

REFLECTIONS

THE RISK OF BECOMING:

Notes on translation and transformation



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

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Translation is risk, and poetry is the highest form of risk. To translate a poem is to follow it into the flame, risking that what survives the burning is no longer what first arrived. Accepting this, I have undertaken the translation of Late Prabuddha Sundar Kar's Bangla poem "Jhuki" into English. The poem, originally published as the first poem in the poet's *Mayatant* (2001) collection, appears below.

Jhuki

Etodin jake dekhā gelo, se amār dāmi
Etodin amār hoye se águner bhetor
jhapiye porechhe

Ek śūnyatā thekē vōl̄ kheyē chīṭke
porechhe arék śūnyatā

Ghumer bhetor samudra swapna ar
boba dhwani bhar niye madhyarate se
jege uthechhe

Je patar arale kuyaśār cheye aspaṣṭa
meyerā padma photay

Sei patar opor assthira jalabindu
hoye amake se etodin arale rekhechhe

Aj theke dāmi shoriye sampurṇa
jhuki nite chāi

The act of "vōl̄ kheyē chīṭke porechhe arék śūnyatā" (vaulting outward) suggested abrupt propulsion. The psyche does not glide from one emotional void to another. It is hurled. This creates a kinetic structure in the poem, a movement through emptiness that gave the translation its spine: vaulting outward from one emptiness and flung into another. A rhythmic echo of the poem's vertigo.

is encountering the ghost of an ego constructed for survival. This dummy is not a puppet. It is a provisional self that has substituted true experience. The translator needed to preserve this psychic distance. Keeping the English line impersonal protects the poem's dissociated gaze.

Walter Benjamin wrote that the translator must reveal the relationship between languages that is hidden inside the original text. According to him, translation is not a copy. It is a continuation of the poem's "afterlife." In "Jhuki," that afterlife is already embedded in the poem. The speaker stands on the edge of a transformation that has already begun. The poem itself is in a state of metamorphosis. So the translation must become part of that change rather than simply describing it. Its tense is not retrospective but continuously happening. So the translation remains in the present perfect—the tense of ongoing transformation rather than closure.

The imagery of leaping into fire provided another challenge. The instinct of an insect rushing to flame is not heroic. It is a compulsion of desire and destruction. Freud named this compulsion the death drive (Todestrieb). A desire for release through self ruin. The dummy absorbs the death drive. The real self is preserved by letting the false self burn. Bangla diction evokes this helplessness. Therefore, English needed to resist the temptation of romanticising the leap. "It has rushed into fire" restores the instinctive self-harm that the original contains. The dummy is driven by its own self-annihilation, perhaps because that is the only way to keep the true self untouched.

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The lines "Ghumer bhetor samudra swapna ar boba dhwani bhar niye" (carrying ocean dreams in sleep and the weight of voiceless sound) and "madhyarate se jege uthechhe" (It has awakened in the middle of the

night) form the poem's deepest point of psychic tension. Within "ghumer bhetor" (within sleep), the self is submerged in the interior landscape of the unconscious, drifting through "samudra swapna" (ocean dreams) that recall Freud's notion of the "oceanic feeling," that primordial sense of dissolution before the birth of selfhood. Yet those dreams are burdened with "boba dhwani bhar" (the weight of voiceless sound), an image of language

In translation, this demanded a rhythm that mirrors the slow breaking of a wave: Carrying ocean-dreams in sleep / and the weight of voiceless sound, / It has awakened / in the middle of the night. The cadence holds the pulse of emergence, as if consciousness itself is surfacing from darkness, trembling with the knowledge that every awakening carries the risk of unmaking what was safe.

Then comes the mist. And girls

ঁুকি

এতদিন যাকে দেখা গেল, সে আমার ডামি

এতদিন আমার হয়ে সে আগুনের ভেতর ঝাঁপিয়ে পড়েছে

এক শূন্যতা থেকে ভল্ট থেয়ে ছিটকে পড়েছে আরেক শূন্যতায়

ঘুমের ভেতর সমুদ্রস্থ আর বোবাধনির ভার নিয়ে মধ্যরাতে সে জেগে উঠেছে

যে পাতার আড়ালে কুয়াশার চেয়ে অস্পষ্ট মেয়েরা পদ্ম ফোটায়

সেই পাতার ওপর অস্থির জলবিন্দু হয়ে আমাকে সে এতদিন আড়ালে রেখেছে

আজ থেকে ডামি সরিয়ে সম্পূর্ণ ঝুকি নিতে চাই।

trapped inside emotion, where sound exists without articulation. This is the gravity of repression, a language that has not yet found its mouth. When the poem reaches "madhyarate se jege uthechhe", that awakening is not gentle but seismic. The dummy rises involuntarily, compelled by the pressure of what it has carried through sleep. Psycholinguistically, this is the moment of passage from affect into speech, from latency into consciousness. The night becomes the porous threshold where silence begins to turn into utterance.

summoning lotuses into bloom. Here, the language enters a dream-topography. Psycholinguistically, the unconscious voice emerges in metaphors that bypass the rational. The dummy becomes a droplet of water, hiding the true self. The translator must learn to listen to the silence inside metaphors. Behind the leaf is not a place. It is a sanctuary of concealment. A secret interior scene. Translation has to protect that intimacy of concealment, because the poem's revelation emerges only from hiding.

Carrying ocean dreams in sleep and the weight of voiceless sound,
It has awakened in the middle of the night.

Behind the leaf where mist-blurred girls summon blooming lotuses,
It has kept me hidden so far as a restless waterdrop upon that leaf.

From today, sloughing the dummy, I want to take the full risk.

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POETRY

Somewhere but not here



PHOTO: MAISHA SYEDA

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Tea breaks,
the perks of a bike ride.
A tea stall on the highway
is like the navel of a belly dancer.
The one at Chhaygharia Mor is
famous for its lemon tea,
a steam of lemon leaf and clove
that builds a dam against the
road's long thoughts.
Stopping there, I saw a signboard
pointing toward

Indira Model Govt. Primary School.
What's Indira doing in Satkhira? I
wondered.

I feel a strange urge to visit the
narrow lanes
whenever I come to a crossroad—
these narrow lanes call me to
wander.
Sometimes I go even,
just to discover—it leads me to the
same village
where jealousy fuels the everyday.

For me—it's like an attractive
distant woman
a thousand efforts to draw near,
only to find out—
it's all the same.
And in that moment, a ghost of a
song:
arriving somewhere but not here.

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