

The Triumph of the Snake Goddess: A Composite Creative Translation of Verse into Prose

Mohammad Shafiqul Islam

Department of English, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology

Sylhet 3114, Bangladesh

Email: msislam-eng@sust.edu

Abstract For both practitioners and theoreticians concerned with literary translation, *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*, translation of *Manasamangal Kāvya*, must be a classic. The earliest form of *Mangal Kāvya*, the epic narrates the story of Manasa, the snake goddess, who seeks everyone's devotion, ultimately conquering the worshippers of other deities. The paper aims to examine how prose translation of verse retains the depth and appeal of the original text like *Manasamangal Kāvya*. The book is a composite translation from the medieval Bengali epic, which, of course, is not easy for a modern reader to unravel. Kaiser Haq, the foremost English language poet and one of the leading translators of Bangladesh, renders the poem into modern English, employing the creative translation process. The paper focuses on omissions and incorporations, and therefore on the consequent much deliberated issues of loss and gain. The paper also offers a meticulous comparative study between the source text and the translation, with an object of discovering if creative translation commits violence to or enriches the original. The paper further investigates how much the translation is relegated from the original, or how the original resonates with the translation, as far as meaning, form, and style are concerned.

Keywords *Manasamangal Kāvya*; Creative Translation; *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*; Classic; Kaiser Haq

Author **Dr Mohammad Shafiqul Islam** is Professor in the Department of English, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh. His research interests encompass, but are not restricted to, Postcolonialism, World Literature, Translation Studies, Anthropocene, and South Asian Literature. Other than scholarly work in literature, he is committed to creative writing, especially poetry, and literary translation. Dr Islam is the author of two poetry collections, most recently *Inner State*, and the translator of several books, including *The Glorious Afternoon*, *Selected Poems: Rudra Muhammad Shahidullah*, *Humayun Ahmed: Se-*

lected Short Stories and Aphorisms of Humayun Azad. His research articles, poetry, and translation have appeared in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Critical Survey*, *Journal of World Literature*, *English*, *The Review of English Studies*, *Comparative Literature: East & West*, *South Asian Review*, *Journal of Global Postcolonial Studies*, *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies*, *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Poem*, and elsewhere. His work has been anthologized in a number of books such as *The Book of Dhaka: A City in Short Fiction*, *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Selections*, *The Best Asian Poetry*, *When the Mango Tree Blossomed*, *An Ekushey Anthology 1952-2022*, and *Poems from the SAARC Region*. He has also presented a good number of papers in international conferences and participated in workshops on literary translation and creative writing. Dr Islam is currently at work on his third collection of poetry and a few research and translation projects.

Introduction

One of the key concerns of critical writings on literary translation is to evaluate or analyze a translated text to discover how close or distant the translation is to or from the original. Besides, research in the field of Translation Studies explores translation literature to vindicate if the translation is beautiful or faithful to the original, how much liberty the translator has taken, if they have created a new text out of the original, or they have blindly adhered to equivalence. Does the translator do justice to the original author and text by becoming creative, or they commit a damage to the text. The vital question arises if the translation is good, and therefore is commendable. Wook-Dong Kim, a translator and scholar of Translation Studies from South Korea, articulates his views about translation as a creative act in his notable article entitled “The ‘Creative’ English Translation of *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang” published in *Translation Review*, “. . . we have no way of knowing whether a given translation is good or bad without a severe, scrutinized comparison of a source text with its translation. Any assessment of a translation is bogus unless it has gone through a rigorous comparison of the source and the translated texts” (65). Kim’s observation springs forth from his meticulous reading of *The Vegetarian*, translated into English by well-known translator Deborah Smith, which won Man Booker International Prize in 2016. After scrutinizing and comparing the original and the translation, he discovers that the translator has transformed into a creative writer while rendering the text into English, taking liberty to the fullest.

This article attempts to analyze Kaiser Haq’s translation of *The Triumph*

of the *Snake Goddess*, the original of which is *Manasamangal Kāvya*, an influential medieval narrative, recounting the story of Manasa, the snake goddess. *Manasamangal Kāvya*, composed in verse rhyming all through the work, poses a threat to even an accomplished translator. It is an “egregious sin” (Greene) to claim that a translator improves upon the original, but I argue that complying blindly with the original to be more accurate certainly causes a damage to the final product. I confine my attention to what occurs to the translated text, as it is carried across from medieval Bengali into modern English, from verse into prose. Critics have a wide range of views about translation in general and translation of verse in particular. Translation of verse, no doubt, is more challenging than any other genres, but Forrest Gander believes that “all poems are untranslatable until the right translator shows up” (228). Although translation of verse is more daunting, as Gander implies, good translators are capable of producing a reliable text in the target language, no matter if it is prose or verse. Poetry is usually believed to be untranslatable, but accomplished translators can make it possible. *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* is indeed translation of a skilled craftsman. Wendy Doniger, Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor Emerita of the History of Religions and South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, has written a long and rich introduction to the book, in which she states that *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* is a “remarkable translation” (28). Doniger’s introduction, in general, upholds the value of the book as an epic, and this specific statement does justice to Haq’s devotion and the standard of the translation.

