

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 TLT₁ and TLT₂ 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-নিবাদ মৃদু; তা সহ মিশিয়া
 ভাসিল নূপুরধ্বনি, 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; জীমূত-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)

TLT₁:

... 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)

TLT₂:

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 TLT₁ and TLT₂ 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 – 20th 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.