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Revitalizing the Original: A Translation Study of Benyamin's *Goat Days*

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Abstract

The practice of translation has become an essential pre-requisite of ever expanding social group speaking multiple languages. Maintaining the cultural identity of different communities' translations of a literary work has also a corresponding obligation to both the reader and author as well. So the translator is to produce in mind of the readers the same emotions, as those produced by the original in the mind of the readers. A proficient piece of work to corroborate it is *Aadujeevitham* (*Goat Days*) by Benyamin. The translation of *Aadujeevitham* by Dr. Joseph as *Goat Days* follows Skopos theory. With much concern and precision the novel is translated for the target audience taking into consideration the target culture, target purpose and target circumstances. Thus upholding the ethics of translation, Dr. Joseph takes the credit that the dynamic superiority of the original is intact to the source text with "judicious blending" achieving equivalence with the linguistic features. At this juncture, the paper ventures to relocate the responsibility of translator as a bridge for 'carrying across' values between cultures though it is argued that translations can but 'offer us a vague

equivalent' apart from the tensions between two languages, with special reference to *Goat Days* by Benyamin.

Keywords

Translation Studies; Benyamin; *Goat Days*; *Aadujeevitham*; Joseph Koyippally; Skopos theory.

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"True translation is a metempsychosis"

- Wilamowitz

Benyamin's hero in *Goat Days*, Najeeb Muhummad is just a youngster recently married who too dreams of gulf with all the expectations of an average Malayalee. To work in a good environment, send money back home and bring luxury to an average household are what he hopes for. In Gulf, however, he gets trapped. He is driven to the desert where he was assigned to look after 'sheep' and camels under a brutal 'arabab'. In a country where he does not know the language, culture or people, he was far away from any human interaction. His days were days of extreme sufferings. No proper food, no shelter no facilities for basic human needs, slowly and steadily he started identifying with the goats. He considered himself as one of them and his life was like that of a goat. His dreams, desires, revenge, and hopes - he identifies all that with them. He talks to them, eats with them, sleeps with them and lives the life of a goat. Still he nurses a ray of hope which will bring freedom and end to sufferings some unknown day. A prophet may arrive one day! In the face of the brutality of fellow human beings and wilderness of nature he had only one saviour, hope! Hope in life & hope in God. Together he takes up the fight and it was a journey worth traveling! It was a shocker to the Kerala society, which always prefers to think that the life of the so-called "Gulf Malayali" was colourful, rich and pompous. The book, with its simple narrative, brought in a new sensibility and even rewrote the concept of expatriate literature.

It has been acknowledged that the best translation is that which never reads like a translation. It should give the feel of an original writing done in the source language. In the modern context a translated work is no more secondary to the original work in the source language. Instead of stereotyping translation as a mere rendering from SL (Source Language) to TL (Target Language), in a different perspective it can be appreciated as 'an innovative form where traditional notions are disregarded in its new and creative process'. Thus a translated work is celebrated in its ability to recreate the original, maintaining its readability, memorability and selling ability in the target language. Considering *Goat Days* of Benyamin, there is no doubt in saying that Dr. Joseph Koyipally has tried to maintain balance while translating it into target language i.e. English.

This work has become an embodiment of linguistic bridge between the literal world of Kerala and Arab countries- a beautiful code switching from one culture to the other. Though literal translation can result in the loss of ideas- Dr. Joseph has succeeded in fulfilling the task of being a mediator between the mind of the author and the mind of the reader i.e. between the SL and TL. It is an indispensable fact that the understanding between two language system and culture are different, a translation can successfully overcome this space by wisely eliminating it. And instead of skipping the problems, a translator has to solve it.

It can be seen that Najeeb misinterprets the meaning of the term *masara* for water, but later he identifies that it isn't. He says:

When he (*arbab*¹) told me something, I guessed he meant 'you proceed to the *masara* with the goats, I will follow'. Ah, then *masara* means the enclosure for goats. So, *mayin* must be water... together, he and I brought water and hay to the *masara*. Did I say *masara*? Look how quickly I switched to Arabic. (75)

¹ *Arbab* is a Persian word that means "boss", "master" or "landlord"

Like Najeeb the protagonist switched from Arabic to Malayalam, the same code switching happens within the readers. From this point we can see the beautiful shift of culture from Kerala to Arabian world. So it can be seen that as Benyamin has done this wisely so is the case with Dr. Koyipally who did a wise translation giving no space for doubt to the readers.