Haq has not chosen a particular text to translate; rather, he has read various versions of the original, from which he picked different episodes. In this respect, Doniger observes “This new translation by Kaiser Haq reflects the permeable boundaries . . . between the various retellings of the story, picking one piece from here, another from there, just as a traditional storyteller would do” (27). *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* is a composite prose translation, as already pointed out, and Haq has translated from different extant versions of *Manasamangal Kāvya*. Various episodes from Puranic tales, myth, historical incidents, religious rites, among others, are taken from multiple versions. In the prologue, Haq also makes it clear, “My version is a composite prose retelling of the Manasa legends, rather than a complete rendering of a single text, which is the more common scholarly practice; and hence a word of justification and a brief explanation of the way it has been put together are in order” (“Prologue” 35). Given that Manasa is an important goddess to the people of the East, especially South Asia, her devotees worship her to attain her blessings. As a result, the Manasa tale has been told and retold in different eras,

and its written versions composed by numerous authors are also available. Haq has attempted to give it a composite shape, exploring major versions of the original. Haq also explains why he has chosen to render the text in prose, “Prose versions are more reader friendly and also avoid the hazard of churning out imperfect verse renditions” (“Prologue” 36). All the original versions are written in verse with the strict maintenance of rhyming couplets as well as triplets. According to Haq, verse renditions would have been more hazardous, and the final product, therefore, could have been substandard compared to the prose version.

The factors for which I have grown an interest in exploring *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* include the original text’s status as a medieval classic in verse composed in medieval Bengali, the translation done by Haq, the publication of the book by Harvard University Press, and its warm reception and critical attention. Besides, rhyme in both couplets and triplets has been maintained all through the original versions, the case that elicits interest, because it is, by all possible means, tough to translate. All these factors obviously suggest that the translation of the text is challenging. Hence is the fascination for exploration of the text—my purpose is not to find only misrepresentation of the original, if any, but assess the translation in general. In doing so, I intend to foreground the article on relevant research work in the area of creative translation. As I would like to highlight the translator’s creative self as he carries the text across English, I would apply the methods of creative translation to evaluate the translation performance.

Theoretical Framework

Various factors, in general, unsettle translators’ confidence and performance, exerting an impact on the overall translation quality. In this respect, Juliane House’s observation is noteworthy, “. . . a multitude of . . . conditioning and constraining factors also routinely impinge on its processes, performance and of course on translation quality” (3). There are various factors that impact on the translation process, along with its overall quality. House has developed a model for evaluating translation quality, which is called Translation Quality Assessment (TQA). Drawing on the TQA offered and elaborated in her influential book *Translation Quality Assessment: Past and Present*, I intend to evaluate and analyze *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*. House has offered numerous categories of assessment, and out of all of them, I would like to apply two categories—covert and overt.

For an assessment of the translation quality, House’s Translation Quality Assessment model is highly relevant and appropriate—her model is standard and widely applied for research in translation. On the basis of House’s two categories

of translation, covert and overt, errors in translation can also be identified. House claims:

An overt translation is thus one which is overtly a translation, not a ‘second original.’ ... A *covert* translation is a translation which enjoys the status of an original source text in the target culture. The translation is covert because it is not marked pragmatically as a translation text of a source text but may conceivably have been created in its own right . . . an original and its overt translation are to be equivalent at the level of language/text and register as well as genre. . . . In overt translation, the work of the translator is important and clearly visible. . . . In covert translation, on the other hand, the translator’s task is to betray the original and to hide behind the transformation of the original; he is certainly less visible, if not totally absent. (65-67)

House’s categorization of translation into overt and covert reflects two kinds of translations that turn out to be markedly at variance. In overt translation, the translator is more visible to the target language audience, while in covert translation, the translator remains aloof from the translated text as well as the target language audience. Through covert translation, the translator creates almost a new text that does not retain so much of the original; rather, it is mostly a new text in itself, a creative work. Haq’s *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* may be examined on the basis of this significant assertion on translation in order to vindicate that the text is an overt translation, and it is unquestionably a remarkable creative work.

