entered (or, on entering) the bedroom'. Seely's 'bonfire' for Dutt's 'अग्निराशि' may also be misleading for the target reader. Ever since Dr. Johnson's acceptance of the mistaken idea that the word 'bonfire' came from the French 'bon' which means 'good', the word has lost its old English implication of 'bonefire' or 'banefire' (meaning, 'a fire of bones') or 'balefire' (meaning, 'the fire of the funeral pile'). Even a perceptive target reader without the knowledge of the word's O.E. connection may be surprised to find bonfire (good fire) in the dismal battlefield. Radice's simple 'fires burned' offers a better negotiation here,

but does not leave any mark of what Spivak has called ‘an intimate act of reading’ that in her opinion is the hallmark of a good translation. Again, a lack of such intimacy is revealed in Seely’s translation of ‘সুরথী’ as ‘charioteer’. For one thing, Laxman is never described in the *Ramayana* as a charioteer. Bengali synonyms are sometimes very wide-ranging (for example, the word ‘গো’ has strangely various meanings). Seely fails to see that ‘সুরথী’ means ‘worthy son’. Radice’s translation of the word as ‘valiant son’ is quite acceptable. Radice also remains clearer than Seely when he translates ‘সৌমিত্রি’ as ‘son of Sumitra’. Seely’s retention of the Bengali word in the roman with initial upper case surely necessitates a proper note: ‘Saumitri’ may be read as a proper name. The same can be said of his translation of ‘বৈদেহী-না’ as ‘Vaidehi’s husband’ as well, as opposed to Radice’s ‘Sita’s lord’.

### Canto / Book – IX (নবম সর্গ)

Dutt:

ইরষদরূপে অগ্নি ধাইলা ভূতলে!  
 সহসা জ্বলিল চিতা। সচকিতে সবে  
 দেখিলা আগ্নেয় রথ; সুবর্ণ-আসনে  
 সে রথে আসীন বীর বাসববিজয়ী  
 দিব্যমূর্তি! বাম ভাগে প্রমীলা রূপসী,  
 অনন্ত যৌবনকান্তি শোভে তনুদেশে;  
 চির-সুখ-হাসি-রাশি মধুর অধরে!  
 উঠিল গগনপথে রথবর বেগে;  
 বরষিলা পুষ্পাসার দেবকুল মিলি;  
 পুরিল বিপুল বিশ্ব আনন্দ-নিনাদে।  
 দুধধারে নিবাইল উজ্জ্বল পাবকে  
 রাক্ষস। পরম যত্নে কুড়াইয়া সবে

ভস্ম, অম্বরাশিতলে বিসর্জিলা তাহে!  
 ধৌত করি দাহস্থল জাহুবীর জলে  
 লক্ষ রক্ষঃশিল্পী আশু নির্মিলা মিলিয়া  
 স্বর্ণ-পাটিকেলে মঠ চিতার উপরে;-  
 ভেদি অত্র, মঠচূড়া উঠিল আকাশে।  
 করি স্নান সিঙ্কনীরে রক্ষোদল এবে  
 ফিরিলা লক্ষার পানে, আর্দ্র অশ্রুণীরে-  
 বিসর্জি প্রতিমা যেন দশমী দিবসে!  
 সপ্ত দিবানিশি লক্ষা কাঁদিল বিষাদে।। (Banerjee IX.423-443)

Seely:

In the form of lightning streaks, Agni ran to earth. Then at  
 once the pyre burst ablaze. All, startled, looked upon that  
 fiery chariot. There on a seat of gold within the  
 chariot sat the warrior. Vanquisher of Vāsava,  
 in celestial form. On his left, pretty Pramīlā whose  
 splendor of unending youth shone from her graceful figure  
 and on whose honeyed lips, a smile of everlasting joy.

With great speed that best of chariots climbed its skyward path  
 as the god clan in concert rained down flowers, and the  
 universe filled with blissful sounds. The Rākṣasas put out  
 those brilliant flames in streams of pure milk. With utmost care they  
 gathered up the ashes and immersed them in the ocean.  
 Having washed that cremation site using water from the  
 Jāhnavī, Rākṣasa craftsmen by the thousands built with  
 golden bricks a temple on the spot where stood the pyre—

that temple's lofty spire, cleaving clouds, rose to the sky.

After bathing in waters of the sea, those Rākṣasas  
now headed back toward Laṅkā, wet still with water of their  
grief—it was as if they had immersed the image of the  
goddess on the lunar tenth day of the Durgā Pūjā.

Then Laṅkā wept in sorrow seven days and seven nights. (Seely 9.425-445)

Radice:

In the form of lightning, Agni rushed down to earth!

The pyre suddenly flared up.

Everyone saw in amazement a chariot of fire; the

vanquisher of Indra sat on a golden seat in that

chariot, an image of the divine!

The lovely Pramilā sat to his left; the grace of eternal

youth shone from her body; smiles of eternal joy

played on her lips!

The heavenly chariot took off swiftly into the sky; the

assembled gods rained down flowers; the whole

universe filled with shouts of joy!

The Rākshasas put out the raging fire with pouring of

milk. With extreme care they gathered up the ashes,

and consigned them to the waves.

Dousing the cremation-ground with Ganges water,

thousands of Raksha craftsmen quickly constructed,

from golden bricks,

A memorial over the funeral pyre; its turrets soared

high, piercing the sky!

After bathing in soothing water, the Rākshasas now

returned to golden Lankā, wet with tears—

Like Durgā, on the tenth day of her *pūjā*, when her

image is immersed.

Lankā, for seven days and nights, wept with sadness. (Radice IX.423-443)

There are the concluding lines of the ninth and last Canto/Book of *Meghnadbadh kabya*, and they describe how a celestial chariot comes down to take Indrajit and Pramila to their Heavenly abode. What is important to note is that Dutt's language here is simpler than in most places of the epic. The reason may be that the valedictory, funeral, elegiac mood requires to be expressed in a less ornate language. Radice's 'lightning' is enough for the Bengali 'ইরম্মদ', and Seely's 'lightning streaks' is a superfluous compound. The descent of Agni is better captured in Radice's 'rushed down' than in Seely's rather flat 'ran'. It may be that Seely is responding in a restrained way to Dutt's own flat verb 'আইলা' (meaning 'came'), while Radice wants to lend a sense of extraordinary speed to Agni's descent by using the word 'rushed'. But Radice's 'flared up' is less solemn than Seely's 'burst ablaze', as translations of Dutt's 'জ্বলিল' in the second line of the SLT quoted. One may ask: why does Seely translate 'আগ্নেয় রথ' as 'fiery chariot', while Radice puts it as 'chariot of fire'? The answer is: first, Seely had to count his syllables which, as we have already noticed, always remain fourteen a line; and secondly, Radice as a later translator had to remain 'different' from the earlier translator as far as possible. Radice has dropped the word 'বীর', and Seely translates it as 'warrior' which is not a happy translation, at least for a reader who can compare the SLT with the TLT. We feel tempted to add that 'valiant vanquisher', with their alliterations, could be a better substitute. Both Seely's 'pretty' and Radice's 'lovely' are too pedestrian to catch the celestial beauty of Pramila which Dutt's 'রূপসী' adequately establishes.

We may here add that the title of Jibanananda Das's *Rupasi Bangla* is almost always translated as "The Beautiful Bengal" or "The Beauteous Bengal". Dutt's 'অনন্ত যৌবনকান্তি' has rightly been translated by Radice as 'eternal youth'; Seely's 'unending youth' falls a bit short of the divine splendour of Pramila's beauty. As Seely chains his verses to fourteen syllables a line, he has to leave out a word or two even at the cost of sounding a bit ungrammatical. Hence in translating 'চির-সুখ-হাশি-রাশি মধুর অধরে', Seely hazards ungrammaticality with his 'on whose honeyed lips, a smile of everlasting joy' in which a required verb is absent, while Radice gives us a fully grammatical sentence – 'smiles of eternal joy played on her lips'. It appears that Radice's verb 'took off' goes better with the chariot's flight than does Seely's 'climbed', as translations of Dutt's 'উঠিল (গগনপথে)'. Radice's 'the assembled gods' is a finer translation of 'দেবকুল মিলি' than Seely's 'the god clan in concert', but his 'blissful sound' for 'আনন্দ নিনাদে' is better than Radice's 'shouts of joy'. 'দুগ্ধধারে' does not mean 'in streams of pure milk' as Seely renders it but 'pourings of milk' (in Radice's translation). With regard to Seely's 'pure milk', we can say that whether the milk is 'pure' or not has not been mentioned in the SLT. 'বিসর্জিলা' is carelessly translated by Radice as 'consigned', a word which lacks the ceremonial grandeur unlike Seely's 'immersed'. Radice rather rashly translates 'ধৌত করি' as 'dousing', a word which has nothing to do with 'washing' ('ধৌত'). Radice's 'memorial' for Dutt's 'মঠ' is rather secular in tone than Seely's sacred 'temple'. Seely's 'water of grief' is an inaccurate translation of 'অশ্রুধারে'; Radice's 'tears' is enough. Terse, compact subordinate clauses may sometimes be misunderstood by translators. This happens here when Radice compares the wet Rakshasas with the immersed image of Durga. Actually, Dutt is comparing the return of the Rakshasas with the return of the devotees after the image of Goddess Durga is immersed on the tenth day of the Puja. This is an error arising out of the misreading of a source language syntax.

