

***Rūpāntar* as *Ropoṇa*¹ : Forming a Third Meaning of *Rūpāntar* by Comparing it with the Biological Metaphor of ‘Adaptation’²**

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Thinking adaptation metaphorically as traffic - a physical, intercultural mobility in between dialects, geographies and climates accompanying both flows and interruptions; movability and immovability; licit exchange and illicit trades, the proposed paper will try to revisit the term ‘adaptation’ and then will turn towards the Sanskrit/Bengali word “*rupāntar*” – often synonymously used with the word “adaptation” and make an attempt of equating the ideas of *rupāntar* and ‘adaptation’ going into the botanic metaphor and viewing it through the prism of the theory of evolution of species as forwarded by Charles Darwin in the nineteenth century. It will pay particular attention on terminological insights of both ‘adaptation’ and *rūpāntar* and try to understand how they carry the botanic metaphor of ‘plantation’. Taking Shelly’s concept of ‘transplanting seeds’ to be a point of entry, this paper will try to discover the translator/adaptor as a *ropoka* (planter) and attempt to analyze different layers of the botanic metaphor located into the term *ropoka*. This will be possible because the study of lexicons will unfold a very interesting but hitherto unattended fact that the concept of *rūpāntar* in Bengali is also related to the idea of *ropoṇa* or planting besides the well attested meanings like ‘change in form’ and ‘change in beauty’ (Trivedi 2014, Tymoczko 2006).

Keywords: adaptation, *rūpāntar*, Darwin, plantation, Shelly, botanic, *ropoṇa*.

I

The following research stemmed from an idea of studying the tradition of *rūpāntar* vis-à-vis the practice of adaptation and the adventure of digging

¹ This paper is a part of the thesis titled “Rethinking ‘anubad’ and ‘rupantar’ in Bangla in the Context of Adaptations of Plays by Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay”, submitted for the MPhil degree in Translation Studies from the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies, University of Hyderabad, India.

² The diacritical marks have been given in this paper according to the National Library at Kolkata romanisation transliteration scheme.

deeper into the lexical meaning of the words like ‘adaptation’ and *rūpāntar* thus begun. Such a task was accomplished by going through a number of dictionaries and lexicons thoroughly that existed in the nineteenth century Bengal. The nineteenth century was taken as the point of beginning for the obvious reason that the earliest Bengali lexicon could be traced to this century. This paper will then try to contest the traditional notion of ‘adaptation’ by exploring the etymological origin of this very term at the same time it will attempt to establish a strong organic connection with the Darwinian concept of adaptation.

Etymological Origin of ‘Adaptation’

Exploring the lexical entry of the term ‘adaptation’³ will demonstrate the fact that it has been derived from the French word *adaptation* which in turn came directly from the Late Latin word *adaptationem* (nominative *adaptatio*), which again is a noun of action from past participle stem of *adaptare* and according to Ernest Klein’s *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (1966) *adaptare* connotes ‘to fit, adjust, adapt’ (Klein 1966: 11). The French term *adaptation* around 1600 meant “action of adapting” which from 1670s changed into “condition of being adapted”. The sense of “modification of a thing to suit new conditions” came from 1790s. The biological sense in the term was first recorded in Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859.

As natural selection acts by competition, it adapts the inhabitants of each country only in relation to the degree of perfection of their associates; so that we need feel no surprise at the inhabitants of any one country, although on the ordinary view supposed to have been specially created and adapted for that country, being beaten and supplanted by the naturalised productions from another land (Darwin 1859: 410).

James Donald edited *Chambers’s Etymological Dictionary* (1872) too, has mentioned that the term ‘adaptation’ implies “*the act of making suitable, the state of being suitable*” (Donald 1872: 5). Adaptation, therefore, in the biological sense means the current state of being of an organism in a particular habitat or environment and also to the dynamic evolutionary system that leads to the adaptation. It is Darwin who has reorganized the relationship between an organism and its environment which was seen as a fixed relationship earlier. According to him, with the climate changing, the habitat changes, and as the habitat reshapes, the organism mutates with the environment. When the environment changes, there are three things that may happen to a living organism, e.g., a) habitat tracking,⁴ b) genetic change⁵ or c)

³ See the etymological entry ‘adaptation’ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/adaptation>

⁴ See Eldredge, Niles. *Reinventing Darwin: the great evolutionary debate*. Wiley, N.Y. (1995): 64. Print.

extinction.⁶ Of these three types, genetic change accomplishes adaptation. We will explain it further after combing the lexical archive of the term *rupāntar*.