There are more about the categorization of translation in House’s model of Translation Quality Assessment. In her book titled *A Model for Translation Quality Assessment*, House reflects on overt translation more closely, further categorizing “overt errors into seven subcategories: (1) not translated; (2) slight change in meaning; (3) significant change in meaning; (4) distortion of meaning; (5) breach of the source-language system; (6) creative translation; and (7) cultural filtering. Overall, House’s model is based on the degree of change or distortion of the meaning of the source text” (qtd. in Kim 67). As this categorization suggests, a translated text is assessed to find the cases of omissions, changes in words and meaning, distortions, misrepresentations, the translator turning into a creative writer, and filtering cultural aspects. From the model, these subcategories are well applicable for comparison of two texts—the original and the translation—in order to identify the level of excellence or mismatches in translation. In comparing the two texts, the original and the translation—*Manasamangal Kāvya* and *The Triumph*

of the Snake Goddess—I will focus on the subcategory of creative translation, rather than applying the whole model widely.

The concept of creative translation sounds paradoxical, but the act of translation is nowadays compared to creative work—hence arises the comparison between a creative writer and a translator. That a translator in work is a creative writer is now an established concept, with which writers, readers, critics, and scholars of Translation Studies are well familiar, although it is not beyond arguments. According to Hermeneutic scholars of Translation Studies, “Translation is ... regarded as an individual creative act, in the process of which the ‘meaning’ of a text is also ‘created’ anew” (House 10). Meaning, not words, is more important in creative translation on which House emphasizes. And the statement suggests that the act of translation entails an appreciable amount of creativity, and it is certainly an engrossing solitary act. House further argues, “In a predominantly poetic-aesthetic text, however, the limits of translatability are reached: a TT is then no longer a translation but a kind of creative transposition” (37). This observation is appropriate in evaluating *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*, as the original text is a “poetic-aesthetic text,” which poses a threat to the translator. So Haq transposes the original creatively while translating it into English. Levy Jiri’s statement, thus, adds to the concept of creative translation, “Translation is a reflective and creative process which always leaves the translator some freedom of choice between several approximately equivalent possibilities of realizing situationally appropriate meaning” (qtd. in House 16). There is no denying that a translator has to think deeply, concentrate on the work, and attempt to produce the best possible output, and in doing so they have to create something in the process. According to Jiri, the translator’s freedom leads them to be creative so that they can convey the best meaning and the essence of the original in the target text.

Research on Bengali literature in English translation is exiguous, but *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* being a major work is entitled to give rise to interests of world academics—the text merits critical attention and widespread recognition. Haq quotes Professor Muhammad Shahjahan Mian, “*Padmapuran*, or *Manasamangal*, is the national epic of Bangladesh” (“Prologue” 51). The claim, which is justified, adds value to the text, highlighting the importance of its translation into English for a wider access to this major Manasa tale. *The Vegetarian*, as referred earlier, is also such a text that has made an impact on English-speaking readers after its translation. Kim’s observation about Deborah Smith’s translation of *The Vegetarian* is relevant here, “Despite Smith’s apparent flaws, her translation can be regarded as ‘creative’ and positive at least in that it is highly accessible for

target language readers. The translator's faulty grasp of both the source language and the source culture can potentially be fatal because the reader does not know the original version" (66). Through comparison, contrast, and scrutiny, Kim finds numerous flaws in the translation, but he does not repudiate the significance of a Korean novel's access to world readers. It is the limitation of translation in general that target language readers do not know if the original is misrepresented or the translation is flawed, because they do not have access to the original text. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere observe:

Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. . . . Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices, and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulative processes of literature as exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live. (xi)

If translation is "a rewriting of an original text," as Bassnett and Lefevere claim, *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* is certainly one—the translator introduces a certain tradition of a particular society, its rituals, history, cultures, religions, and so forth to other nations and cultures. The translated text emerges as something new and exciting to the target audience, as they are familiarized with a different culture and society. The translator plays an important role in the reshaping of the source culture for the target culture. *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* introduces readers from various countries and cultures of the world to an interesting and rich tradition, especially the snake cult in ancient Bengal. In his prologue, Haq notes, "The fear and fascination inspired by snakes have given rise to colorful myths and legends and snake cults across cultures" (29). Many cultures throughout the world have a great attraction to snakes, and even religious books such as *Veda* and *Mahabharata* are replete with tales of snake cults. Moreover, in folklores, Puranic tales, myths, and in holy books of Hinduism and Buddhism, snakes are intrinsically connected to human beings and gods and goddesses.

Background to the Translation of *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*

The Triumph of the Snake Goddess, no doubt, is a notable work, reaching a wider

audience in various countries and cultures across the globe. If any piece of work of a particular language is carried across into a global language such as English and it receives rave reviews as well as wider readership along with critical acclaim, the nation should be proud of the work. Literary circles in Bangladesh—writers, poets, translators, and critics—are excited about a seminal work like this, *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*, about which Fakrul Alam, another distinguished translator of Bengali literature and renowned scholar, claims that *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* is “a sort of national epic . . . a work in the tradition of the major epics of the world.” The title, *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*, has already been recognized as a work of international importance alongside its importance nationwide. Alam’s observation makes it clear that the book emulates the great epics written in different centuries and still read and highly evaluated around the world.