By way of a conclusion to our critique of select passages from Dutt's epic and their translations by Seely and Radice, we can discuss the question of 'mistakes' in translation as we have seen that both Seely's and Radice's translations are not without mistakes.

Harry Aveling, in his seminar paper titled "'Mistakes" in Translation: A Functionalist Approach" (2002), talks about two kinds of mistakes in translation: 'dumb mistakes' or foolish errors, and 'deliberate mistakes'. The former generates from the translator's lack of knowledge of the nuances of the Source Language, of the culture that the SLT belongs to, and of certain facts related to the SLT; the latter, on the other hand occurs "[...] when a translator specifically chooses to recreate the text in a way that seems to deviate from the literal surface meaning of the source text" (2).

Aveling further refers to two kinds of translators: the scholar – translator and the poet-translator. This division is relevant in any discussion of Seely and Radice as translators. We know Seely is an academic and scholar but not a poet; Radice, on the other hand, is a poet in his own right. Both, with their good command of the Bengali language, have translated Dutt's epic *Meghnadbadh kabya*. Here is how Aveling draws the difference between a poet-translator and a scholar-translator:

[...] the poet translates what s/he likes, ignoring what s/he does not like [...]. The scholar, on the other hand, is regulated by gaps in knowledge, or the need for such-and-such to be done. The scholar works from the outside in, shedding as much light as s/he can, from any reasonable source. The poet works from the inside out [...] attempting to withdraw into communion with s/his [*sic*] task. (4)

And here is Laha (2004), commenting on Radice's double vocation as poet-translator:

One reason why he is such a good translator is that he is such a fine poet himself. It is not very difficult to see how his translations proclaim (or, reclaim) his identity as a mature poet, and how in turn his own poetry registers the requisites of a good translator. (9)

While the 'dumb mistakes' made by Seely or Radice can be corrected in the next editions of their translations, if such mistakes are pointed out to them by proficient bi-lingual readers, their 'deliberate mistakes' are indeed to be taken as 'transcreations'.

## CHAPTER – V: IN(CON)CLUSIVE CONCLUSION

The magnetism of certain literary works is so pervasive, perennial and potent that they attract translators in the domain of the same target language quite often. The grand example of Homer's *Iliad* is at hand: it has been translated into English itself some 100-odd times between 1581 and 2015. There is, again, the example of Tagore's "Karna-Kunti Samvad" which has an abiding appeal to the Bengali minds and which has been translated as many as five times into English (see Laha 2017). Such repeated translations of an SLT into the same target language indeed disarms the allegation that poetry is untranslatable.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Meghnadbadh kabya* has till date five English translations, including Seely's and Radice's. As Radice (2010) puts it:

My translation is the fourth that has been done. The first (not at all well known) was done by Rajendranath Sen and published in Benares in 1926. It is in fluent English blank verse, and the translator deserves more credit for his achievement than he has ever received. Another translation, by Shyamal Bandopadhyay, was published by Toms Publications in Calcutta in 1986. It is described on the title page as 'translated into English Blank Verse', but in fact it is in free verse: the lines do not follow any metrical or rhythmic pattern. Then, in 2004, Clinton B. Seely's translation appeared [...]. (*The Poem* cii)

Radice did not know that Seely had already completed the translation; and when one fine morning he received a copy of Seely's translation, he was unsure whether he should proceed with his own translation. To quote him once again:

[Seely's] book was a major step forward in the interpretation and dissemination of *Meghnādbadh kābya* to non-Bengali readers, and [...] I was strongly tempted to give up. Professor Seely urged me not to, saying [...] that

he warmly welcomed my translation as a companion piece to his book. His view – and I agree with him – is that a great poem like *Meghnādbadh kābya* deserves many translations. I am sure that mine will not be last. (*The Poem* cii-ciii)

True to Radice's expectation, the fifth translation appeared in 2017: *Meghmaadbadh Kabya*, translated by Bina Biswas and Sayantan Gupta. The first and the second translations ever remained unavailable to the present researcher, despite repeated and desperate quests made before and even during COVID-19 pandemic predicament the world over. Hence this chapter will take a look at the latest translation of Dutt's epic and compare it with both Seely's and Radice's translations that preceded it, as well as with their common SLT.

At the beginning of Chapter IV, we have discussed what Seely and Radice have to say about their respective methods of translation. We now need to take a look at Biswas and Gupta's prefatory remarks on their own method of translation:

Our translation is in free verse. This has given us greater freedom of expression. Many words in Bengali cannot be translated in a mere word or two. Sometimes the syntax has to be inverted entirely. By following free verse we have endeavoured to catch the spirit of the original. Preserving and creatively transferring the astoundingly great spirit of this masterly epic poem for non-Bengalis was counted as more important than anything else by us, in settling on this method of translation. (xxiii)

And here is the renowned Bengali poet and academic Alokranjan Dasgupta's appreciation of this 2017 translation of Dutt's epic:

In fact, Michael's intention has been translated in terms of diction and *idiom of identity* in their [Biswas and Gupta's] version executed in the spirit

of *Jugalbandi*. At the same time their excellent rendition has the quality of *explication de texte* as well. In other words Sreemati Biswas and Sree Gupta have been able to interpret aesthetically Michael's masterpiece, studded with ambiguous allusions and metaphoric depths, in conformity with the *zeitgeist* of our millennium. This indeed is a great achievement. (Biswas and Gupta xiii)

In collating Dutt, Seely, Radice, and Biswas & Gupta some important lines relating to the central event of the poem – the 'Slaying' or 'Killing' of Meghnad – will be chosen for a comparative critique of the SLT and the three TLTs. The central event, as indeed the titles of the SLT and the TLTs register, is Laxman's dastardly attack on Indrajit (Meghnad) and slaying / killing him with support from the gods. Laxman has been guided by the Machiavellian philosophy—the end justifies the means – “মারি অরি, পারি যে কৌশলে” (Banerjee VI.490) while Indrajit demands a fair duel which is unacceptable to Laxman as he is far inferior to Indrajit as warrior. Part of the last, moving words by and about Indrajit is reproduced below, first in the Bengali original and then in translations, for the purpose of the intended comparative study.

Dutt:

অন্যায় সমরে পড়ি, অসুরারি-রিপু,  
 রাক্ষসকুল-ভরসা, পরুষ বচনে  
 কহিলা লক্ষণ শূরে; - “বীরকুলগ্লানি,  
 সুমিত্রানন্দন, তুই! শত ধিক্ তোরে!  
 রাবণনন্দন আমি, না ডরি শমনে!  
 কিন্তু তোর অস্ত্রাঘাতে মরিনু যে আজি,  
 পামর, এ চিরদুঃখ রহিল রে মনে!  
 দৈত্যকুলদম ইন্দ্রে দমিনু সংগ্রামে  
 মরিতে কি তোর হাতে? কি পাপে বিধাতা

দিলেন এ তাপ দাসে, বুঝিব কেমনে?  
 আর কি কহিব তোরে? এ বারতা যবে  
 পাইবেন রক্ষোনাথ, কে রক্ষিবে তোরে,  
 নরাধম? জলধির অতল সলিলে  
 ডুবিস্ যদিও তুই, পশিবে সে দেশে  
 রাজরোষ-বাড়বাগ্নিরাশিসম তেজে!  
 দাবাগ্নিসদৃশ তোরে দক্ষিবে কাননে  
 সে রোষ, কাননে যদি পশিস্, কুমতি!  
 নারিবে রজনী, মূঢ়, আবরিতে তোরে।  
 দানব, মানব, দেব, কার সাধ্য হেন  
 ত্রাণিবে, সৌমিত্রি, তোরে, রাবণ রুষিলে?  
 কে বা এ কলঙ্ক তোর ভঞ্জিবে জগতে,  
 কলঙ্কি?” এতেক কহি, বিষাদে সুমতি  
 মাতৃপিতৃপাদপদ্য স্মরিলি অস্তিমে।  
 অধীর হইলা ধীর ভাবি প্রমীলারে  
 চিরানন্দ! লোহ সহ মিশি অশ্রুধারা,  
 অনর্গল বহি, হায়:- আদ্রিল মহীরে।  
 লঙ্কার পঙ্কজ-রবি গেলা অস্তাচলে।  
 নিৰ্ব্বাণ পাবক যথা, কিম্বা ত্রিশম্পতি  
 শান্তরশ্মি মহাবল রহিলা ভূতলে। (Banerjee VI.642-670)