Now if we look into the Adaptation Studies scholarship we will hit upon the definition of “Adaptation” by Georges L. Bastin:

a set of translative interventions which result in a text that is not generally accepted as a translation but is nevertheless recognized as representing a source text. As such, the term may embrace numerous vague notions such as appropriation, domestication, imitation, REWRITING, and so on. Strictly speaking, the concept of adaptation requires recognition of translation as non-adaptation, a somehow more constrained mode of transfer. For this reason, the history of adaptation is parasitic on historical concepts of translation (Baker 1998: 3).

As we can see, this section of ‘Adaptation’ in the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies* addresses ‘adaptation’ as a deviance from the source text. An adaptation is loosely based on the source text but its existence as a “non-translation” allows it to take liberty and make desired additions and alterations in the source text. In the process of pointing out the difference between these two terms, Bastin has defined ‘translation’ somewhat as a “constrained mode of transfer”. Here he has only slightly hinted at the difference between the two concepts which are often confused as synonyms but actually entails a vast gap between the two practices. The debates about whether the act of adaptation may be considered within the purview of “translation proper” can be perhaps traced back to the olden times. Throughout human history there have been philosophical debates about the nature, purposes and functions of these two. However, it is important to note that ‘adaptation’ has been seen as a branch of the discipline of translation studies and it needs to be mentioned here that Bastin has argued that there is a kind of ‘creative operation’ and ‘re-dimensioning’ hidden in the term ‘adaptation’ and therefore it has been tagged as ‘infidel’.⁷ Thomas Leitch (2008: 63) has mentioned that theorists as far back as George Bluestone attacked the process of ‘adaptation’ from within the fidelity discourse from where Robert Stam and Alessandra Reango’s monumental project *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (2005) and *A Companion to Literature and Film* (2007) quested after the ‘reorientation’ of ‘adaptation studies’.⁸

⁵ See Orr, H. “The genetic theory of adaptation: a brief history”. *Nature Reviews Genetics* 6 (2) (2005). : 119-127. Web. <http://www.nature.com/nrg/journal/v6/n2/full/nrg1523.html>

⁶ See Koh, Lian Pih; Dunn, RR; Sodhi, NS; Colwell, RK; Proctor, HC; Smith, VS. “Species Coextinctions and the Biodiversity Crisis”. *Science* 305.5690 (2004): 1632–1634. Web. <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/305/5690/1632>

⁷ See the entry of ‘adaptation’ by Georges L. Bastin in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies* (1998) edited by Mona Baker.

⁸ See <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4c45/c7031cc297274b55b5ad9acb96145aaea1ee.pdf>

Katja Krebs (2014), in her essay, “Introduction: Collisions, Diversions and Meeting Points” has discussed about the relationship between translation and adaptation. According to her, “Translation and adaptation – as both practices and products – are an integral and intrinsic part of our global and local political and cultural experiences, activities and agendas” (Krebs 2014: 1). But ‘translation’ and ‘adaptation’ have been placed as two opposite binaries – one is bounded by the linguistic equivalence and the other guided by creative faculty and therefore free from any kind of linguistic confinement. V. Demetska (2011: 15) has cited the fact in his essay, “Translational Adaptation: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives” that adaptation has been seen as a ‘stepdaughter’ of translational studies. But both the methods – ‘translation’ and ‘adaptation’ are ‘rewriting of texts’. It is a well-known fact that Roman Jakobson in his seminal essay “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” (Venuti 2004: 114) broadly categorised the process of translation as ‘intra-lingual’, ‘inter-lingual’ and ‘inter-semiotic’ and according to him, “inter-semiotic translation” is “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems” or ‘transmutation’.⁹ This “inter-semiotic translation” has largely been understood as ‘adaptation’ because there is a change of medium happening. The text that existed in the spoken or written medium is now to be translated and produced in the medium of both verbal and non-verbal signs. This means the removal of the text from its own comfortable habitat to that of the realm of different signifying system which creates certain demands on the text in order to be fully represented. Therefore, the text has to be modified in a way that it can easily fit and accommodate in this new domain. It is to be noted here, that the term adaptation is not necessarily refer to inter-semiotic transfer only. Inter-lingual transfers are also considered as adaptations. The term ‘adaptation’ has been categorized in to a lot of terminologies which according to John Milton has created a lot of problems, with a large number of terms i.e., ‘recontextualization’, ‘tradaptation’, ‘spinoff’, ‘reduction’, ‘simplification’, ‘condensation’, ‘abridgement’ and ‘revision’ (Pym & Perekrestenko 2009: 51). Julie Sanders (2006: 26) in her book, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, emphasizes that an “adaptation” will usually contain omissions, rewritings, maybe additions, but will still be recognized as the work of the original author, where the original point of enunciation remains.