Haq, the translator of the text, gives a background to his taking up the project of this challenging task, the task of translating a difficult classic of Bengali literature into modern English. The translation is “based on,” as the blurb of the book states, “five extant versions.” The translator cites the names of the extant versions as sources at the end of the book, which are the versions of Ray Binod, Vijay Gupta, Radhanath Raychaudhuri, Tantrabibhuti, and Vipradasa. The blurb further mentions that the book is “the first comprehensive retelling of this epic tale in modern English.” *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*, therefore, bears significance and merits attention. Already a renowned translator, Haq is also a leading English-language poet in Bangladesh who is well-known across borders. Currently a professor of English at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, he has taught at the University of Dhaka, where he received his BA and MA in English, for more than two decades. Later, he earned his PhD in Warwick University, England. He has translated a number of books, both poetry and prose, from Bengali into English, including *Selected Poems: Shamsur Rahman* (1985, enlarged edition is published in 2016), Anis Chowdhury’s *The Perfect Model and Other Stories* (2010), Rabindranath Tagore’s *Quartet* (1993), Nasreen Jahan’s *The Woman Who Flew* (2012), and *The Wonders of Vilayet* (2002). Among his translated works, *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* is unquestionably a major one, drawing international attention.

Analysis of the Translation of *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*

The original text *Manasamangal* was composed, as mentioned earlier, in different times, starting in the fifteenth century, and the translator has used all the versions as source texts. The chapters of *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*, thus, are based on

those versions of the original. From a version composed by Narayan Deb and Janaki Nath, a few lines are cited here, “মহাপুণ্যময় কথা অমৃত লহরী। / শুনিলে পাতক হরে পরলোকে তরি” (3), which Haq translates as “Strange and marvellous is the story of creation” (59). The lines in Bengali are obviously in verse, which are rhymed as well. The line in English here is not exactly the translation of the original; rather, it is the meaning of the above lines, including a few other lines from the original. *Manasamangal* begins with these lines that give an introduction to the creation myth. With a mark of precision and an adroit use of powerful words such as “strange and marvellous,” Haq gives an apt introduction to how the story progresses, retaining the depth and significance of the original. The translator creates something which, of course, adds value to the text. Here are a few lines more:

যখনে না ছিল সৃষ্টি মর্ত কি পাতালা
 নাহি ছিল চন্দ্র সূর্য দশ দিকপালা
 শূন্যেতে উদ্ভব হয়ে ব্রহ্মা নিরঞ্জনা
 ঘর্ম হ’তে অনাদির করিলা সৃজনা (Deb and Nath 4)

Haq’s translation of the above lines, “In the beginning formlessness reigned everywhere. There was neither heaven, nor earth, nor underworld; no land, water, wind, fire, sky. There were no men, women, or animals; nor any supernatural beings, divine or demonic. Only the supreme spirit, Niranjana, radiant and immaculate, extended everywhere as pure consciousness” (59). The sentence “In the beginning formlessness reigned everywhere” succinctly conveys the meaning of several lines in the original. The next lines in translation flow well and continue from the sentence, although a few words are added—such as “radiant” and “immaculate”—after Niranjana. It is the creative translation in which the translator takes some liberties. In regard to taking liberties, Haq remarks, “I have taken certain liberties, as all *Manasamangal* authors have done, adding a flourish here and a flourish there and leaving out bits, but keeping narrative consistency in view. I have kept literary interest and comprehensiveness of treatment in mind in deciding which source or sources to use for a particular chapter” (“Prologue” 38). This is indeed the translator’s elucidation on the justification of creativity while translating a text like *Manasamangal*. But it is worth noting that he has maintained flow and sincerely attempted to retain literariness throughout the work. Ensuring literary quality as much as possible in the target text is indeed the highest concern of a literary translator.

Haq translates the chapter called “মহাজ্ঞান হরণ” (*Mahagyan Haran*) from Vijay

Gupta's version as "Neutralizing Chand's Occult Power." The title of the chapter in translation is proof to what extent the translator has remained creative throughout the whole work. "Neutralizing Chand's Occult Power" is the interpretation of the whole chapter that indicates what is going to take place in subsequent lines. The chapter begins like this:

দেবগুরু ভক্ত চান্দ ছোট জন কহে
একমনে ভাবে শিব বাপ পিতামহো।
শিব পূজে ভক্তি ভাবে অন্যো নাহি মনা
স্বপনেতে পিতামহ পায় মহাজ্ঞান।
.....
সেবকেরে জ্ঞান কহে জগতের নাথা
বিষ নিবারিতে বস্তু দিল তার হাতা।
হেতাল কাষ্ঠের বাড়ি দেব অধিষ্ঠানা
তাহারে দেখিয়া সর্পের ভয়ে কাঁপে প্রাণা।
.....
বাপের ঠাঁই জ্ঞান পেয়ে বেড়ায় অহঙ্কারো
তোমার তরে গালি পাড়ে লাগল পেলো মারো। (Gupta 90)