Seely:

Felled in unfair combat, that foeman of the Asuras'  
 foes, that hope of the Rākṣasa clan, addressed the champion  
 Lakṣmaṇa with harsh words, “Disgrace to the community  
 of warriors, you, Sumitrā’s son! Shame on you a hundred

times! I, the son of Rāvaṇa, fear not Śamana. But  
 what will be an eternal sorrow in my heart, base one,  
 is that by a blow from your weapon I shall die today.  
 I—who in pitched battle subdued Indra, the subduer  
 of the clan of Daityas—am to die now by your hand? For  
 what false step has Providence meted out such punishment  
 upon this humble servant—shall I ever understand?  
 What else can I say to you? When the lord of Rākṣasas  
 gets word of this, who will save you, O meanest of all men?  
 Even though you plunge into the sea's unfathomed waters,  
 our sovereign's wrath will navigate to that domain—burning  
 like Vāḍaba. That rage of his, like a forest fire, will  
 incinerate you in the woods, if you flee into the  
 forest, you beastly thing. Even Night, you fool, will not be  
 capable of hiding you. Dānava, divine, or man—  
 who is fit to rescue you, Saumitri, when Rāvaṇa  
 is angered? Who in the world will wipe away your blemish,  
 blemished one?" Saying this, that noble-minded one recalled  
 with sadness in those final moments the lotus feet of  
 both his mother and his father. Anxious, he grew calm as  
 he thought of Pramīlā, his eternal bliss. Tears blended  
 with his blood as both flowed freely, alas, dampening the  
 earth. The sun of lotus Laṅkā had reached his setting-hill.  
 Like dying embers or gentle rays of Tviṣāmpati,  
 just so the mighty one lay on the surface of the earth. Seely 6.645-673)

Radice:

Falling in unfair combat, the scourge of the foes of the

Asuras, the hope of the Rākshasas,

Said in harsh tones to Lakshman: ‘You are a blot on the

race of warriors, O son of Sumitrā!

A hundred curses on you! I am Rāvan’s son—I do not

fear death!

But oh what perpetual pain it will be in my mind, O

miscreant, that I died today from your sword’s blow!

Did I defeat Indra—conqueror of demons—to die at

your hand?

How shall I understand why God has dealt this torment

to me? What sin I have committed? What else shall I

say to you?

When the Rākshas lord gets news of this, who will save

you, miserable man that you are?

Even if you dive to the bottom of the sea, his royal

anger, volcanic in its power,

Will reach you there; it will burn you up like a forest-fire

if you hide in forest, O evil one!

Night will not conceal you, you fool. Who among

demons or men or gods has power to rescue you,

Son of Sumitrā, from Rāvan’s fury? Who can expunge

your shame from the world,

O sinner?’ Dying as he spoke, noble Meghnād recalled

the lotus-feet of his father and mother.

In anguish he thought of Pramilā, his eternal joy! A

stream of tears mixed with blood,

Flowing unrestrainedly, drenched the earth! The lotus-

sun of Lankā set!

Like a flame snuffed out, or the fading sun itself, his

mighty strength lay on the ground. (Radice VI.642-670)

Biswas & Gupta:

Felled in an unfair combat, the foe of the enemy of Asuras,

the mainstay of the Rakshasa race, harshly said to

Lakshman,

“Oh, you son of Sumitra, you are a disgrace to all warriors!

Fie on you a hundred times over! I am the son of Ravana.

I do not fear death! But I die, struck down by your

arms, scoundrel,

this brings in everlasting grief in mind. Did I

vanquish Indra,

the scourge of the demons, only to die in your hands?

Due to what fault of mine had Fate assigned such a

grief for me

I shall I understand? What more shall I tell you?

When this news will reach the King of Rakshasas, who

will save you,

you lowly human? Even if you immerse yourself

in the deepest waters of the ocean, the Imperial rage

will reach there –  
 blazing, like the sea-horse breathing fire.  
 If you of the evil mind, enter a forest,  
 this rage will incinerate you like a forest fire!  
 The night will not be able to enshroud you, you imbecile.  
 If Ravana gets infuriated, then, oh son of Sumitra,  
 demon, human, god, who can protect you?  
 Whosoever in this world will be able to do away with  
 your disgrace,  
 you disgraceful man?’ Saying this, the noble one, in  
 his final hour,  
 recalled with sadness the lotus-feet of his parents.  
 Remembering Pramila, his eternal joy, the steadfast one  
 became restless! Tears flowed, and mingling with  
 blood, alas,  
 moistened the earth. The lotus-sun of Lanka set.  
 Like fire getting extinguished, or the sun becoming mellow,  
 the mighty hero lay on the ground. (Biswas and Gupta 190-191)

‘পড়ি’ (=পড়িয়া) is a tricky verb for non-Bengali translators. It may mean ‘having fallen down’ (like, say, felled trees; it may also (figuratively) mean ‘circumstanced’ (i.e. hurled into certain situation) as in the Bengali – “করোনা অতিমারির জন্য গরিব লোকেরা খুবই অসুবিধের মধ্যে পড়ে গেল” or “পড়বি তো পড়, আমারই চোখে পড়ে গেল” in which the verb ‘পড়ে’ has nothing to do with physical falling. Both Seely and Biswas & Gupta translate it as ‘felled’ and thereby try to indicate both the physical and circumstantial plight of Meghnad. Radice wanted to deviate from Seely, and so he makes the verb ‘Falling’ without any loss whatsoever. As Biswas &

Gupta was later to arrive on the scene, they could follow either Seely or Radice if they wished. It may, however, be noted that ‘felled’ is semantically more sinister than ‘falling’, as Shakespeare’s ‘Time’s fell hand’, supplies as with a top-up implication.

The fine double compound ‘অসুরারি-রিপু’ has been finely (and poetically, too) translated by Radice as ‘the scourge of the foes of the Asuras’. (One is reminded of Hamlet’s ‘scourge and minister’ (Davies 213). Seely’s ‘foeman of the Asuras’ / foes’ is made rather bland by the repetition, while it is not clear what semantic profit Biswas & Gupta have earned by the synonymous use of ‘foe’ and ‘enemy’ in their ‘the foe of the enemy of the Asuras’. ‘রাক্ষসকুল’ has been translated as ‘the Rākṣasa clan’, ‘the Rakshasa race’ and simply ‘the Rākshasas’ by Seely, Biswas & Gupta, and Radice respectively. A finicky target reader may stop and ponder the appositeness of the term ‘clan’ or ‘race’, but will surely give the benefit of the doubt to Radice’s plain and simple ‘the Rākshasas’. Seely retains the word ‘শূরে’ and translates it as ‘champion’, while in the other two translations the word has been left out. Seely normally translates each and every important word, and he makes compromise only when his syllable-based verse-structure demands such a compromise. It may be argued that in dropping the word ‘শূরে’ from their translations, the other two translators were making a functional approach; they perhaps thought that the word ‘champion’ or ‘valiant’ might not go well with a character who wins a game by underhand methods. It may also be argued that ‘scoundrel’ (as translated by Biswas & Gupta) or ‘miscreant’ (as translated by Radice) is more forceful than Seely’s ‘base one’ for the Bengali word ‘পামর’, which Meghnad is certainly using abusively.

One of the insuperable hurdles in translating a Bengali text into English is that English has no equivalent(s) for the various connotations of the pronoun ‘তুই’ and its several grammatical forms. This Bengali pronoun can be used endearingly as in – to give a very strong example – the devotional songs of Ramprasad where a devotee is using this pronoun

with regard to Goddess Kali. But more often than not this pronoun is a pronoun of despise, so to say, which bolsters the intended abuse. The English ‘thou’ is no match here, in spite of Hamlet’s peculiar, sudden shifts from ‘you’ to ‘thou’, and back to ‘you’ again, in his harsh conversations with Ophelia in Act III, Scene 1 of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The dying superhero, Meghnad, is here vitriolic against the unfair means adopted by Laxman to slay him. This deep despise of Meghnad, whose another name is ‘Indrajit’ because he defeated Lord Indra in a battle, is by no means expressed in the English ‘you’ / ‘your’ in lieu of the Bengali ‘তুই’/‘তোর’ as used in the SLT. But, as they say, what cannot be cured, must be endured. It may be assumed that all the translators court this unavoidable linguistic defeat quietly. Anyway, a note or gloss on this Bengali pronoun would be welcome in any translation. We take this opportunity to quote just two lines from Tagore’s poem “জনকথা” where a child is asking its mother a question:

‘খোকা মাকে শুধায় ডেকে, এলেম আমি কোথা থেকে

কোন্ খেনে তুই কুড়িয়ে পেলি আমারে?’ (Tagore 455)

Here ‘তুই’ in the second line of the quote is used very endearingly, and would require some sort of notes from the translator to compensate for the inability of the English translation of the pronoun as ‘you’ to capture the spirit of the original. ‘You’ belies the playfulness of the child.