Coming back to the etymology of the word “adaptation”, the stem *adapt-* in early fifteenth century denotes “to fit (something for some purpose)” which stems from Middle French *adapter* which again comes from Latin *adaptare*, expresses “adjust”. The meaning “to undergo modification so as to fit new circumstances” has been associated with the word *adapt* from 1956.¹⁰ As *Chamber’s Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* has suggested

⁹ See Jakobson, Roman. “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation”, Lawrence Venuti (ed) *The Translation Studies Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 126-132. Print.

¹⁰ See <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=adaptation>

that the term *adaptation* has entries like “the act of making suitable”; “the state of being suitable”; “fitness” which brings forth a few synonymous associations to our mind, for instance, “version”, “modification”, “adjustment”, and “accommodation” etc., with the resultant understanding that adaptation implies adjustments made by an organism or a piece of literary work and the modifications it has to undergo in order to accommodate in an environment other than that of its origin.

II

With this understanding of the term “adaptation”, the proposed paper will turn towards the Bengali/Sanskrit word “*rūpāntar*” – often synonymously and sometimes erroneously used with the word “adaptation” and investigate how the term and the practice ‘*rūpāntar*’ in Bengal has been equated with the term and practice of ‘adaptation’. It will pay particular attention on terminological insights of both ‘adaptation’ and *rūpāntar* and try to understand how they carry the botanic metaphor of ‘plantation’.

Revisiting the Etymological Root of *Rūpāntar*

Rūpāntar is constructed by combining two Sanskrit words *rūp* and *antar*. The word *Rūp* means ‘form’ and *antar* means ‘change’; therefore *rūpāntar* denotes ‘transformation of a text’ and would be equivalent to words like ‘rendition’, ‘adaptation’ and ‘version’. This means that the text has not undergone a word for word translation; rather it has undergone a ‘change of the form’ and has been given a new shape.¹¹

If we start the chronological voyage through dictionaries we will see that the word *rup* in Monier-Williams’ *Sanskrit to English Dictionary* (1872), not only means ‘form’, ‘figure’ and ‘beauty’ but also contains meanings like *ropa* and *ropita*. It is a curious fact because according to the same lexicon, the term *ropa* means ‘the act of raising or setting up’ and the entry of *ropita* begins with ‘the act of planting (trees/saplings) or sowing’.

¹¹ It will be fascinating to note that the word *rupāntar* does not exist in the dictionaries/lexicons/ vocabularies published in the nineteenth century Bengal. Though the dictionaries published in between 1800 to 1900 do mention *rup* and *antar* in separate entries but the composite word *rupāntar* is completely absent. None of the dictionaries for example, Henry Pitts Foster’s *A Vocabulary in Two Parts, Bongalee and English, And Vice Versa (Part II)*, published in 1802, or William Carey’s *A Dictionary of the Bengalee Language (Vol. II, Part I & 2)* published in 1825, or Tarachand Chukruburtee’s *A Dictionary in Bengalee and English*, printed at the Baptist Mission Press in 1827, or *A Dictionary, Bengali and Sanskrit: Explained in English and Adapted for Students of Either Language to which is added an Index, Serving as a Reversed Dictionary*, a Bengali-English bilingual dictionary published from London in 1833 and compiled by Graves C. Haughton, or Rev. William Yates’ *A Dictionary in Sanskrit and English, Designed for the Private Students and of Indian Colleges and Schools (1846)*, or *Bengali and English Dictionary, for the Use of Schools (1856)* published by School Book Society, Calcutta, have given place to the composite term *rupāntar* in between their jackets.

rūp: 1. ropā, 2. ropita (connected with rt. I. *ruh*), Ved. the earth. (Monier-Williams, 1872: 850)

Since the term *rūp* has been equated with *ropā* and *ropita*, so it is necessary to look at the entries of these two words in the same vocabulary. According to him, *ropā* means in one word ‘plantation’ and *ropita* is ‘planted’:

ropā: (fr. the Caus of rt. 1. *ruh*), the act of raising or setting up... (fr. the Caus of rt. 2. *ropita*); the planting (of trees).

ropoka, planter.

ropita: causing to grow, causing to grow over or cicatrize, ... putting or placing on; the act of setting up or erecting, raising ; the act of planting, setting.

ropita: planted, erected, raised (Monier-Williams 1872: 855).

