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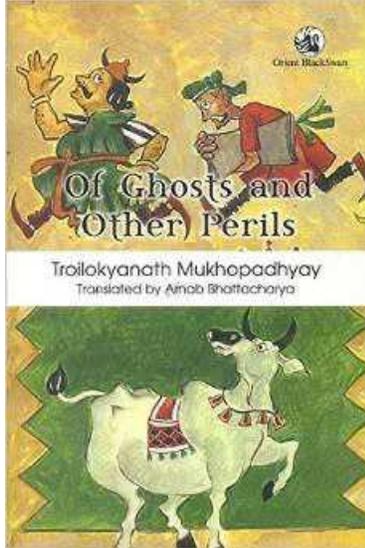
Book Review

Of Ghosts and Other Perils

By Troilokyanath Mukhopadhyay (original author in Bengali)

&

Arnab Bhattacharya (Trans.)



Paperback: 288 pages

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Arnab Bhattacharya's translation of Troilokyanath Mukhopadhyay's selected stories into English titled *Of Ghosts and Other Perils* is a novel work. It is not an ordinary work of translation, but, hours of assiduous research have gone into it to make it transcend all barriers of ordinariness. And that is evident from his Foreword, Note on the Translation and a detailed 'Critical' Afterword. He makes his point clear as a responsible 'translator' in 'A Note on Translation':

In my translation, I have 'bent' the target language, i.e. English, to the source language, i.e. Bengali. My modest attempt has been to make my target language recognizably English, and also to make that English recognizably different in being inflected with Bengali cultural idioms. In a way, this is my subversive response as a postcolonial reader/translator to T.B. Macaulay's project of making English-educated Indians comprise " a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (the thirty-fourth point of *The Minute* published on 2 February 1835). I have attempted to make my translation English "in blood and colour" , i.e. in texture, and Indian " in tastes" i.e. in spirit. [xviii]

And, truly he does so. He retains a few words and phrases of vernacular intact just to keep back the 'taste' of native culture and ways of life. And, again some of the words in the original Bengali has a special connotation which no other English equivalent can match. He adds a detailed *Glossary of Non-English Words/Phrases* at the very outset, for the convenience of non-Bengali or non-Indian readers.

Trailokyanath had a touch of humour in all his stories on ghosts. And, that is really impossible to retain in an alien language. But Bhattacharya successfully achieves it with impeccable use of diction and style. Nowhere it seems to be just a translation as the two languages, translated from/into, have made to sound in unison. Naturally the jarring effect of translation, as we usually come across, is not seen here in this book.

Now, let us take a peep into the content of the book. He has translated seven long stories by Trailokyanath, namely, *Birbala*, *Lullu*, *Nayanchand's Business*, *The Pearl necklace*, *Smile on MadanGhosh's face*, *A Story by Damrudhar* and *Another Story by Damrudhar*. Each story is a class by itself. For example, *Birbala's* story requires 'word-to word' translation to keep back the flavor of the original tale intact. And, the translator retains the charm of the original in his own way, by keeping the culture-specific words intact. In fact, in almost all the seven stories he follows the same technique, leaving the readers, here and abroad, with a genial feel of the indigenous 'culture' the writer portrays, so authentically. The confusing identities of Debisingha, *Birbala's* attachment to Debisingha, and, the final union of the two needed a lively portrayal as the original, where any deviation from both the nuances of the language and the genuine appeal would have been fatal to the appreciation of the story. Thanks to the translator, he took no false step to mar the beauty of the original story. *Lullu* and *Nayanchand's Business* have an intrinsic humour in narration. When *Lullu* is won over by Amir [whose wife had been taken away by the ghost who was a prospective bachelor on the lookout for a perfect match], *Lullu's* plight tickles us to laughter when he agrees to run errands for Amir and even be with him forever just to be given a regular supply of 'chandu' [sort of addictive leaves] ! Do the ghosts really get addicted to doses of 'opium', to be precise? Is it not laughter-inducing to extract oil from a ghost's body to utilize the same in some sensible way?