Seely certainly forces the target reader to browse his notes for the meaning of ‘Samana’ which is just a transliteration of Dutt’s ‘শমনে’ without the inflection. ‘Samana’ may a little baffle the reader as he/she may confuse the word with ‘Shaman(ism)’ well known to Anglo-American readers of poetry. Others have, of course, judiciously translated the Bengali word as ‘death’ which can readily be understood by any sort of reader. Although English is their mother tongue, both Seely and Radice slips into ungrammaticality as they translate

‘মরিতে কি তোর হাতে’ as ‘die [...] by your hand’ and ‘die at your hand’ respectively. Biswas & Gupta, have made a dumb mistake in translating ‘তোর হাতে’ as ‘in your hands’. The standard idiom should be ‘at your hands’; besides, ‘in’ in lieu of ‘at’ changes the meaning, as any usage dictionary would make it clear. Seely’s translation of ‘কি পাপে বিধাতা / দিলেন এ তাপ দাসে, বুঝিব কেমনে?’ as ‘For what false step has Providence meted out such punishment upon this humble servant – shall I ever understand’ seems to a Bengali ear all right except for the low-key synonym for ‘sin’ as a translation of ‘পাপ’ which has a religious connotation. Radice’s translation splits the single interrogative sentence into two, and puts in some more dramatic touches. The corresponding translation by Biswas & Gupta is syntactically wrong, may be due to a printing mistake: ‘I shall I understand’ does not make any sense.

It is interesting to see that the rather difficult compound word ‘বাড়বাগ্নিরাশিসম’ has been tackled in three different ways in the three translations. Radice combats the oxymoronic idea of ‘sea fire’ with the help of a different geological analogy – ‘volcanic in its power’; Seely makes it ‘burning / like Vādāba’, and has ample comments on the word in the Glossary. Depending on his sources, he describes Vādāba as ‘mare’s fire’. This mythological idea is directly there in the translation done by Biswas & Gupta – ‘like the sea-horse breathing fire’ – but as their book has no notes or glossary, readers may stumble on the simile until they fathom it out from their known resources. The demand of Seely’s syllabic verse, once again, makes him choose a semantically odd word as he translates ‘পশিবে’ as ‘will navigate’. Radice’s and Biswas & Gupta’s ‘will reach’ is a much better translation. Radice’s ‘burn you up’ for ‘তোরে দক্ষিবে’ is more homely and reader-friendly than Seely’s, and Biswas & Gupta’s, ‘incinerate you’. Seely’s and Radice’s translations of ‘নারিবে রজনী, মূঢ়, আবরিতে তোরে’ as ‘Even Night, you fool, will not be / capable of hiding you’ and ‘Night will not conceal you, you fool’ respectively are better than ‘The night will not be able to enshroud you, you imbecile’ of Biswas & Gupta; but Radice’s is more natural than Seely’s : Seely writes ‘capable of

hiding’ instead of a smoothier version like ‘able to hide’ because he is manacled by his own choice of the fourteen-syllable verse-form that he has used all along.

In translating ‘দানব, মানব, দেব’ as ‘Dānava, divine, or man’ Seely flouts the normal grammatical stipulations of either capitalizing ‘divine’ or putting a definite article before the lowercased adjective ‘divine’ to imply godhead. Biswas & Gupta claim that their translation is in free verse; but one might wonder why even ‘free verse’ has produced such a bizarre syntax: “If Ravana gets infuriated, then [...] demon, human, god who can protect you?”! Radice’s rendering of this interrogative sentence is far easier to read and understand: “Who among / demons or men or gods has power to rescue you [...]”. Even so, we should not miss the point that Dutt’s ‘দানব, মানব, দেব’ imply plurality which is defied by the singular verb ‘has’.

When a hero dies, he thinks of his country (may be even of his countrymen) but the fond, familiar faces of his family, too, flash across his sullen mind. What does the vision of the pretty face of his beloved spouse bring him – quiet or disquiet? It appears that the three translations that we have of Dutt’s “অধীর হইলা ধীর ভাবি প্রমীলারে” read the line in two entirely different ways. Seely translates it as ‘Anxious, he grew calm as / he thought of Pramīlā’, implying that as Indrajit thought of his spouse, he became dignifiedly quiet; Radice’s rendering is: ‘In anguish, he thought of Pramīlā’; and Biswas & Gupta have it thus: ‘Remembering Pramila [...] the steadfast one / became restless’. A Bengali reader of these translations will definitely side with Radice, and Biswas & Gupta. Last but not least, where did the hapless hero fall on? Dutt says it was ‘ভূতলে’; the other translators than Seely say it was ‘on the ground’; Seely requires three more syllables for his line and so describes the location as ‘on the surface of the earth’. One wonders if Dutt would love or laugh to see the linguistic latitude Seely avails himself of in negotiating with ‘ভূতলে’ rather too geographically!

We may here in passing reflect on the matter of ‘mistakes’ in translation. Aveling’s paper (2002) begins with a joco-serious expostulation:

Translators are regularly berated by various critics for their apparently endless “mistakes”. All of us who are practising translators know this well. We labour for years to translate a text, in a sensitive and caring way, only to be told that “there is a comma missing on page 45”, “this sort of bird is a pigeon and not a magpie, and “the subjunctive, which is a particular feature of this author’s style in the original, is missing in the translation”. Mistakes, mistakes, mistakes ... (2)

It is, however, interesting to see that contemporary theorization of translation has not taken the issue of ‘mistakes’ seriously into consideration. Here is some proof proffered by Aveling:

In fact, very few of the some twenty books about translation I have on my home bookshelf have entries in their index on either “mistakes” or “errors” at all. And this includes the index to Lawrence Venuti’s monumental anthology *The Translation Studies Reader* (Routledge, London 2000), although if one turns to the word “equivalence”, one is encouraged to “*see also* adequacy, accuracy, correspondence, fidelity, identity”. (4)

The survey of the theories / principles of translation done in Chapter I, the discussion made in Chapter III of what is known as ‘the poetics and politics of translation’, and the comparative study of Seely’s and Radice’s translations attempted in Chapter IV as well as in this chapter lead us to infer that a functional approach rather than an approach based on search for equivalence can make a poetic translation all the more successful. What, then, are the essentials of a functional approach? Let us quote Aveling once more:

1. The translator interprets the source text not only with regard to the sender's intention but also with regard to its compatibility with the target situation.
2. The target text should be composed in such a way that it fulfils functions in the target situation that are compatible with the sender's intention.
3. The text world of the translation should be selected according to the intended target-text function.
4. The code elements should be selected in such a way that the target-text effect corresponds to the intended target-text functions. (7)

All told, both Seely's and Radice's translations, despite the difference in their verse-structures (one is syllabic and the other, three-phrase) follow more or less the functional approach Aveling talks about. Naturally, they have tried their best to overcome what Aveling calls 'functional inadequacies' (7) which, in his opinion, are of four types: (a) pragmatic translation errors which Christiane Nord (1997) describes as resulting from "inadequate solutions to pragmatic translation problems such as lack of receiver orientation" (75); (b) cultural translation errors which we have discussed at some length in Chapter III; (c) linguistic translation errors which have been pointed out amply in Chapter IV; and (d) text-specific translation problems, which have been mentioned in Chapter I, while comparing Seely's and Radice's translations of a passage taken from Canto/Book-I of Dutt's poem.