Next comes Haricharan Bandyopadhyay’s herculean achievement, *Bangiya Śabda Koś* (1932) - a Bengali Dictionary, where we will see a comprehensive entry of the word *rūp*, the root word of the term *rūpāntar*:

*rūp*1: *rūpkaṛaṇa*, *rūpjuṭakarāṇa* [adding attributes].

*rūp*2: ‘*rūpjuṭa*’ [added attributes], *sadrśa* [similar]. 1. *ākṛti* [form], *mūrti* [effigy], *kāy* [figure]. 2. *saundarya* [beauty] 3. *cakḥurbishay mātra*, *drābha* [seen through eyes, object]. 4. *swabhāb* [characteristics], *prakṛti* [nature], *biśeṣ dharma* [particular attributes]. 5. *pratibimba* [reflection], *pratikṛti* [figure]. 6. *bhāb* [condition], *prakār* [types] ... 8. *sadrśa* [likeness], *tūlyatā* [comparable]. 9. *pad-dhati* [method].

*rūp*3: *ropita kora* [to plant]¹² (Bandyopadhyay 1932: 1926).

Here we come to see that along with the two most obvious entries like ‘beauty’ and ‘form’ mentioned above, Haricharan Bandyopadhyay also mentions that *rūp* can also mean *ropita* (to plant/to sow). Such connotations bring to our mind Shelley’s metaphor of ‘transplanting the seeds’ to denote the process of naturalization. P. B. Shelley in his *A Defense of Poetry* (1821 [1840])¹³ has suggested the famous idea of ‘transplanting the seed’ while talking of carrying across a poem from one culture to the other. Poetry, as stated by Shelley, has an ambiguous correlation with music, as thoughts have an attachment with sounds.

¹² All the English words against the Bengali words are my translations.

¹³ It is written by P. B. Shelley in 1821 and first published posthumously in 1840 in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, edited by Mrs. Shelley and published by Edward Moxon in London.

Sounds as well as thoughts have relation both between each other and towards that which they represent, and a perception of the order of those relations has always been found connected with a perception of the order of the relations of thoughts. Hence the language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence, than the words themselves, without reference to that peculiar order (Shelley 1840: 9-10).

According to Shelley, (1820 [1840]), the words and sounds of a poem are so intricately linked that it cannot be recreated with same effect in another language if (using the botanic metaphor) the plant is uprooted from one soil and planted in another. What is possible otherwise is carrying the seed, or the thought embedded within the poem, which can be sowed in the soil of another linguistic world. It will then be exposed to a completely geographical world and will bear flowers and fruits possible in that part of the world. He writes:

[...] the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower-and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel (Shelley 1840: 9-10).

Forming a Third Meaning of *Rūpāntar*

The basic difference between the ‘transplantation of seeds’ and ‘plucking a plant from one soil and planting it into a different soil’ is that in the first what is getting translated is the basic essence or thought and core characteristics of a text into the target culture but in the second one the whole text with all its characteristics and essence is made to be adapted into a different cultural environment which has different demands and can nourish the thought in a different manner.

Harping on the idea that translation or adaptation means carrying across the seed of thought from one culture to another, Lorna Hardwick, as cited in Bassnett’s “Culture and Translation”, suggests that the act of translating words also ‘involves translating or transplanting into the receiving culture the cultural framework within which an ancient text is embedded’ (Kuhiwczak & Littau 2007: 15).

...[B]old claims for translation as an instrument of change, and in doing so alters the emphasis for today’s student of classical languages. The task of facing the translator of ancient texts, she argues, is to produce translations that go beyond the immediacy of the text and seek to articulate in some way (she uses the organic metaphor of ‘transplantation’, which derives from Shelley) the

cultural framework within which that text is embedded. Moreover it is the very act of translation that enables contemporary readers to construct lost civilizations. Translation is the portal through which the past can be accessed (Kuhiwczak & Littau 2007: 15).

Bassnett here argued that Lorna Harwick has emphasized on the fact that since a translation or adaptation is a tree that has grown out, albeit differently due to the difference in the geographical factors, of a seed of thought brought from another culture, retracing of steps from the tip of that tree towards the roots can bring us closer to the classical culture of the past. Thus a critical study of the adapted text is not just about analyzing the methodology adapted or the changes that have been accommodated but also about going back to the origin of the seed which will talk of the connection between the two cultures and enable a comparative study of the two.

