



Translation as a Genre: A Brief Interpretation of “*The Cycle of Season*”(Ritusamharam) By Shankar Mokashi Punekar

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Today, the world of translation studies is focusing its interest on a whole range of speculative issues that engage scholars in the academic circles. Translators have been playing active role in different phases, but have failed to get due attention.

Translating a text means, it can be taken as one of the most reliable indicator of the indigenous cultural transactions that take place between various cultural communities. This relationship can be traced back to the first formal contact between the English and the Indians---particularly the Sanskrit literature which had its influence on all other Indian languages and literatures. Within a few years of English entering into India interaction between the two languages Sanskrit and English began in the form of translation. And the interface between the two languages and literary traditions has continued through translations even today after the end of the colonial rule 65 years ago. Almost many of the Sanskrit classics have been translated into English and other various languages. Thus, translation today has become a genre in literature.

There may be problems and difficulties in translating of the texts but a translator has to overcome the translation and interpret the source language into target language. In a true sense he has to be a professional then only he can produce a clear and pleasant text. Most important, apart from the surface meaning the translator must not lose the deeper suggestive meaning. Indian literature and Indian English literature has been passing through the phases of translation since the advent of British in India. Most of the Indian English writers are bilingual and have been translating native language literary works into English. And particularly many of the Indian writers in English have successfully completed the task of translating great works of Sanskrit into English to explore the greatness of Sanskrit writers and the richness of the language.

Today, many of the Universities in Indian and abroad offer a course in **Indian Literature In Translation** as a specialization. Hence, translation in English from various Indian vernaculars started gaining special significance. And particularly the translations from Sanskrit literature such as: Bharatamuni's "*Natyasastra*", Somadeva's "*Kathasarithsagar*", Kalidasa's "*Abijnan Shakuntalam*" etc. One such translation from Sanskrit into English was done by scholar critic and poet Shankar Mokashi Punekar—the great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa's classical work "*Ritusamharam*" as "*The Cycle of Seasons*".

Shankar Mokashi Punekar (SMP) is a serious Indian English poet most neglected by Indian critics and scholars. He has contributed to Indian English literature in many ways as poet, critic, research scholar and translator. The present article makes a few interpretations of his translated work "*Ritusamharam*" or "*The Cycle of Seasons*" A great poetical work by Kalidasa. Speaking of Kalidasa's "*Ritusamharam*" Sri Aurobindo says, "Ritusamhara must have come upon his contemporaries like the dawning of a new sun in the skies". K. M. Munshi says, "His (Shankar Mokashi Punekar) translation of "Ritusamhara" into parallel stanzas is a noteworthy achievement". This translation brings out the scholarship and brilliance of Shankar Mokashi Punekar as a poet and translator. We not only find cultural values being presented but also there is Botany, anthropology, Mythology etc. it is the cyclicity of life that becomes the basis of classical emotions. When one reads the translation one feels that one has been passing through the phase of real human experience which is both subjective and objective. Shankar Mokashi Punekar speaks about the following Indian seasons: 'The Summer', 'The Rainy Season', 'The Autumn', 'The Cold Season' (Hemanta), 'The Winter' and 'The Spring Season'.

"*Ritusamharam*" translated as "A Compendium of Seasons" is the product of the poetic genius of Kalidas. Stylistic perfection and lyricism are the hallmarks of the fabric that endeared Kalidasa to Indian scholarship over centuries.

The present poem is a wonderful and powerful romantic emotion an an individual preferential love. It shows how Indians in particular lovers are thrilled by the arrival of beauty in Nature in different seasons. Shankar Mokashi Punekar says "This is the season when even offended wives who are aware of their husbands' faithless doings hug them close. Lightning's have frightened them into their arms and the patter of rain and the sound of thunder have stimulated their desire" described in Canto II, stanza II of the poem.

Shankar Mokashi Punekar says, "Kalidasa is not a Nature poet in the sense Wordsworth, Shelley or Browning is. He represents the stable society whose sense of beauty was so keen and well cultivated that even its wildest exaggerations came real to it and felt within the range of its emotional responsiveness by an appeal to the system of shared cultivations and evocations." (P-28)

Shankar Mokashi Punekar began the translation of the poem in 1950, but when he was influenced by Richard Aldington's 'A Wreath for San Gemignano' and the study of Yeats's poetry brought him out of the confusion regarding the difference between the classic and the romantic—a difference of kind and inspiration. He completed the rest of the cantos and also revised the first three cantos.

