



Research Article

VARIATIONS IN TRANSLATIONS: VANDE MATARAM

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ABSTRACT

Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay composed the song *Vande Mataram* which was included in his famous novel *Ananda Math*. The song became inspiration for generations of freedom fighters and the utterance “Vande Mataram” became a popular slogan and mantra among them. After independence the song was accepted as the National Song. Different translators at different points of time have translated the song into English. Among these translations most common is by Aurobindo Ghosh or Sri Aurobindo, the freedom fighter turned spiritual leader. There is an anonymous translation which has later been incorporated by Basanta Koomar Roy in his translation of *Ananda Math*. More recently, Julius J. Lipner, a half-Czech and half-Indian Professor of Hinduism and the Comparative Study of Religion, University of Cambridge, has translated the song as part of his translation of the novel *Ananda Math* published last year from OUP. Done in different periods of political history, by translators of different identities and different objectives, these translations share similarities and differences. This paper will attempt a comparative analysis of all these translations from different social, political, religious and linguistic perspectives.

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INTRODUCTION

The song *Vande Mataram* was and is an inspiration for generations of Indians in both pre and post-independence India. The phrase “Vande Mataram” became an extremely popular slogan and mantra for the patriot Indians in general and the freedom fighters in particular. Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay composed the song *Vande Mataram*, supposedly on 7th November 1875 as a ‘filler’ for the periodical *Bangadarshan*. During 1881-82 the song was included in his masterpiece *Ananda Math* when the novel was being published serially in *Bangadarshan* before being published as a book in the year 1882 itself. This novel portrayed the political teaching of Bankim Chandra. In the language of Rabindranath Tagore, “This novel is a legend of the struggle for the freedom and the passion behind it seems to reflect Bankim’s vision of free India.” It was Rabindranath himself who sang *Vande Mataram* in a convention of Indian National Congress in Calcutta in 1896. On 7th September 1905 the Congress session in Varanasi adopted *Vande Mataram* as the national song though this information has been contested by historian Prof Sumit Sarkar. Finally, after independence, the first two stanzas of the song were accepted as the ‘National Song’ whereas the first stanza of *Janaganamana* by Rabindranath Thakur was accorded the status of ‘National Anthem’.

Different translators have translated the song *Vande Mataram* into English at different points of time. Among them, three translations are common and popular. The first translation is by Aurobindo Ghosh or Sri Aurobindo, the freedom fighter turned spiritual leader. The second translation is an anonymous translation which was later incorporated by Basanta Koomar Roy in his English translation of *Ananda Math* published by Orient Paperbacks in 1992. Basanta Koomar Roy introduced the translation of the song as “Translated anonymously, when it was illegal even to utter the word *Bande Mataram*.” Finally, recently, Julius J. Lipner, a half-Czech and half-Indian Professor of Hinduism and the Comparative Study of Religion, University of Cambridge, has translated the song as part of his translation of the novel *Ananda Math* published last year from Oxford University Press, New York. Translated in different perspectives of political history, by translators of different nationalities, identities and objectives, these translations share certain similarities and differences. This paper attempts a comparative analysis of all these translations.

The first thing about these translations that strikes the eye, if they are put side by side, is the difference of length of the three translations. The translation by Aurobindo is of 266 words, the anonymous translation is of 159 words whereas the translation by Lipner is of 212 words. Surprisingly, the original Sanskrit-Bengali song composed by Bankim Chandra is of just 94 words, certainly due to his formation and use of Sanskrit or Sanskritised compound words. Of course, where there is such a huge difference in the number of words of translations in the same target language, they are bound to differ significantly.

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In fact, the very phrase *Vande Mataram* has been translated in different ways in the three translations. Aurobindo translated it as “Mother, I bow to thee!” The anonymous translator translated it as “Mother, hail!” Lipner translated the phrase as “I revere the Mother!” The word meaning of ‘Vande’ perhaps lies somewhere between worship and expression of deep respect. In that sense, all the three translations are close to the original.

In the translation of Sri Aurobindo we find different Target language expressions for the same word “Mataram”. Here he added some phrases or adjectives absent in the original text to express his respect the Mother and to describe her. For example he used phrases like “Mother of might” (stanza 1), “Mother free” (stanza 1), “Mother I kiss thy feet” (l. 12) and the like. This translation strategy of addition culminated at the concluding portion of the translation where he translated “Mataram” in three lines as “Mother, mother mine!/ Mother sweet, I bow to thee,/ Mother great and free!” Similarly, towards the end of the fourth stanza Aurobindo has added a triplet which was absent in the original text: “To her cry who ever her foeman drove/ Back from plain and Sea/ And shook herself free.” In these additions we find the patriotic zeal of an ardent freedom fighter in describing his ‘*Deshmatrika*’, motherland. The political context of British India and freedom struggle, in which Sri Aurobindo was an active participant, forced him to take this freedom as a translator to mention ‘free’ mother repeatedly where this adjective was absent in the original text. In this context, we must remember that Aurobindo Ghose acknowledged Bankim Chandra as his political guru. In Aurobindo’s own language “Of the new spirit which is leading the nation to resurgence and independence, Bankim Chandra Chatterji is the inspirer and the political guru... His was the sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose.”