In spite of some dumb mistakes and a considerable number of deliberate mistakes, the two translations have done laudable justice to their common SLT. These are indeed what Derrida calls 'relevant' (a term we have discussed at the end of Chapter III) translations; both the translators have 'surrendered' – Spivak's phrase, discussed in Chapter III – themselves, as best they could, to the original; both the translators have 'negotiated' (Eco's phrase) well enough to ferry the Bengali epic-poem across/away from the Ganges (or Kapataksha?) to the Thames or the Chicago River; both the translations reveal reflections of and refractions from

the original, and they can exist as original poems in their own rights. What does the target reader get ultimately – ‘Mouse or Rat’ (the title of an Eco book much utilized in Chapter III)? Maybe either of them, but by no means a mole (Talpidae) or ‘ছুছুন্দরী’, to take a word from the title of Jagabandhu Bhadra’s lampoon (‘ছুছুন্দরীবধ’ i.e. ‘The Poem of the Slaying of a Mole’), published in 1868, on the epoch-making Bengali epic poem.

Even the blurbs vindicate our general appreciation of Seely and Radice as translators of *Meghnadbadh kabya*. The Penguin classics, the publishers of Radice’s translation, blurbed their appreciation as follows: “This lyrical and vigorous translation by William Radice is accompanied by an extensive introduction, detailed footnotes [...]” The blurb on the back cover of Seely’s book has appreciations by three academies of repute. Rachel Fell McDermott of Barnard College comments:

This book is a polished gem, a sparkling gift of translation and contextualization from Clinton B. Seely—legendary teacher, speaker, and translator—to all students of Bengal, colonial history, *Ramayana* studies, and Indian literature. *The Slaying of Meghanada*, Seely’s artistic rendition of Michael Madhusudan Datta’s classic Bengali version of the *Ramayana*, invites us to understand and feel, with Datta and through Seely, the particularly Bengali pathos of a doomed, humanized, agonized Ravana. Here is a text for our times, where Rama is not the hero.

The historian Dipesh Chakrabarty of the University of Chicago opines:

“This is a landmark book, indispensable to students of literature and modernity in colonial South Asia. It consolidates Seely’s reputation as one of the finest contemporary translators of Bengali into English. A truly remarkable achievement.”

And, finally, here is the historian Romila Thapar of Jawaharlal Nehru University in praise of Seely:

The *Meghanada-vadha-kavya* captures some intersections of Indian and European cultures in then nineteenth century. Clinton Seely's translation evokes the potential of this historical moment and also of the epic genre, both of which resonate with the perceptions of Michael Madhusudan Datta.

A writing takes place in history which ferries the writing across contemporaneity into futurity. Any writing's uniqueness is not conclusive or cocooned in a given time but 'projected' into posterity where it attains further signification, acting as both a signifier and a signified. The uniqueness of Dutt's *Meghnadbadh kabya*, a star that dwelt apart in the glorious firmament of the Bengal Renaissance, is thus not 'conclusive' or 'exclusive' but 'inclusive' of how futurity has retrieved it in one way or another.

As we have already mentioned, Dutt's epic was parodied—not long after its publication—in a poem titled "*Chuchundaribadh kabya*"; Tagore, in his early youth was very critical of Dutta's poem, but changed his views in straight angle later in his mature years. In 1926, Rajendranath translated the poem into English in blank verse; then gradually the poem became a canonical Bengali text—a solitary peak in the whole landscape of early modern Bengali poetry; in 1986, the poem was revisited by Shyamal Bandyopadhyay who translated it in free-verse; the first two decades of the present century saw three translations of it, including Seely's and Radice's; and now, in 2020, some reflections on the translations of Dutt's poem have been made in the present thesis.

A text gets regenerated through its receptions and translations continuously over time, and no single evaluation of it or its translation(s) can be conclusive. A text has to be evaluated and reevaluated in all its inclusiveness. Hence the fifth and last chapter of the

present work has been titled, with a tinge of oxymoron, “In(con)clusive Conclusion”. Structurally, this is the concluding chapter; but that it is *not* ‘conclusive’ but rather ‘inclusive’ (of what is to come) is made clear from our decision to bring in the latest translation of *Meghnadbadh kabya* for a comparative discussion in this chapter itself. The present thesis, therefore, is only part of a continuum; and as we all know, no continuum can have an exclusive conclusion as it always remains in a state of flux to be explained, extended, debated and interrogated, and therefore, supplemented by newer scholarships to come.

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APPENDIX I

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**Translation as Negotiation: A Brief  
Comparative Reading of Clinton B. Seely's  
*The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from  
Colonial Bengal* and William Radice's  
*The Poem of the Killing of Meghnad***

PEENAZ KHAN  
BINAYAK ROY

*The task of translators becomes rather intriguing with poetry translations, as poetry generically deploys defamiliarization more than prose does. When a translator embarks upon translating a grand-scale poem like the epic, the task becomes even more arduous as its 'grand style', which is far removed from the stylistic features of the lyric or the ballad, entails greater problems of what Roman Jakobson calls 'inter-lingual transposition' in translation (1966:238). In 2004 Seely completed his 25 years' project of translating Michael Madhusudan Dutt's magnum opus, Meghnadbadh Kabya, and it was published by OUP under the title, "The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal." By then Radice, too, had completed the first draft of his translation of the same epic, but delayed its publication until 2010, under the title – "The Poem of the Killing of Meghnad". These translations have not yet been taken up by anyone for a comparative study in the light of translation theories. Hence a juxtapositional reading of them, which is the object of this proposed paper, may not be either trite or superfluous.*

*Keywords: Translation Studies, TLT, SLT, equipollence, blank verse, metre, phrasing*

One of the tasks of Translation Studies is to examine how far, and with what effects, the Target Language Text (henceforward abbreviated to TLT) adheres to and deviates from the Source Language Text (henceforward abbreviated to SLT). The case becomes rather intriguing with poetry translations, as poetry generically deploys defamiliarization more than prose does. When a translator embarks upon translating a grand-scale poem like the epic, the task becomes even more arduous as its 'grand style', which is far removed from the stylistic features of the lyric or the ballad, entails greater problems of what Roman Jakobson calls 'inter-lingual transposition' in

translation (1966:238). So, to translate Milton's *Paradise Lost* into a target language is much more demanding than to translate his sonnets or elegies. Things become even more interesting for a researcher in the domain of Translation Studies when an SLT is translated into the same target language by different hands. The point becomes patent once we remember that Tagore's "Karna-Kunti Samvad" was translated into English not only by Tagore himself but by at least five others, too, including Sturge Moore, Humayun Kabir and Ketaki Kushari Dyson. Multiple translations of the same SLT invite two basic questions: first, as Laha (2017:71) indicates, how does each of the translations stand as translation *per se*, and secondly, how do the translations differ from each other and with what effects?

Clinton B. Seely, as we know, has translated *inter alia* Jibanananda Das's poetry, and William Radice is a well known Tagore translator. Seely's translation of Jibanananda's poetry and Radice's of Tagore's have already been taken up for study by researchers. [E.g. Dr. S.C. Dasgupta of Raiganj University worked on Radice as a Tagore translator, and Ms. S. Das is at present working under him on Seely as a translator of Jibanananda's poetry, to name two near at hand.] In 2004 Seely completed his 25 years' project of translating Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *magnum opus*, *Meghnadbadh Kabya*, and it was published by OUP under the title, "The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal." By then Radice, too, had completed the first draft of his translation of the same epic, but delayed its publication until 2010, under the title – "The Poem of the Killing of Meghnad". These translations have not yet been taken up by anyone for a comparative study in the light of translation theories. Hence a juxtapositional reading of them, which is the object of this proposed thesis, may not be either trite or superfluous.

There are basically two diametrically opposite views on poetry translation: one proclaims that translation is not possible, translators are traitors because a poem gets killed in translation; the other vindicates possibilities of successful translations – sometimes not excluding even what came to be known in the mid – 20<sup>th</sup> century as 'machine translation'. The present study will not take into account the former, and while focusing on the latter it will exclude the matter of machine translation which can translate 'Out of sight, out of mind' as 'invisible lunatic'!