It is a known fact that Indian literature in general and Indian English Literature in particular and Sanskrit poetry is judged both by the Indian critics and critics abroad by Western critical

principles and standards and come to erroneous conclusion. This is where Indian Literature, art and culture fail to get due appreciation and recognition. When one goes through the reading of the translation of “*Ritusamharam*” (“*The Cycle of Seasons*”), one cannot remain silent without admiring the scholarship and the brilliance of the poet. What can we find in the poem: Botany, Mythology, Anthropology, poetry, music etc. also there is a vigorous spirit in the enjoyment of romantic beauty of Nature and natural life, wonderful poetry and melodious music.

The poem is written in six cantos and each canto representing a season experienced by the Indians since ages. But Western society has only four seasons. The six seasons are: ‘*The Summer*’ forms Canto-I; ‘*The Rainy Season*’ Canto-II; ‘*The Autumn*’ Canto-III; ‘*The Cold Season*’ (*Hemanta*) Canto-IV; ‘*Winter*’ Canto-V and ‘*The Spring*’ Canto-VI.

In the first Canto, ‘*The Summer*’ which has 28 stanzas contains a beautiful description of the Summer season which sets in motion with a magnificent expression:

“A blazing sun; a welcome moon so cools;
Dip-inviting even the shrunken pool;
Even so placid; love so temperate
That’s sumer now; see mate!”

(Canto-I, St-1, P-37)

Similarly, the pleasures of the youth find a gratifying expression as one proceeds:

“Girls wear silks on girdle rounded hips,
Blooms on Sandal-smear’d bosom-tips,
Unguents on their well-washed fragrant tresses,
To meet lovers’ hot caresses.”

(Canto-I, St-4, P-37)

There are a certain lines/stanzas in the present canto which show the creativity of SMP, his evocative and pictorial expressions:

“Sweating moist in all her depths and heaves,
Each lush girl her heavy brocades leaves;
And hurries into the thinnest silks all which
Her bosoms’ shape enrich!”

(Canto-I, St-7, P-39)

One cannot keep away from the effect of rhyme and rhythm in the present canto:

“To waken cupid from his weary slumbers
Dulcimers are played to rousing numbers;
Perfumed fans are waved and bosoms wear
Just a flower-strip, else bare.”

(Canto-I, St-8, P-39)

And so also:

“Flames have arisen high on Shalmali trees
And in their hollows glow with a gold-white crease;
And catch dry trees top-downwards with ease
And wander thence escorted by the breeze.”

(Canto-I, St-8, P-37)

In the second canto ‘*The Rainy Season*’ with 28 stanzas SMP has brought out effectively the depiction of the rainy season through his translation, a season, generally known as the season of lovers. Not only the effects of the rain is described genuinely but also shows his poetry of the exceptional kind, his creative scholarship and in a true sense the sense and sensibility which is found in his poetry---that which Sanskrit poetry is known for:

“Turbid streams play strumpets’ brazen pranks!
Fell for shame their kin, the trees on banks;
Madly vie to reach their tryst, the sea
In unabashed glee!”

(Canto-II, St-7, P-51)

And so:

“The thundering cloud that fearful makes the night,
For passionate night-walkers holds no fright.
Lightening guide their feet to the trysted place;
Night hides their lusty face!

(Canto-I, St-10, P-51)

In the present canto, if a careful surveillance is made it clearly shows that SMP has produced a melodious music through rhythm beyond rhythm. Besides, he shows that man cannot remain isolated without being influenced by the tantalizing beauty of Nature which is described in the last stanza of the canto:

“May this month of clouds, bringer of showers,
This boon companion of the green and flowers,
This life of Creatures, thief of women’s mind,
Fulfill all desires of his lovers.”

(Canto-II, St-28, P-57)

In the third canto “*The Autumn*” which contains 26 stanzas describes the season of Autumn (Indian call it as ‘Sharad’) in which the important phase of the Indian cultivation of contentment and poetry described as Nature eroticism, the real emotion affirms the poet/translator and observes that ‘the persistent cultivation of this has been part of Indian prayer and poetry, worship and mythology.’ And for Indians the earth is always a metaphor; ‘It is a woman!’

