

## Translation review

### A TRANSLATION OR A MIS-TRANSLATION?

*My Story and My Life as an Actress*

**Edited and translated by Rimli Bhattacharya**

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Translation is absolutely indispensable for a wide readership. It is the only way by which a text in one language can be read by someone who is not familiar with that particular language. Thus the translator has a very important role to play. A translator should be aware that it is she who is going to introduce the author to the people who cannot comprehend the language of the original. She should desist from using such words and expressions as were not meant by the author. He might have the capability to express the thoughts of the author far better than author himself has done; but then his job is merely to translate the text and not to improve upon it. This is one view of literary translation

Rimli Bhattacharya's translation of the autobiography of Binodini Dasi, the eminent theatre personality of the late nineteenth century Bengali stage – *Amar Katha* and *Amar Abhinetri Jiban* may be cited as an example of how a translation should not be carried out. Not that she is translating something out of the blue, but that she is utterly careless, even feckless about it. In her hurry to finish and be done with job, she makes lots of mistakes that could have been easily avoided had she been more diligent. So much so that one simply cannot rely on what she writes – one has to re-check it in the Bengali original!

Firstly, Rimli Bhattacharya does not explicitly state which version of Binodini's autobiographies served as her primary text. She writes, "This book is greatly indebted to the editors of the Bangla text of Binodini's selected works, Soumitra Chattopadhyay and Nirmalya Acharya". But in the bibliography she also mentions *Nati Binodini Rachana Samagra* edited by Asutosh Bhattacharya. Now any reader will not guess that there can be any difference in the main body of the text in this book and *Amar Katha o Anyanya Rachana* by the joint editors. More so when Asutosh Bhattacharya says that in her second edition of her *Amar Katha*, Binodini does not make any alteration to the text of the first edition, but merely added the Preface written by Girish Chandra Ghosh and a dedication. But he goes wrong. Binodini did make some additions and Rimli Bhattacharya translated them. To avoid confusion, the translator should have mentioned the name of the editor of the Bengali text she has used for translating.

Now onto Rimli Bhattacharya's translation. Binodini was made to come back to the Star Theatre due to the authority of Gurmukh Rai as the proprietor and the imploring of Girish Chandra Ghosh. But this has been translated as "... it was only because of Girish-babu's concern for me and by virtue of his authority as a shareholder...". When the Star Theatre was to be sold by Gurmukh Rai, he wanted Binodini to have half the share, if not actually be the proprietor. But this has been translated as "If Binod does not agree to this...", which is not the correct rendering of the original. Rimli Bhattacharya translates a speech of the play *Chaitanya Lila* as "In Gaya I saw at Krishna's feet...". But we all know that it is not Krishna, but Vishnu who is worshipped at Gaya and Girish Chandra Ghosh too correctly mentions it. 'Antah Krishna Bahih Radha' has been translated as 'Krishna within and Radha without'. This does not make sense. Binodini tells us that she used to faint while performing in *Chaitanya Lila*. She could continue only after regaining her consciousness, but felt weak doing it. She adds that it

was not so on a particular occasion when Father Lafont was present. Rimli Bhattacharya puts it as “I did not continue with my performance *lifelessly*...” Even today anyone can say that Binodini’s performance in this play, or for that matter in any other play, was never “lifeless”. The translation goes on – in the second part of *Chaitanya Lila*, Binodini in the eponymous role required the portrayal of ‘madness’. Was this saint ever *mad*? He used to go into ecstasies, but never into fits of madness. Later on Binodini complains against the society that does not allow prostitutes to admit their children to schools; but the translator says that they are prevented from *building* schools! Binodini talks about the divine purity of her daughter and Rimli Bhattacharya renders it thus: “In that loving, trusting heart of hers was manifested the purity of the Goddess Devi...” Does the translator want to add another to our existent thirty-three crores of divine beings? Again, a nonsensical song in Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi’s skit has been translated as :

“I am the big saheb of the world and you a little one  
I eat shrimps and you live on onions”.

But if correctly translated, the second line should read

“You eat shrimps and I live on onions”.

About the staging of *Kapalkundala* at the Bengal Theatre, Binodini writes Hari Baishnab and Biharilal Chattopadhyay appeared as Nabakumar and Kapalik respectively and that the latter looked dreadful in his make-up. In Rimli Bhattacharya’s translation Baishnab looked dreadful in the guise of Kapalik! There is a mistake in the transliteration of the name of a Bengali journal *Rup o Ranga* – it has been written “*Roop o Rang*”.

Rimli Bhattacharya commits some other types of errors too. The cover of the book bears a picture of Binodini in the male attire of Sarojini in *Sarat – Sarojini*. But Rimli Bhattacharya forgets to

mention it. She writes that Golapsundari died in 1890, but performed in *Anandamath* in 1898! She further writes about the National Theatre splitting into the National and the Hindu National after February 1874. But the split dates earlier. She mentions Gopinath Shethi's sub-lease of the National Theatre in 1871. But it may be noted that the first public theatre of Bengal opened on December 7, 1872. *The Police of Pig and Sheep* is mentioned as the *Police of Sheep and Pigs*. She further writes that the British announced the Dramatic Performances Control Bill in 1875. But the Bill was introduced in 1876.

This book bristling with such errors has been published by none other than Kali for Women, New Delhi. The publishers too could not resist making some contributions to the already numerous errors sprinkled throughout the book. The picture of Binodini in the costume of Gopa in *Buddhadeb Charit* has been described as "‘Srijukta Binodini’ as Sahana in male attire in Girishchandra's ‘*Mohini Protima*’. And the picture of the actress as Sahana is described as that of Binodini as Gopa! Such blunders are intriguing.

One feels that even with the slightest attention, most of the errors could have been avoided. It is true that there may be errors and a good translation may also be improved. One expects more care to be taken by an experienced academician like Rimli Bhattacharya.

However it may be said to the credit of Rimli Bhattacharya that she aptly translates Binodini's cries of despair and her complaints against the society for the plight of prostitutes. She goes wrong in one instance. She wrongly states about the latter being stopped from building schools, but elsewhere she is faithful to the original. Rimli Bhattacharya has chosen the correct words while translating the portions where Binodini speaks out her mind. The words of the actress where she unburdens her soul are typically Indian. It is very difficult to put them in English. But they way Rimli

Bhattacharya has done this does is highly commendable. It does not show the forcing of the idiom of one language into that of another. Though Rimli Bhattacharya's translation of Binodini's autobiographies is unsatisfactory, it must be said that her work has made easier the job of the future translators of the Bengali actress. They can see how the Bengali words have been rendered into English and thus improve upon it. Moreover Rimli Bhattacharya is the first to bring the works of Binodini to those who do not know Bengali. Students of drama will now be able to profit by reading the autobiographies of an actress who performed about a hundred and thirty years ago. Besides Binodini vividly paints the days in which she lived. So students of social studies will also benefit from the translation.

Thus Rimli Bhattacharya's translation has increased the scope of research on Binodini as well as on the nineteenth century Bengali theatre.

What is urgently needed is a more meticulous and faithful translation of Binodini's autobiographies.

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