It may be useful for the purpose of the present study to refer to some notable practising translators, engaged in translating poetry from Bengali into English. *Tagore and Modernity* edited by Krishna Sen and Tapati Gupta and published in 2006 has a panel discussion, excerpts from which are reproduced below:

MARTIN KAMPCHEN: How do I do my poetry translation? There is a poem in the beginning, and there is a poem at the end of a long tedious process [...]. I [have to] absorb the various layers – linguistic, emotional, cultural, religious – of that poem [...]. I try to reconstruct the poem [by combining] philological correctness and literary value. (228)

KRISHNA DUTTA: [...] what I find the most difficult thing is that whenever I try to translate, the beauty and grace of Rabindranath's Bengali hums in my ear, and however much I try to put it across into English, I find it is inadequate [...] Translations, however clever, can only transfigure dancing into acrobatic tricks, in most cases playing treason against the majesty of the original [...] but I am also optimistic that it can be done. (229-32)

SUKANTA CHAUDHURI: There is a sentence which I wrote a few years ago in a preface [...] "The semiotics of poetry exceeds its semantics" – which is an unnecessarily complicated way of saying the full meaning of a poem is not conveyed simply through its words, but through its overall formal impact [...]. Any word is impossible to translate, fully, out of one language into another [...]. But for the practising translator, the bigger problem usually [...] is to think of how to devise a sort of formal structure for the entire translation [...] I feel that the translation of a poem should make some attempt to indicate the total formal structure – The stanza form, the rhyme scheme – of the original. [...] I don't say reflect entirely. Of course it is not possible to reflect entirely, but in fact, sometimes it may be possible to reflect it more than you may think at first sight. [...] to preserve the seriousness of the original, and the other non-prosodic aspects of the original, you have to tone down the effect, especially if you are trying to render a language like Bengali where rhymes and alliteration and repetition come much more easily in verse as compared to a language like English. We have to tone it down [...]. This might mean compromising the details of the form, leaving out some things, putting a few extra things, trying, as it were, for a kind of general principle of equipollence, of equal weight, not precise correspondence. (234-36)

KETAKI KUSHARI DYSON: I feel that if I didn't write some poetry in English, I wouldn't have the courage to translate from Bengali into English [...] you really have to know the craft skills [...]. Poets like Buddhadeb Bose [...] had this capacity as poets to make new poems on the models of the given source texts [...]. I think the whole point of translation is to bring out the flavour of something which is different. If it was the same, I wouldn't be translating it. It's the difference that makes the art of translation so exciting and so challenging. (239-42, 247) (emphases added)

To make a gist of the extracts above, we can say that (i) Kampchen wants to reconstruct the SLT; (ii) Krishna Dutta would struggle to capture the majesty of the original; (iii) Chaudhuri is in favour of devising a formal structure for the entire translation, a structure that will answer to a general principle of equipollence; and

(iv) Dyson implies that in order to be a good translator one needs to be a poet because a poet knows the craft of writing poems – the craft of transcreation. Notwithstanding the various positions (often supplementary or complementary to each other) of the practising translators, the fact probably remains that “[a]ny translator is faced with the competing demands of the desire, on the one hand, to be as faithful as possible to the original and, on the other, to produce a version which communicates well and is a pleasure to read” (France, 23).

Reduced to its bare essentials, the art (or ‘Science’?) of translation, therefore, has to depend on both ‘reflection’ and ‘refraction’, and engineered by the translator’s poetic sensibilities which can create a poem out of a source-poem, with traces of similarities and differences.

Needless to say, the difference between the two translations starts right from the titles themselves. While the subtitle to Seely’s work takes on an interpretive mode with the words “A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal”, ‘slaying’ in Radice’s becomes ‘Killing’, and ‘Meghnada’ becomes ‘Meghnad’ with the addition of ‘The Poem’ which probably is due to Radice’s desire to retain the word ‘Kabya’ of the SLT. It can be guessed from the two titles that deviations in translation are likely to tell us a lot about the ‘poetic engineering’ (Radice’s phrase, used in his *Poetry and Community* published in 2003) of the translator concerned. [Here it may be said *in passim* that Seely spells Madhusudan’s surname as ‘Datta’, while Radice sticks to the poet’s own choice ‘Dutt’ while signing in English. The present study picks up the latter].

For the purpose of the short study let us juxtapose a few lines from Book I as translated by Seely and Radice (henceforward referred to as TLT<sub>1</sub> and TLT<sub>2</sub> respectively) can be juxtaposed to demonstrate how the two TLTs individually differ from each other in negotiating with their common SLT. This demonstration is crucial for the statement of the problem because, to quote Laha again, “How a TLT ... negotiates with its SLT, and with what effects, have remained central to the questions concerning the art of translation and the field of Translation Studies” (2017, ix).

SLT: Henokaale charidike sohosa bhasilo  
 Rodon-ninad mridu; ta soho mishiya  
 Bhasilo noopurdhwani, kingkinir bol  
 Ghor rolay. Hemangi songinidal-sathe,  
 Probeshila sabhataley Chitrangada devi.  
 Aloo thaloo, hai, ebe kabaribandhan!  
 Abharanhin deho, bono-sushobhini  
 Lata!Ashrumoy aankhi, nishar shishir-

Purno padmaparna jeno! Virbahu-shokay  
 Bibosha rajmohisi, bihongini jotha,  
 Jobe graase kaal foni kulaaye poshiya shaboke,  
 Shoker jhar bohilo sabhate!  
 Suro-sundorir rope shobhilo choudike  
 Bama kul; muktakesh meghamala, ghono  
 Nihshwas proloy-baayu; ashruhari-dhara  
 Asaar; jimoot-mandra hahakar-rob!  
 Chamakila lankapati kanak-aasonay!  
 Felilo chamor dooray titi netraniray  
 Kingkori; kandilo feli chhatra chhatradhar.  
 Kshobe, roshe, doubarik niskosila osi  
 Bhimroopi; patra mitra sabhasad joto,  
 Adhie, kandila sobe ghor kolaholay. (Book I: 322-44)

TLT<sub>1</sub>: Suddenly / at that time, there drifted in from all directions soft sounds / of weeping blended with anklets' tinkling, jingling girdles / and ominous outcries. Escorted by the golden-limbed women of her retinue, Queen Citrangada stepped to / the floor of that assembly – hair, alas, disheveled! Her / arms, naked, without bangles, like forest-ornamenting / vines when, in snow, they lack gemlike blossoms! Her tear-filled eyes / were as the dewy lotus pads at night! The queen was quite / beside herself, lamenting over Virabahu, as / does a mother bird when some fell snake slips inside her nest / and swallows up her fledglings. A storm of woe blew into / that assembly hall! The women folk stood there, appearing / comely as the wives of the divines, their loose and flowing / hair seemed a swirl of clouds, their heaving sighs Pralaya-like / heavy winds, their streams of tears torrential rains, their wailing / moans the thunder's rumble! Lanka's sovereign on his gold throne / was startled. Maidens in attendance, tear-soaked, dropped their / yak-tail whisks; the umbrella bearer let slip the parasol / and wept; angry and confused, the guardsman unsheathed his dread / sword; and the ministers, the counselors, and members of / the court, alarmed, broke down crying, causing utter havoc. (Book I: 322-44)

TLT<sub>2</sub>: Then, suddenly, the sound of feminine weeping flooded in from all sides,  
 Mingled with the tinkling of anklets, and the sonorous jingling of girdle-bells. Chitrangada-devi came into the chamber, with her gold-complexioned attendants. Her hair was unplaited, alas,  
 Loose and disheveled! Her body was without ornament, like a forest-adorning creeper in the snow,  
 Bereft of its jewel-like blossoms! Her eyes were full of tears, like petals of a lotus brimming with night's dew!  
 The queen was benumbed with grief for Virabâhu, like a mother-bird after a deadly snake enters her nest and devours her young!  
 A storm of grief swept through the court!  
 The golden skin of her women flashed all around like lightning; their unbound hair was a bank of clouds; their heavy sighing was a hurricane wind;

Their tears **streamed** like a cloudburst; their weeping and wailing boomed like **thunder!** The lord of Lankā on his **golden** throne started!

Handmaidens dropped their fly-whisks as their eyes moistened; the weeping umbrella-bearer dropped his umbrella; shocked, **Angered**, the guard at the door unsheathed his awesome sword; **councilors**, Ministers and the rest of the court were all alarmed, all in tears, all weeping noisily!

It is interesting to note that while negotiating with the SLT, the two translators differ from each other in more ways than one. Even a cursory reading of the quoted passages would not probably fail to notice that 'drifted in soft sound of weeping' in TLT<sub>1</sub> becomes 'flooded in sound of feminine weeping' in TLT<sub>2</sub>, just as 'golden limbed' becomes 'gold complexioned', 'arms, naked, without bangles' becomes 'body...without ornament', 'forest-ornamenting vines' becomes 'forest-adorning creeper', to mention only a few. It becomes clear, too, that TLT<sub>2</sub> tries as far as possible to adhere to the SLT phraseology (cf. 'nishar shishir' / 'night's dews') while TLT<sub>1</sub> seeks to maintain the general principle of equipollence through paraphrasing (cf. 'nishar shishir' / 'Dewy...at night').