Along with the mainstream translation theories or perspectives the cultural approach comes first. The culture is in the pinnacle while making an allowance for the other themes in translation studies. That is, the new culture has to be introduced in such a way that it has to be comprehensible to the target audience. The new culture may not be in equivalence with the target culture, but it has to be re-created in such way that the target audience may not feel it as alien- similar to what Skopos theory states. For example, “They gathered around the bucket, as if to drink *kaadi*- a type of cattle drink prepared back home from the water used to wash rice” (83). Dr. Koyipally has successfully introduced the term ‘*kaadi*’ from its source language, a Malayalam word is used wisely at the same time introducing it for a target language reader giving no space of ambiguity. Even again, the imagination and knowledge about a desert and the description by Dr. Koyipally seems different, were he has beautifully pictured what a desert is in real. “This place was quiet different from deserts I had heard about or seen in pictures...it was all hard soil and boulders” (74).

The practice of translation has its own limits. Even though there remains difference between SL and TL, translation done within the limits of translating an original writing becomes successful. A translation becomes the best when it is never read like a translated work, giving us the feeling of an original wring done in the target language. It can be seen in the soliloquy of Najeeb, where he thinks that: “My fervent desire was to sit in a bit of shade for some time. You can imagine my sufferings it that was what I dreamt of and longed for!” It is evident that the sentence is re-written giving priority to the target language, instead of adhering word to word transformation. Consequently, a fundamental requirement for effective translation is a deep understanding of the stylistic

elements of the original, an understanding that is reinforced by knowledge of the context in which that original was produced.

And Dolet also propounds ‘that stylistic requirement, the harmony of the original must be observed in any decision taken during the process of translation’, making his theory a source oriented one. He even again proposed that, for a translation to be successful, reader focused approach has to be taken into account- “liberty instead of servitude” (quoted in Robinson). That is in translation enabling the translator to make the original work intelligible wherever necessary and thus displaying an approach where the reader is given the priority. It is evident in several chapters and it can be seen especially in 26th chapter.

Getting those words out, expelling them provides the greatest mental peace. Those who do not get this chance die choking on words. I too would have died choking on words. I too would have died like that. But it was through the stories I narrated to my Pochakkari Ramani, my Marymaimuna, my Kausu and Aravu Ravuthar that I threw out those words accumulating inside me. (167)

It can be said that while doing word to word translation, as the emotions in each language differs; it requires certain alterations so as to convey its full meaning in target language. The thought of the author and the harmony of words go hand in hand only when written in his native language for native audience. So there is a requirement of change at some point or the other where translator cannot bring the actual emotions of the author using word to word- where change is inevitable. For example in chapter twenty three, Najeeb says regarding his goats: “Poor thing, all of it ended in one night. That is life” (155).

At the same time it can be seen that while translating *Goat Days*, Dr. Koyipally has also to some extent followed Dryden, on the other hand contemplating that “the thought of the author and the harmony of his words cannot be transferred to another language via literal translation” (quoted in Robinson). He assumes that these difficulties can be overcome by ‘imitation’.

The primary task of a literary translator is to work with a text and recreate it meaningfully for a new set of expectant readers. And Dr. Koyipally, instead of word to word translation, has attempted to catch the spirit of the original with wise analysis and interpretation.

A good example of it is in the beginning of the novel, where Najeeb and Hameed are in jail.

By the evening, someone from the nearby Indian block came to visit me. I don't recall his name now. As soon as he saw me, he shook my hand and smiled. 'Allah is compassionate', he said, as if to himself. He enquired if I was the one who had made it to Kunjikka's shop. I nodded yes. (15)

And again the letter which Najeeb had written for his wife Zainu is another example for imitation.

My very dear Zainu,

I have reached safely. I couldn't even write a letter because I was very busy with work. I know you must be worried. Don't worry. Your Ikka² is comfortable here...my *arbab* likes me very much. He likes my work, and often gives me presents. (129)

No translator deliberately yearns for a shift while translating from SL to TL, but it is the faithfulness that prompts the translator for a wise shift. Without doubt one can say that, for those who uphold faithfulness and source oriented translation, it will not be a success in a true sense. The following words justify readjustment, rereading and rewriting: 'Really, translation is about all of this: mishearing and parroting correctly, making jumps in orders and reclassifying, perceiving in concrete and abstract terms, allowing and creating the slippages and reshaping that will best work.' Ultimately though, and for Caws most crucially, it is about 'rethinking in order to retranslate, with some degree of surprise'.

² The term used by a Malayalee wife to call her husband.

Nonetheless there exist quite a few theories on the subject of translation, it is difficult to appraise its accomplishment when made practical. Concerning translation theories and practice very often there remains a gap which is unfulfilled. Subsequently one can say that 'translation is what translation does'- aiming to the quality of the translated work and to the extent to which the readers are satisfied with it. Thus taking *Goat Days* into consideration one can say that Dr. Koyipally has tried to tell both what the author says and what he means so as to keep the credibility- taking into account the role of 'a reader and a writer' as stated by Kathy Mezei. *Goat Days* is an eye opener in the field of translation studies.

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