The translator first provides the background to the episode and then gives an introduction to the whole chapter, covering a range of details. In this episode, as Chand does not follow Padmavati or Neta, Neta considers it Chand's arrogance, so she instructs Padma to give him a lesson with her power. It is important to note that Padma is another name of Manasa, and Neta is her elder sister, whereas Chand is a mortal who is gifted with a mantra, for which he does not care to worship Manasa—hence Manasa's anger upon Chand. The way Neta asks Padma to devastate Chand's garden is elaborated in this part, and Haq translates the above lines in the following manner:

Padma was deeply concerned at the unbending arrogance of Chand and consulted with Neta on the course of action to adopt. 'Sister,' said Neta, 'I told you that after our parents imparted to him the great occult knowledge that guarantees immortality Chand lost all fear and became overwhelmingly arrogant. His greatest passion now is a garden containing every variety of flowering and fruit-bearing plant or tree. He loves to spend his leisure there, gazing at the natural loveliness. You should take your nagas and destroy the garden. (190)

In the original, there are a number of verse lines, but the translator presents the whole subject matter in a single line. Hence is the justification of calling it a creative translation of the text, which resonates with covert translation. This particular part is a bit elaborate in comparison with the original, as the original does not describe Chand's luxurious life that Neta illustrates when she talks to Manasa. While describing Chand's life-style, Haq incorporates some extra facts and figures about him along with his passion for gardening. There is not any description of the garden in the original, but the translator takes liberties and portrays Chand's state of mind and his garden. After reading the verse lines, the translator transforms them into prose, retaining the terseness in the translation. Next lines in the original go as follows:

নেতা বলে পদ্মাবতী স্থির কর হিয়া।
 নটীর বেশে চল তুমি সকল জিনিয়া।
 সাধুর সহিত তুমি নিসর্গ করিয়া।
 গুণের গামছা তার আনহ হরিয়া। (Gupta 91)

The lines above reveal that Neta is giving advice to Manasa to entrap Chand so that he gets into trouble and subsequently transforms into one of her devotees. Neta's suggestion to Padma is carried across in this way, "Assume the form of a sexy nautch girl and seduce Chand to make him yield the great occult knowledge. Once he does that it will lose its potency" (Haq 191). Here in the original a word such as *gamcha*, which literally means a piece of cloth, belonging to Chand should be plundered away from him. It is also evident that the word is metaphorically used in the original, and the translator takes it granted as the occult knowledge, the power that Lord Shiva bestowed upon Chand. Haq's deep exploration of the rhymed verse and his clear understanding of the substance of the original text attunes to the standard translation, which is spontaneous and reads smooth.

Receiving order from Neta, Padma transforms herself into "a sexy nautch girl" so that she can entice Chand and make him suffer and then submit. Padma exposes herself as a dancing girl in disguise so that Chand and his allies cannot recognize her. When she adorns herself like this, she looks attractive and seductive. The original goes like this:

নেতার হাতে পদ্মাবতী পাইয়া উপদেশ।
 প্রভাত সময়ে পদ্মা ধরে নটীর বেশ।।

সহজে নাগিনী পদ্মা নানা মায়া জানো
তাল যন্ত্র গন্ধর্ব্ব ডাক দিয়া আনো।
সংবাদ পাঠাইয়া আনে দুই বিদ্যাধরী।
ত্রিভুবন মোহ যায় পরমাসুন্দরী।
পদ্মার বিষম মায়া জানে কোন জনা
সর্ব্বাংগ ভরিয়া পরে নাগ-আভরণ। (Gupta 91)

It has already been mentioned that the original of *Manasamangal Kāvya* is so complex that one has to struggle to carry the text into any language let alone English. These lines obviously have the same difficulty level, and the translator, therefore, renders the text into English through interpretation. The translated version of the above lines:

No sooner said than done! Padma mustered her nagas and arrived at the gate to Chand's garden in the twinkling of an eye. With its well-ordered rows and clumps of exquisite plants it surpassed in its beauty Indra's heavenly abode of Amaravati. But that didn't prevent Padma from ordering its prompt and all-out devastation. The serpents systematically poured venom on the plants and trees, causing them to shrivel and die instantly. (Haq 190)

As advised by Neta, Padma summons the snakes instantly and reaches Chand's garden, which is as beautiful as heaven. The nagas poisoned the trees and flowers in the garden following Padma's order to devastate the whole garden, subsequently infuriating Chand. Haq continues presenting the incident as if he were telling the story in his own way. Here lies the justification of calling *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* a retelling of the *Manasamangal Kāvya*, a creative translation of verse into prose.