It transpires from the quotes above that the SLT – TLT movement in Seely is different from that in Radice in respect of versification as well. Rendering Madhusudan's Bengali blank verse in English is a big problem, and a close, comparative reading of TLT<sub>1</sub> and TLT<sub>2</sub> makes it clear that Seely and Radice attempt very disparate solutions to their common problem. In order to negotiate with Madhusudan's *amitraksara chanda*, Seely adheres to the fourteen-syllable, unrhymed line with enjambment although he has not forced his lines to be coterminous with the original. In other words, he frames lines based on fourteen English syllables and takes great care to end his paragraphs with a full, fourteen-syllable line. In order to maintain the 14-syllable structure, Seely often has to end his lines with little words like 'to', 'as', 'of' – words that perform grammatical, rather than lexical, functions. Seely was not unaware of the problem of putting a non-stressed language like Bangla into a stressed language like English – "So what do you do? You try a little bit, if you lose a little bit, then you compromise a little bit and it's one – not the only – solution" (Islam: 2005).

For Radice, it appears, 'phrasing' is as much important as 'metre' (the matter of syllable) in encountering Madhusudan's Bengali blank verse. Phrasing, for Radice, means "the length and balance of phrases, the placing of pauses in the line or sentence or paragraph" (Radice: 2004), and unlike Seely he never ends his lines with 'little

words'. Radice's lines, on the other hand, "are based on a count of three phrases, a phrase being defined by the pause before or after it that is indicated by any kind of punctuation mark [...] even though the phrases can vary hugely in length" (ibid.). Incidentally, we can take into account Madhusudan; letter of 1 July 1860 to Raj Narayan Basu wherein he categorically says; "Let your friends guide their voices by the pause {...}. My advice is Read, Read, Read. Teach your ears the new tune and then you will find out what it is" (ibid.). It, therefore, appears that Seely deviates from, while Radice tries and adheres to, Madhusudan's dictate, and that as a whole TLT<sub>1</sub> caters to a great extent to 'refraction' while TLT<sub>2</sub> by and large has recourse to 'reflection'.

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## Who is the Real Hero of Michael Madhusudan Datta's Meghanadavadha Kavya ("The Slaying of Meghanada")?

Peenaz Khan\*

### Abstract

World literature includes Bengali literature, and modern Bengali literature cannot be discussed without any reference to Michael Madhusudan Datta's epoch-making epic poem *Meghanadavadha Kavya* published in 1861. One of the questions that continue to puzzle its readers is: who is the real hero of the poem – Meghanada or Ravana? The title itself demands that Meghanada should be looked upon as the hero of the poem. Given that Indrajit (the other name of Meghanada) was the poet's favourite, there should apparently be no debate about who the hero of the poem is. But, as D.H. Lawrence has warned us, "trust the tale, not the teller". A narratological reading of the poem may claim that despite Meghanada's superb heroic qualities and tragic end, his father Ravana should be deemed the de facto hero owing to magnitude of his tragic endurance and fight against fate. Meghanada seems to be a supernova whose extinction only amplifies Ravana's tragedy. This paper attempts a comparative study of the tragic roles played by the son and the father across the cantos, and thereby examines the claim for the real heroism of this pioneering 'Ramayana from Colonial Bengal', as Clinton B. Seely (one of the poem's renowned translators) puts it.

**Keywords:** tragic hero, narratology, tragic flaw, pity and terror, catharsis

As a remarkable piece of work in Bengali literature in particular and World Literature in general, Michael Madhusudan Datta's epoch-making epic poem *Meghanadavadha Kavya* (1861) continues to fascinate scholars at home and abroad alike. Even the twenty-first century has seen two of its remarkable translations: one by Clinton B. Seely in 2004, and the other by William Radice in 2010. Since Datta's poem is basically a subversion of the canonical *Ramayana*, it is only natural that it would attract attention and invite questions all the more. When one has finished reading the poem one is likely to be disturbed by a rather general question: who is the real hero of "*A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal*" as Seely (2004) subtitles his translation? An epic generically leans towards tragedy: *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost* end tragically. *Meghanadavadha Kavya* is of course a far more grim tragedy than the two just mentioned. A tragedy requires a hero "who gives significance and tone to a tragedy" (Nicoll 150). Most tragedies take their titles after the names of the respective heroes. By that count, the heroism of *Meghanadavadha Kavya* straightaway goes to Meghanada or Indrajit (the other name of Meghanada). The central event of the poem is of course the killing or slaying of Meghanada, and here is William Radice summarising the importance of the event:

[...] the manner in which Meghnād is killed by Lakshman, in a temple, where he has come to carry out a pūjā to Agni and where he has no way of defending himself [...] is the most subversive and original feature of Madhusudan's epic, and his chief way of turning Meghnād into a tragic hero. (2010, iv)

But the problem crops up as we begin to think of such things as tragic flaw, terror and pity, catharsis- all that we associate with tragedy.

An epic is a narrative, and so demands appreciation from the viewpoint of narratology, that is, how a story gets told or narrated in spite of what the writer actually wanted to highlight. D.H. Lawrence famously advised us to trust the tale and not the teller. This means that narratology can bring to surface the contrast between 'wanting to say' and 'what is ultimately said'. Madhusudan indeed wants to present his 'favourite' Indrajit as the hero; but the question is: does the narration across the nine cantos do justice to his deep desire?

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The feelings of pity and terror towards the tragic hero constitute the cathartic effects of a tragic tale. We feel sorry for the downfall of the hero and are terrorized by it as well so that a secret identification between the hero and ourselves is established. We begin to wonder and ponder: if this can happen to such an elevated character, why should we grumble about our puny tragedies? A tragic hero must have some sort of tragic flaw in him. As Nicoll puts it:

[...] the tragic hero, while not a paragon of goodness, must [...] have noble qualities in him, but he must at the same time be capable of indulging in some error, due either to ignorance of affairs beyond his knowledge or to human passion. (150)

It can be argued that these benchmarks apply more to Ravana than to his dearest son Meghanada. We should not miss the wail of the great warrior before Lakshmana dastardly slays him:

I – who in pitched battle subdued Indra [...]

[...] am to die now by your hand? For

what false step has Providence meted out such punishment

upon this humble servant – shall I ever understand? (Seely, Canto 6, 652-55)

What are Meghanada's 'false steps', really, given in the poem? Ravana, of course, had a big one – the abduction of Sita.

With these preliminaries in mind, we would now embark upon a comparative study of the presentation of the two characters – Meghanada and Ravana – in the total framework of the tragic tale.

The two contenders vying for the position of the protagonists are father and son, that is, Ravana and Indrajit. Interestingly, there has been absolutely no conflict whatsoever between them. Rather, the bond between the father and the son is like that of confluence and fluorescence, the dusk and the dawn, the container and the content. Similarly, the question of heroship does not alienate the pair but rather yokes them together in an inseparable relevance. If Indrajit happens to be the protagonist then Ravana's refuge is indispensable for him to be so; and if Ravana transpires to be the protagonist then Ravana can by no means deny Indrajit's divine richness and heroism as an indispensable part of his aura as the King of Lanka. Let us first examine the possible rationales to vote Meghanada as the protagonist. Rhetorical rules can portray ample abundance of virtuousness that is necessary for Meghanada to be the sole hero, the protagonist. Adherent to tiptoe vigilance, utmost loyalty, duty respect, selfless service, honour and prominence, Meghanada not only exemplifies a soulful integrity of character with all heroic qualities, but beyond all perfect disciplines of his pious family life, he looks like a demi-god with absolute substance and principles, even though he appears in three cantos only. In the very first canto, we have a glimpse of his noble sense of duty when he leaves the company of his beloved and other women as the bad news of the death of his brother Virabahu is brought to him. This is how the poet depicts the moment:

Full of wrath, great warrior Meghanāda tore apart his  
garlands, threw away his golden bracelets; lying at his  
feet, his earrings shone most elegant [...]

[...] "Fie on me,"

the crown prince chided gravely, "Fie on me! Hostile legions  
cincture golden Laṅkā, and here am I midst these charming

women! Does this befit a one like me, Indrajit, son

of Daśānana? Bring my chariot at once. I shall  
efface this infamy [...].” (Seely, Canto 1, 617-25)

Besides, Meghanada in itself is Datta’s profound creation as the central character of his poem; his quasi-divine deeds paint him to be sort of the Koh-i-Noor in the garland of gems that the epic unfolds. The poet draws his innermost self on this central character in symmetry to his core best principles that breathe life in Meghanada. Madhusudan wanted to swap his own imperfect life with Meghanada’s perfections. The poet not only depicted himself in conformity to what he is, but also comprehended all accomplishments that remained unattainable. It is not difficult to perceive the poet’s distinctive identity with Indrajit as self-regarding and privileged to be known as a beau of Madhusudan’s fond inner self. The poet’s forsaken fortune, yet a passionate desire for perfect completeness of glorified success are decorated in the persona of Indrajit. Thus, the character of Meghanada adorns the poet’s endless esteem, extreme admiration and enormous hearty charm. While expressing opinion about Indrajit, the poet said: “He (the glorious son of Ravana) was a noble fellow, and but for the scoundrel Bibhisana would have kicked the Monkey army into the sea” (quoted in Banerjee 210). No wonder, such unfair and unjust killing of Indrajit would lacerate the poet’s heart forever. The poet looks upon Ravana’s son Indrajit not only as his intimate alter ego but also as ‘my favourite Indrajit’ (210). The poet’s burning imagination stirred by the killing of Meghanada, his emotional excitement and enormous arrangements are epitomized in what he confided to his friends: “I am going to celebrate the death of my favourite Indrajit” (210). So, it is possible to argue that the poem’s foremost supreme character and the poet’s ultimate confidante should necessarily be called as the hero, the sole protagonist and that no other identity can do justice to the recognition of this exceptional persona.