In this manner, in almost all the stories in this volume the ghosts engage themselves in laughter-provoking, sometimes again hair-raising antics which ultimately lead on to a disaster for themselves. And, Bhattacharya has captivated us, the readers, with the befitting diction he chose meticulously. Snippets of his impeccable translation would speak volumes of the style he has adopted to mesmerize the readers:

In the evening, the ghost came to their door. They both rode on the ghost's back. *Lullu* got out of water and took the sky route. He moved at lightning speed. At about the second prohor of the night they all came to Delhi. The ghost put them down on Amir's rooftop. Amir had locked the door while leaving his place in the guise of a fakir. Now he and his wife unlocked the door and stepped in. They beckoned *Lullu* to a room, and said, "*Lullu*, this room is yours, from now on you'll stay here. I will give you opium or chandu—whatever you need."

Lullu said, “ I will never desert you in this life. No way can I do that.”

Next day, Amir called in his neighbours and narrated the entire saga in its right sequence. Seeing Amir back home everyone was elated. [*Lullu*, p. 51]

But, you know, since my childhood I am a *doshokorma*, I will do whatever I am entrusted with, having skill in all trades. I composed a rhyme on my own. Let me recite parts of it, listen:

Shitala says ‘Wherever I visit

Gobble up young ‘n’ old as raw meat.

Sixty four thousand in my pox army

Destroy households in matchless spree.

Big pox, small pox, pox’s grandson

Come back from households leaving alive none.’ [*Nayanchand’s Business*,p.66]

It is not so easy to translate the poetical lines of a piece, though, Bhattacharya does it with perfect ease and elan. Especially, the rhyme scheme of the original lines has been maintained with dexterity.

As *The Pearl Necklace* is a string of bizarre stories, the translator successfully maintains the oeuvre of the original by staying faithful to it and yet making it readable and appealing at the same time. A quote from the same would make my point clear, I believe:

“The skull said, ‘Listen, we all are betalas[translator’s explanation follows].We like problems, riddles and stories. If I give you some problems, can you sort them out like Vikramaditya[translator’s explanation given], the king?’

“ I said, ‘No mahasay! I don’t have that ability. I am but a yokel with little knowledge. I don’t know stories.’

.....“ The betala or the skull said, ‘You cannot solve riddles, you cannot tell stories either. Which means you can do nothing. But still you want me to go and start knocking and banging against another skull! Does that make sense? Okay then, go and marry Coconut-face, and raise a happy family.’ [*The Pearl Necklace*,p.123]

The quote shows how the translator maintains a balance, while making the two cultures stand and shake hands with each other, on the same pedestal. Thus, in the next three stories, the translator follows the same style and goes winning the hearts of the readers.

The *Afterword from the Translator* is an added bonanza which, I am sure, would make us more knowledgeable about the story-telling modes of Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, with an erudite discussion on Magic Realism and the author. The translator expatiates on the ‘adda’ culture of Bengal too, at length.

This book is a rare gem in the field of translation and surely would add prestige to the stack of each library across the world, apart from being just an individual collector's pride.

Dr. Ketaki Datta is an Associate Professor of English, Bidhannagar College, Kolkata. She is a novelist, short story writer, critic and a translator. She had been to Lisbon on an invitation from IFTR [Ireland chapter] to read out a paper titled "Human Values and Modern Bengali Drama", which got published in the Festival Issue of *The Statesman* in India. "Indo-Anglian Literature: Past to Present" [2008], "New Literatures in English: Fresh Perspectives"[2011], "Avenel Wings of Short Fiction" [2012], "Selected Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore in Translation"[2013], "The Black and Nonblack Shades of Tennessee Williams"[2012] , "The Last Salute"[translated novel] [SahityaAkademi, 2013], "The Voyage"(translated novel) [2009], "Across the Blue Horizon"[poetry collection, England, 2014], and two novels [A Bird Alone(2008) and One Year for Mourning(2014)] are a few of her notable publications. Her short story has been published in *New Asian Writing Anthology*, 2013. She has also been interviewed by NAW [New Asian Writing]. She is the only contributor from India in the forthcoming book titled "Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy" [to be released in August, 2014], being compiled by Prof. Magda Romanska of Emerson College, Boston, USA.