In the same chapter titled "Neutralizing Chand's Occult Power," Gupta tells half of the story in *lachari*, a certain form of verse. As the tale continues, Manasa, adorned as a nautch girl, begins to discharge her tantric acts. While doing so, she embellishes herself in a distinctive way, and Gupta describes her in the following lines:

সাম্বিতে বিষম কাজ,	মনসার নাহি লাজ,
দেবকন্যা হইলেন নটী।	
কাণাকাণি করে দেবে,	মনসা কি করে এবে,
চণ্ডিকা হাসেন খটখটি।	

সাজিয়া আসি সকলে,
 অবশেষে হইল দিনভাগা
 বায়ুগতি অনুসারে,
 পঞ্চস্বরে গাহে নানা রাগা। (Gupta 91)

আকাশ পথেতে চলে,
 চলিল চান্দর দ্বারে,

In order to punish Chand or to make him her devotee forcibly, Manasa takes all measures to put him under a magic spell. The above lines demonstrate how the goddess beautifies herself—the poet gives a long description of how she prepares. Interestingly, the description in Haq’s prose translation adds something more. The translation of this part:

Neta’s words dispelled Padma’s qualms and she prepared for the mission—dressing to kill, as the saying goes. She scented her hair by blowing incense fumes through it, then drawing it firmly, fixed it in a tight bun; put on large round earrings; a nose-pin as charming as the sesame blossom. . . . She was now feminine beauty incarnate, the epitome of seductive power, ready to humble her foe. . . . ‘Padma has become a courtesan!’—and her stepmother Chandi couldn’t contain laughter.

The seductress and her entourage set off, borne along in their celestial chariots by a compliant wind, and they sang various ragas as they flew over fleecy clouds and reached Chmpaknagar. (Haq 191-192)

If we set the translation in alignment with the original, we discover that the translator has created a new text, remaining, however, close to the essence of the Bengali verse. But it is important to note that the translation retains the poetic language, although it is rendered in prose. One of the best translators of the country, Haq, who is also the master of modern English, is capable of maintaining high literariness in his writing. The proof is his successful rendering of the difficult old text written in a certain kind of verse into modern English prose. The kind of verse used in the above lines is called *lachari*, which is called *tripadi* metre. In the prologue of *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*, Haq explains the kinds of verse in different versions of the original text. Thus Haq gives a detailed account of the verse forms:

The Bengali texts are in alternating sections in the *payar* and the *lachari* or *tripadi* meters. The first is like the English heroic couplet, with rhyming end-stopped lines and a marked caesura. . . . The *tripadi* verses comprise triplets,

rhyiming *aab*, *ccb*, *dde*, *ffe*, and so on. Each triplet is like a three-ply end-stopped syntactic unit arranged with the first two phrases on two sides of one line and the third phrase centered in the next line. (“Prologue” 36)

The original text is written in both *payar* (couplet) and *tripadi* (triplet). The same text tells the Manasa tale simultaneously in both couplet and triplet. Haq wonderfully explains how he handles both kinds of verses in his prose translation. Reading the verses both in couplet and triplet, gleaning the essential meaning of the text, the translator performs the task of carrying over as if he were writing something original, but nowhere can anyone detect the gross deviation from the original, especially when it comes to raising concerns over translating literary texts. To retain the meaning of the original, a literary translator has room for improvisation on the level of adding and deducting words or phrases in order to make the final product worthy as a literary text. Besides, a literary translator enjoys a certain amount of liberty in transforming the original into an independent text.

The translator’s liberty is clearly marked as he translates the line “পদ্মাবতী গাহে গীত কোকিলের স্বরে” (Gupta 2009, 92) as “Padma’s voice rang like a koel’s” (Haq 192). In the original, the singing bird is “কোকিল” that is called “cuckoo” in English, but the translator renders it as “koel” in the target text. In the same episode, enchanted by Padma’s beauty and sensuality, when Chand whispers the mantra into her ear, she shouts in a feeling of triumph, “পদ্মা বলে চান্দ তুমি অবোধ চঞ্চলা / কামে অচেতন হয়ে হারালে সকলা” (Gupta 94). Haq carries the lines across as “You are utterly stupid, Chand, you have lost everything because you gave in to lustful desire” (194). The translation of the two verse lines is a bit longwinded in comparison with the original. The couplet could be rendered in a more precise and succinct form—hence an instance of the loss of poetic essence in the translation. But the translator has expressed his view that poetic translation might have been more damaging to the original.

