



BOOK REVIEW

A Book Review of NABAL JOMI, the Bengali Translation of Jhumpa Lahiri's Diasporic Novel

THE LOWLAND

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(*Nabal Jomi* (Translated): Poulomi Dasgupta, Date of Publication : 2014

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The Bengali Diaspora of the West largely structures its sensibilities on the tradition inherited from their Asian origin , but when it comes to pre-dominantly talking about them , the diasporic authors fall short of expressions that would often appear inadequate to their brethren on the other side of the globe. The non-translability of a Indian Bengali mindscape into a language (English), linguistically ill-equipped for the purpose, constantly and obdurately remains protuberant even where the authenticity of the landscape of Calcutta (now officially Kolkata) mesmerizes, in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*.

What intervenes, is the double inheritance of their institutionalized Western upbringing that largely eclipses the Asian mode of self-expression. Lahiri appears to have conformed to this unanimously accepted tradition.

Although *The Lowland*, entwines cultures across different time frames, yet Lahiri's reframing and representation of a Bengali mindscape and sensitivities of the last decades of the preceding millennium is but an assortment of objective informations, that documentations had to offer. It had hardly anything to contribute in constructing psyches or subjectivities, leaving inadequately represented characters, an average Indian Bengali, if not an American would consider allegedly inappropriate for the time and space they represented. Perhaps the best explanation to counter this allegation, would be to consider the fact , that Lahiri was herself

into a rigorous process of translating a Bengali culture to meet the demands of her readers across the globe. The transnational appeal of *The Lowland* had little to delve into the deeper Bengali psyche and culture, that English as a language failed to express, having no cultural equivalence or even relevance.

To a Bengali reader, however, this lacunae was filled with a translation of the same by Poulomi Dasgupta, titled *NabalJomi* that literally translates the English one. The Bengali translation brought into the text an appropriateness of expression inspite of the gaps and fissures that Lahiri's content betrayed.

Had the English text been a diasporic saga, in the first place, solely, it would have escaped a critical eye, but, perhaps Dasgupta's translation replenished the text with a linguistic appropriateness that contributed to its authenticity, as a historical text. The complete comprehension of the socio-political context, coupled with the social conditioning it requires behind its structuring, demands in the first place a nurturing, which growing up in a place that had been the witness to the historical events *The Lowland* has documented, can afford us, rather than a institutionalized study. The authorial views were insufficient to culturally translate subjectivities, which however the Bengali translation coloured the content with. Language can be carried over to other cultures and context, but often a lack of equivalence between the source and target languages leads to failure at explicitness, meanings remaining understated. Dasgupta's translation *Nabal Jomi* reconnects Lahiri's text to its roots, with its linguistic tool, lending it more palatable to Indian Bengalis, who would prefer movements like Naxalism to be rendered in a tongue that was instrumental in channelizing the movement itself. Lahiri cannot and must not be castigated for what she failed at, given the content that had a transnational appeal, but a textual translation brought our expectations to fruition, offering multitudinous ways of considering the facts in Bengali. Lahiri's reading of the female of her novel, Gauri, widowed and living under social constraints in her first husband's home, which is also that of her second husband's,

and her mother-in-law's silent retaliation to their elopement and the eventual death of her second son Udayan, Gauri's first husband, in no way matches Lahiri's dextrous handling of Bela's character, in a Westernized ambiance, she herself being more familiar with it.

Lahiri has tried to explore womanhood with its different shades, where each individual experience is taken into account, with all its contradictoriness and tried to redefine it in the light of an Indian indigenous and a diasporic experience, an attempt in which Dasgupta's Bengali translation has corroborated the former which could be best explicated in Bengali. The Bengali translation of Lahiri was instrumental in authentically depicting the cultural atmosphere in which the tale was rooted and here a translator's social conditioning outweighed what would only remain stunted in a Diasporic author's half-expressed rendition. Having a critical undertone, this review does not aim to underestimate a Booker Prize Awardee, but the inadequacy of a language in being the cultural expression of another. The source language, structures a content best sculpted and represented in the target language which is Bengali, in which case, *Nabal Jomi* has an edge in its style over *The Lowland*. The historicity of the novel, one of the causes why it reached out to strengthen its grip over the intelligentsia across nations, failed but narrowly to satisfy the *gourmei* Bengali reader whose recognition was obtained by the linguistic reconstruction of the novel in Bengali. The translation surmounted the original in leaving an impact on the Bengali mindset, searching those identifiable individuals in the text, who had previously escaped a thorough study that a competent linguistic rendition of the original, availed. The broken edges received a finesse through this translation of *The Lowland*, that excelled in content, if not in the linguistic medium applied. Lahiri was more at ease in sketching the Americanized Indians with whom she shared a common inherited cultural expression. Dasgupta's translation was absorbed into the Bengali homes in India who are otherwise unaccustomed to the blatant superficiality in the characterization of an average Bengali, they themselves identify with---an alleged flaw, they

judged/mis-judged to be culpable in the original text. A scrutiny of the translation tells that, it concretized the characterization which, otherwise eluded a reader expecting a more wholesome presentation. *Nabal Jomi* consequently is more Bengali in its appeal, than the transnational original text which is inadvertently a milestone for the Indian Diaspora of the West.