Susan Bassnett, in another essay, “Transplanting the Seed: Poetry and Translation”, suggests that translation can be thought in terms of transplanting a seed (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998: 57-75). The seed, once transplanted, flourishes in another geographical condition. Such a study of translation/adaptation does not talk about the reductive nature of the practice. The idea of “lost in translation” and the anxiety associated with it can never gain prominence when thought within the framework of seed transplantation. According to Bassnett, the imagery Shelley uses, ‘refers to change and new growth’ as opposed to the imagery of ‘loss and decay’. Shelley argues,

... [T]hough a poem cannot be transfused from one language to another, it can nevertheless be transplanted. The seed can be placed in new soil, for a new plant to develop. The task of the translator must then be to determine and locate that seed and to set about its transplantation (Bassnett & Lefevere 1998: 58).

Similarly, the process of *rūpāntar* can be located, besides being ‘change in form’ or ‘change in beauty’, in the organic metaphor of ‘transplantation’ and the process of acculturation can be explored through the close analysis of this botanical metaphor. But of course the change in the habitat will lead to the changes in the biota. As Darwin puts it and has already been mentioned before, three main things can happen to the transplanted text or the biota: a) habitat tracking, b) genetic change or c) extinction. The first impact, i.e., habitat tracking in case of theatrical adaptation can be equated with the tendencies among theatre directors to use alien settings, foreign costumes and hunting for actors with physical features that can closely resemble the characters depicted in the source text. Such an endeavour is futile in the sense that when the author of the source text portrayed a character, he had in mind the physical features and personalities of men of his own land whose bodily features and personalities were nurtured in a particular climatic and geographical condition. The expectation of creating the same effect in a land far removed from that of the origin of the text can never be fulfilled unless

actor from foreign lands are imported. But in that case the spectators' response to the theatrical representation may vary significantly. The emotions that the staging is expected to give rise to among the spectators as a result of being identified with it, may not be perfectly achieved.

The third impact, i.e., extinction will allude to Shelley's metaphor of casting the violet into a crucible. This talks about the impossibility of the staging and representation of the theatre in a foreign habitat. This happens also because of the spectators' inability to receive the staging of an alien text with which they cannot identify and also questions the skill of the adapter who could just make the "*antar*" (change) but could not include the "*rūp*" (beauty or aesthetics).

The second and the most important impact is "genetic change" which is adaptation or *rūpāntar* proper. In this case the thought of the source text is adapted and is allowed to freely undergo necessary changes as is required in the new geographical terrain. The source text is given appropriate indigenous flavor so as to suit the taste of the target audience. The target text (be it performative) assumes a new *rūp* shedding the older one and is cultivated all over again according to the aesthetics of the land of the receptors.

Conclusion

So the paper tries to look into the organic metaphor hidden in the term 'adaptation' and it is this botanic metaphor which binds the terminology 'adaptation' with *rūpāntar*. It also seeks to excavate thorough dictionaries a new approach to *rūpāntar* and introduces a new meaning i.e., 'transplantation'. At the same time, the article tries to attempt to expand Translation Studies by introducing the concept of Darwinian principle of 'adaptation' and 'natural selection'. It is greatly hoped that this paper would be instrumental in introducing biological metaphor in the context of the practice of *rūpāntar*. One fundamental question will obviously arise that how valid it is to draw conclusions about including this new metaphor on the basis of the terminological understanding. I admit that to plant this new metaphor into firm land besides the two well-established meanings of *rūpāntar* – 'change in form' and 'change in beauty', one has to look at the practice of *rūpāntar* and improve the theoretical argument.

There is no way of disagreeing to the fact that meanings of words change with the period of time. Words both acquire new meanings and abandon older ones; they rise in the social status and also lose status. Therefore, such a study of lexicology can easily be criticised. But to my defence, I would argue that such a study is essential at the initiation in order to understand the gradual building up of certain ideas (since the period through which the study of the dictionaries have been conducted has been the most productive in terms of evolution of both the terms 'adaptation' and '*rūpāntar*' and according to my understanding all the social and cultural connotations of those words that feature in the lexicons must have affected their practices) and also to go back

to the past and construct a narrative that would link the age old practice of *anuvād* with that of the modern day practice of translation and adaptation.

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