The chapter titled “Eliminating Chand’s Six Sons” is the translation of “ছয় পুত্র বধ” from Gupta’s version titled *Padmapuran*. In this chapter, Neta and Padma hatch a plan to kill Chand’s six sons, because Chand badmouths Padma now and then. The chapter begins:

মহাজ্ঞান গেল চান্দর টুটিলেক বলা
 অধিক পদ্মার সঙ্গে বাধিল কোন্দলা।
 রাত্রি দিন গালি পাড়ে কোপ অহঙ্কারে।
 কোপ মনে বেড়ায় চান্দ সর্প পেলো মারে।
 রাজ্যের ঠাকুর চান্দ পথে দিল থানা।

চম্পক নগর মধ্যে পূজা করল মানা।
 মহাদেবের কন্যা পদ্মা সবে করে ভয়া
 আপন মুখে গালি পাড়ে যত মনে লয়া।
 লঘুর ভর্তসনা আর সহন না যায়।
 দেবতা মনুষ্য বাদ প্রাণে কত সয়া
 কোন মতে করিব চান্দর বংশক্ষয়া। (Gupta 95)

In these lines, there is a reflection of how Padma shows her fury to Chand who not only denies to pay homage to her but belittles her every so often as well. As a goddess, Padma does not stand abjuration by a mortal. She therefore decides to bring misery to Chand's family, killing his near and dear ones. Haq beautifully carries the lines across, retaining, as usual, the essence of the original. Thus goes the translation of the lines, “‘We destroyed his property, he got help to restore it, we eliminated those who restored it, and yet he keeps badmouthing you,’ said Neta to Padma, summing up their campaign against Chand so far. ‘Now we get at those he holds dearest. His wife worships you and is our ally. We will go for his six sons’” (Haq 217). This is simply the substance of what Neta and Padma talk in regard to executing their plan of killing Chand's six sons. Most of the things that Neta and Padma mention in the original text are not directly found in the translation, but the translator, no doubt, remains close to the meaning. The quintessence of the text is skillfully conveyed in the target text.

The most interesting part of this section is how Sonaka and her six daughters-in-law cook for the dinner. In the original, the cooking part is beautifully described in couplets, and it seems impossible to translate this into English. A few lines from the original:

অগ্নি প্রদক্ষিণ করি চাপাইল রন্ধনা
 ডান দিকে ভাত চড়ায় বামেতে ব্যঞ্জন।
 অনেক দিন পরে রান্ধে মনের হরিষা
 ষোল ব্যঞ্জন রান্ধিল নিরামিষা।
 প্রথমে পূজিল অগ্নি দিয়া ঘৃত ধূপা
 নারিকেল কোরা দিয়া রান্ধে মুসুরীর সুপা।
 পাটায় ছেঁচিয়া নেয় পোলতার পাতা।
 বেগুন দিয়া রান্ধে ধনিয়া পোলতা।।
 জ্বরপিত্ত আদি নাশ করার কারণ
 কাঁচা কলা দিয়া রান্ধে সুগন্ধ পাঁচনা।
 জমানি পুড়িয়া ঘূতে করিল ঘন পাকা।

সাজ ঘৃত দিয়া রান্ধে গিমা তিতা শাকা। (Gupta 96)

Those who are familiar with Bengali language may realize how tough it is to translate the above couplets into any language let alone English. Traditional Bengali local items of food and their cooking processes are described here. The recipes are so region and culture specific that one must be in trouble to render them into English. The sixteen recipes of vegetables and their cooking processes are described elaborately—it is indeed a prolonged description, and I have quoted only a few lines from them. But the translator has compacted the whole description into a single paragraph that has successfully captured the original. Haq presents the whole cooking process and the recipes this way:

The cooking began—rice on one stove, accompanying dishes of vegetables, fish, meat on the other. Once the rice was done both stoves were used to cook the latter—of which there was an enormous number. There were sixteen vegetable dishes—various leafy vegetables, plantain, eggplant, the cucurbitaceous *jhinga*, pumpkin, kidney bean, varieties of lentils, arum, all cooked in best-quality ghee, some also with coconut added. For the fish dishes there were carp, catfish, tiger fish, eels, prawns, small varieties of fish. A dish of tender goat’s meat was the last course before several kinds of dessert, rice pudding, sweet cakes, some of them steeped in thickened milk. A whole cookbook could be written about Queen Sonaka’s creations of that evening. She sighed with satisfaction when the last dish was cooked and waited for her husband and children to come in to eat. (223)

Haq’s translation of this part is so precise and summative that a reader can understand the whole cooking part. Gupta describes the sixteen recipes in detail, including the specifics of the ingredients for the recipes. Haq assays to name all the recipes, stating the scientific name and retaining the original in italic on one occasion. He also adds an extra piece of information—“A whole cookbook could be written about Queen Sonaka’s creations of that evening”—which is not available in the original. It may be dubbed as the licence that a literary translator enjoys, and the translator applies it more in translating poetry. It seems that the translator is tempted to add a note on the recipes, but this addition enriches the text rather than incurring any loss as far as translation as a whole is concerned, and his prose reads as if it were a poetic language. This is a conspicuous example of creative translation, as the translator sometimes takes boundless liberties.