The anonymous translation, the shortest of these three, on the contrary, for reasons unknown, omitted some passages, lines and expressions- particularly towards the end of the song. For example, final two lines in the sixth stanza “tomari protima gaRi/ mandire mandire” are left untranslated in the target text. Similarly, the references of Laxmi (“Kamala kamaladala vihaariNii”) and Saraswati (“vaNii vidyaadaayinii”) in the seventh stanza are left untranslated in the translated version. In this stanza “Durgaa dashapraharaNadhaariNii” i.e Durgaa with ten weapons” has been substituted as “Himalaya-crested one, rivalless” in the English translation. However, in the first half of the translation, the translator did not show any tendency of omitting or deleting. Rather, like the translation of Sri Aurobindo, it tended to add certain elements while translating the natural beauty of the country. For example, in the first stanza, ‘sujalaaM’ has been translated as ‘Thou with sweet springs flowing’, ‘suphalaaM’ as ‘Thou fair fruits bestowing’, ‘malayaja shiitalaaM’ as ‘Cool with zephyrs blowing’. There are similar such examples in the second and the third stanzas too. Thus a clear shift of translation style is observed in this translated text from the beginning towards the end- a shift from addition to omission.

Among these three translations the one by Julius J. Lipner followed the original text most closely. He approached the original text here from an objective, impassionate and academic standpoint. Thus he translated ‘sujalaaM suphalaaM’ as just ‘Rich in waters, rich in fruit’ while Aurobindo translated the phrase as ‘Rich with thy hurrying streams, bright with orchard gleams’. Lipner’s style of precision is more

clearly visible when we compare the translations of the line ‘abalaa keno ma eto bale’ (in the third stanza) in all three translations. In Aurobindo it is ‘Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands’, in the anonymous translation it is ‘Yet with all this power now,/ Mother, wherefore powerless thou?’ but Lipner translated it as ‘Powerless? How so, Mother’. Again, the two pre-independence translations by Aurobindo and the anonymous translator used some archaic words like ‘thee’, ‘thou’, ‘thine’, ‘art’, ‘hath’, ‘dost’ etc and the style here is somewhat grand and high, but the English of Lipner is in contemporary, moderate and suitable for the target readers of twenty-first century.

Another significant point is that the ‘Motherland’ referred in the original song and the novel itself is not ‘Bharatmata’ but ‘Bangamata’. This is why the third stanza of the original poem begins with ‘sapta koTi kanTha kalakalaninaadakaraale’ etc. referring to the then population of Bengal which was ‘sapta koTi’ i.e. ‘seven crores’. During the freedom struggle when the song began to be treated as ‘National song’ and the motherland began to mean ‘Bharatmata’ instead of ‘Bangamata’ the phrase ‘sapta koTi’ was substituted by ‘triNgso koTi’ i.e. ‘thirty crores’ to be in tune with the then population of India. Finally, the phrase was made ‘koTi koTi’ meaning ‘crores of’ to remain relevant with the ever-increasing population of the country. In the translations too we find variation of this number. While Sri Aurobindo and Lipner maintains the original figure ‘sapta koTi’ and translated the phrase as ‘seventy millions’ the anonymous translator considers the original to be ‘triNgso koTi’ and translated the number as ‘three hundred million’.

Thus, among these translations, Sri Aurobindo’s translation added many elements which were absent in the original text. Of course these additions are not to an extent for which the target language text can be called an adoption instead of translation, but it can easily be said it was Sri Aurobindo’s patriotic passion which drove him to take more liberty as a translator than usual. In fact, he started a newspaper in Calcutta titled ‘Bande Mataram’ with its policy printed boldly on the cover page: “India for Indians”. The anonymous translation suffered from an inconsistency. It tended to shift in its style as well as method- from addition in the beginning to omission towards the end. This results in the loss of certain expressions, references and descriptions which are vital to the beauty and completeness of the original song. The translation by Julius J. Lipner is the closest to the original text. This translation is precise yet it covers all the descriptive elements of the original text by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. Yet the grand archaic style and music of the original song is to some extent lost here for the sake of readability and acceptability to the modern target reader of the English translation of the novel.

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