Though Meghanada is a heroic character par excellence, yet it is Ravana who happens to be Meghanada’s main custodian in the poem. The reason for Meghanada being the protagonist appears debated. The moot question is whether the brief span of Meghanada emerging as a glorified incandescence into the spectrum of every gleaming eyes is enough for being the hero, or Ravana, the magnitude of whose sufferings with unpredictable mixture of weal and woes, laying the foundation to the entire tale, is the real hero? To put it differently: who should we regard as the sole motivation of the poem? Narratologically, it is Ravana and not Meghanada. That is why only three of the nine chronicle cantos comprise Meghanada and Ravana envelops the whole of the poem- Ravana is the beginning and the terminal end. The central motivation as detected by Rabindranath is about a finding of a horrendous catastrophic power; and that absolute supreme power is Ravana. “The Slaying of Meghanada” sings hymns to this power and glory, and Ravana is both circumference and real centre of the tragic world of Lanka. Meghanada only adequately illumines the readers’ understanding of Ravana’s predicament. Here I would like to quote Rabindranath Tagore at some length:

In Meghanadavadha Kavya [...] he [Madhusudan Datta] has revelled in a spontaneous but vehement play of power [...]. A great glamour surrounds this power [which] has shaken the earth. This power brooks no barriers of ethics or weapons in its way to get what it wants [...]. The poet ends his poem with heaving sighs of grief at the defeat of the proud power which cannot accept the tragic doom even being surrounded by inevitable catastrophe [...]. The Muse has garlanded this indomitable power at the very end. (quoted in Banerjee 170) (my translation)

Let us now see why Ravana should be deemed the paramount object or the sole motivation in this poem? Meghanada may have been the ideal character of Madhusudan but the poet's real reflection is not Meghanada but Ravana. Ravana's valour and vigour, his unceasing determined existence and dying affliction, with determination not to yield to terrible consequences find analogues in the poet's own life. The self-conscious poet was well aware that he possessed in himself an infinite probability; hence to his friends he would say what he could be or do and so on- quite in conformity with the doctrine of the mighty. But we know inscrutable, inseparable, untoward external forces shattered his dreams. This tragedy of unfulfilled desires is not his alone, but a universal plight of the ill-fated, and Ravana stands for the universal human tragedy. Ravana, as if, covered all, including the poet's incessant wails of sorrow stored inside his heart. So, the poet candidly admits that Ravana "was a grand fellow and the idea of Ravan elevates and kindles my imagination" (210-11), and here we can vividly see that in the poem of "The Slaying of Meghanada" Ravana is the real objective of the poet's vision.

Without Ravana this poem would not have gained the profundity of a successful epic. The poet embellishes the character of Meghanada with all heroic attributes but grants him a very limited space to act. The poem ultimately is about Ravana, who is the centrum of all the nine cantos. Around Ravana revolve other characters like Virabahu, Chitrangada, Mandodari, Pramila, etc. And so, does Meghanada too. However, in the star-studded universe of Ravana, Meghanada is such a planet that may have been a small fragment to Ravana's absolute regality, waiting for completeness, but has nevertheless attracted glistening radiance of the readers' heart and soul. But while sitting to judge a protagonist, mere radiance and profundity or the poet's predilections should not be all: thoroughness and details of narration are to be perceived alongside the poet's imaginative focus. Even after the demise of Meghanada we expect more to be said, because Meghanada has perished but Ravana is still there. The spontaneity of Meghanada is so complete and so impeccable that his death is his own ovation. Though this perfect and innocent character is Madhusudan's splendid creation yet he is not the poet's persona. Or else, with the death of Meghanada there would have been an end to the poem- and the countenance of the poem would have had a distinctively different aspect. This was indeed not the poet's intent. The purpose of the poet's impression and enactment of the poem could accordingly be traced in Ravana's characterization. Even after the death of Meghanada we still foster some reckoning hope, but Ravana's defeat instantly lets our last hopes and quest go with the wind, and the poem comes to a deeply tragic conclusion- because the fundamental aspiration meets an ultimate cessation. We understand that it is not the faultless phenomenal superhuman Meghanada but the heterogeneity, the admixture of good and bad in Ravana that captures the poet's esemplastic imagination. The overarching tale of Ravana is central to the poem and the deep sorrowful tears its culmination as a symbol of man's eternal tragedy expressed in immortal verse. That is why, considering the poet's desired fulfilment, Ravana can be regarded as the absolute protagonist. In this context the noted critic Mohitlal Majumdar's perceptive comments can be recalled:

Meghanada is the replica of the poet's consuming desire, a persona with profound charm, fully faultless; a product of infinite fancy, enshrined within the poet's temple of delight. But in conflict with the vagaries of destiny, this dream does not get realized, does not clinch victory in life, a dream ending in sorrows- the hopeless wails and the despairing dusk- so sweet and apt for appeasing the thirst for romantic poetry. In Meghanadavadha Kavya, Meghanada is the reason for the sorrow, the

metaphor for the poet's own expeditious devastating catastrophe [...]. But if Meghanada is his agonizing contentment, then who would be his refuge? The deep interior of it is the poet's own life, and the external image of that refuge is Ravana. That is the reason why Meghanada could not be the poem's alpha and omega [...]. Ravana's prodigiously lingering silhouette engulfs and surpasses Meghanada. The romantic lyrical passion has affected the epic design [...]. [...] though knowingly the poet characterizes Meghanada as the protagonist, yet inadvertently Ravana permeates the poet's entire righteous insight and prevails there as a fundamental enshrinement. [...] in the deeper sense of the term Ravana is distinctively the protagonist of the poem. (quoted in Banerjee 211-12) (my translation)

The tragic endurance of Ravana is indeed far more inclusive in nature, and therefore much greater in intensity, than that of Meghanada. The ruined Ravana that we see in the ninth and last canto is justly worthy of the grandeur of a true tragic hero:

The monarch of the Rākṣasas stepped forward, then spoke with anguish, "It was my hope, Meghanāda, that I would close these eyes of mine for the final time with you before me – transferring to you, son, the responsibility for this kingdom, I would set out on my greatest journey. But Fate – how shall I ever comprehend His līlā? That joy eluded me. It was my hope to soothe my eyes, dear lad, by seeing you upon the Rākṣasas' regal throne, on your left my daughter-in-law, the Lakṣmī of this clan of Rākṣasas, as consort. Futile were those hopes. [...]

[...] Did I serve with care Śiva just to gain but these ends? How shall I ever turn back now – ah, who can tell me how I might return to Lankā and our empty home? (Seely, Canto 9, 383-92, 395-98)

In the ultimate analysis, it can be said that Ravana is the protagonist and Meghanada the worthy deuteragonist of the epic. Or, borrowing the two well-known terms from the domain of Political Science, we can venture to say that the hapless father is the *de facto* hero, while the star-crossed son is the *de jure* hero of the epic since it has been named after him. We should remember that Indrajit was the poet's 'favourite', and Ravana was to him a 'grand fellow'. One was the centre of his imaginative world and the other its circumference. And the poet's constant navigation between the two problematized the question of the 'real' hero.

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APPENDIX II

Evidence of Seminars  
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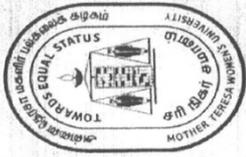
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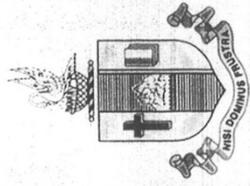
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Michael Madhusudan Bhatta's 'Meghaduta'?  
("The Slaying of Meghaduta")?  
in the SELLTA International Conference on "English Language, World Literatures  
and Gender Studies" - ICEWG, during 04 & 05 July 2019, at Mother Teresa Women's  
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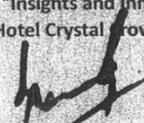
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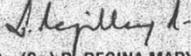
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