Translation of a literary text makes an impact on the readers and critics of both the source text and the target text. Scholars of Translation Studies attempt to discover to what extent the translation does justice to the original. In this respect, Victor Hugo's observation is relevant, "When you offer a translation to a nation, that nation will almost always look on the translation as an act of violence against itself" (qtd. in Lefevere 2). This way translation in general elicits criticism. Target readers and critics, in their primary observations, react the way Hugo indicates in the above statement, but it is undeniable that ". . . different types of texts need to be translated in different ways" (Lefevere 3). The rules of translation are not absolute, which is why the same text may have different versions if more than one translators render the text. From their individual levels, translators take on differing methods and strategies. In Haq's translation, there is, no doubt, a mark of high literariness as he maintains a literary standard, which is certainly suitable for Anglophone readers anywhere in the world. At the same time, simplicity of presentation is another quality of his translation.

In regard to simplicity of translation, Goethe's words are worth noting, "If you want to influence the masses, a simple translation is always best. Critical translations vying with the original really are of use only for conversations the learned conduct among themselves" (qtd. in Lefevere 5). To Goethe, simple and easy presentation through translation is far better than making the target text complex for readers. Simple translation reaches common readers easily, makes a more profound impact on them, touches them, and receives more attention all over the world. *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* can be ascribed as a simplified text in English translated from a complex text in verse in Bengali. Grappling with the original text, unravelling its meaning, even consulting with various experts of the subject, Haq renders it in English with an intent of simplifying the difficult text. In doing so, the translator gives more emphasis on innovation rather than blind representation of the original. In support of this position, Gander's observation is remarkable:

Some readers may question whether such innovative translations represent the original. But I wonder if the goal of 'representing' the original is the goal of translation at all, given that the work is necessarily subjected to alteration, transformation, dislocation, and displacement . . . there are times when NOT 'representing' the original is precisely what permits the creation of something less definitive but more ongoing, a form of translation that amplifies and renews the suppleness of the original poetry's meanings. (228)

This observation, in a true sense, is highly compatible with the aim of evaluating a text like *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*. Gander rightly questions if translation should aim merely to represent the original. According to him, instead of representing the original, the translator needs to “renew the suppleness of the original poetry,” grasping its essence and meaning. Haq does exactly the same—instead of merely rendering *Manasamangal* and representing the original in English, he internalizes its poetic essence, grasps the storyline well, and then retells the tale, altering, transforming, dislocating, and displacing the original.

Conclusion

Although *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* is translated from verse into prose, the text reads as if it were a creative work; in fact, literary translation nowadays enjoys the status of creative work. If the text has lost something, it is predominantly the poetic form and structure, and more importantly rhyme, but the target text reads so well that one feels that it is not a translation. About translation in general, Gander’s observation must be fitting to fine tune the conclusion of this article:

Translation might be considered a frequently borrowed divine apparatus, a warped and leaky alembic for the transference of energy, rhythm, language, and imagination. Its elaborate theories are compelling as ideas – note that Benjamin’s translations of Baudelaire’s Parisian Tableaux are utterly ordinary, not partaking at all of his radical translation theory – because the theories, finally, are not of much practical use. Google Translation is never going to translate literature because literary translation, like literary writing, is an art. After all is said and done, translation is more of a spiritual than a transcriptional activity. (228)

Gander gives translation a lofty place by calling it “a divine apparatus.” The image of “alembic” is fresh, and it creates a powerful metaphor. If translation is an alembic, as Gander compares, “energy, rhythm, language, and” even “imagination” transmit through it. Through translation, a powerful tool, a translator transmits his thoughts, ideas, language, and even his dream and imagination. The statement commends innovation, creation, and freedom that Haq enjoys while translating *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess*. Gander further mentions that translation is an art as well as a spiritual act that cannot be restrained by theories, transcripts, or rules.

The translator of *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* is not bound by any theory or rule or transcript, but House’s argument “. . . a TT is then no longer a translation

but a kind of creative transposition” is applicable to assess the Bengal’s epic as a translated text. Haq leaves various words, phrases, idioms, or even lines from the original text, which are untranslatable or unnecessary for creative translation. However, the translation retains rhythm, flow, fluency, and spontaneity that are the indispensable characteristics of good prose as well as of poetry. What Haq does most is interpret and he, therefore, offers the essence of the original. There are the cases of omissions from the original, but no misrepresentations; there are the instances of mismatches between the original and the translation, but not any superfluity. As the translation is precise and compendious in comparison with the original, there are so many cases of loss, but the issue of gain is undeniable, and therefore the translation is commendable. It is the first narrative of Manasa in modern English, the retelling of a grand tale, which definitely enriches and adds to the valuable treasure of world literature. The Anglophone audience have the opportunity of being familiar with a rare tale from the old tradition of Bengali literature.

Acknowledgement: A short version of this article was presented in an international conference on *Transgressing/ Transcending Borders through Translation*, organized by Department of English, East West University, Bangladesh, during 25-26 January 2019.

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