According to the Indians the ruling spirit of Autumn (Sharad) is ‘white’. It can be found that this particular canto contains the largest number of stanzas which appeal because of the expressions that pulsate with life:

“Rivers hold people’s eyes enamoured.
--By dips of long beaked ducks are ripples stirred
On waters saffron-flushed by lotus-dust;
Banks jostle with flamingoes, herd on herd.”

(Canto-III, St-8, P-61)

There is the change found both in humans and birds and the atmosphere:

“Lakes arrest the people’s mind in a trance
With ripples roused by morning breeze to dance,
With open lotuses of the night and the day,
And wheeling pairs of love-importunate swans.”

(Canto-III, St-11, P-63)

And:

“No peacocks gaze on high in wild surmise;

No winging herons startle fleecy skies;
No rainbow daubs the pallor of the clouds;
No lightning makes its banner like surprise.”

(Canto-III, St12, P-63)

Sanskrit literature in general and Sanskrit poetry in particular is known for sensuous description be it Nature or woman; every aspect of woman finds description in Sanskrit literature be it her body or her personality. Even this description has the aesthetic quality:

“Women’s sprightly gait has lost to the swan;
To red lotuses their bright countenance;
This dark languid eyes to the lilies blue;
To delicate waves, their arch eye-brow dance.”

(Canto-III, St-17, P-63)

And then:

:Drooping shoulders decked with ornament
Are put to shame by creepers flower-bent.
And Malatis and Kankelis outshine
Maiden’s smiles as sweet as moon’s advent.”

(Canto-III, St-18, P-63)

Such depiction however has not received ‘poetical annunciation in our culture.’ (P. 27 of Introduction). But he says that each limb is associated with the specter object of Nature. SMP being also the scholar in Sanskrit never failed to bring the charm of the originality of Sanskrit expression in his translation; the magic of poetry, as a translator:

“The cloudless sky bestrewn with stars will take
The semblance of a lotus-crowded lake
With water moveless as an emeraldslab
Whereon white swans their gentle gildings make.”

(Canto-III, St-21, P-65)

Besides, swans singing in women’s ‘tinkling zones’, the Autumn also suggest that it is the season of harvest of joy. Whichever guides:

“May Sharat, the Kamala-faced and the Utpala-eyed,
Wearing spotless robes of Kashas opened wide,
Decked in sweet Kumudas, passionate as a maid,
To the harvest of high joy, be forever guide.”

(Canto-III, St-18, P-63)

In the fourth canto, “*The Cold Season*” (*Hemanta*) which contains 18 stanzas, SMP brings out the beauty of this season by presenting it as the gracious month of cold and particularly favourite for the ardent lovers. The canto begins with the description of the change seen in nature in the commencement of the season:

“Now is come this gracious month of cold
With leafing woods and Lodhras blossoming gold,
With mists descending on the lotuses worn
And fast-yellowing corn.

(Canto-IV, St-01. P-69)

There is also the poets talent in translation where he attracts the attention of the readers towards the beautiful descriptions of young lovers preparing for their union and the pleasure they seek in the pain inflicted by the lovers:

“Our foreheads gleams the sprouting vermeil-mark
And limbs are smeared with powdered cardamom bark;
With Incense women smoke their silken hair
And for lovers’ night prepare.”

(Canto-IV, St-05. P-69)

Further:

“Cuddling limb to limb young lovers sleep
In the fragrance of their women’s breathing deep,
Their mouths exuding flowered wine’s sweet smell,
In passion’s nightlong spell.”

(Canto-IV, St-11. P-71)

And then:

“A woman proud of all her aching limbs
Her bruised lips with vermilion trims;
With cottons hides nail mark on her breasts;
In flowing hair her shy glance archly swims.”

(Canto-IV, St-16. P-73)

Again and again the readers are drawn to some of the beautiful stanzas particularly the recollection of the passionate union:

“Their slender frames bedraggled by the toil
Of prolonged union, women rub bath-oil
On tired waist and bosom’s upright end.
By their own touch remember thrill uncoil.”

(Canto-IV, St-17. P-73)

The canto ends with another beautiful description of showing that the season is both sweet and virtuous and the end is satisfactory:

“May this sweet and virtuous month of cold,
Its farms made thick with paddy ripening gold,
Its skies filled with cranes, its women satisfied,
Your joy and fulfillment for ever unfold.”

(Canto-IV, St-18. P-73)

In the fifth canto “*Winter*” (Shishir Varnanam) which contains 16 stanzas SMP has effectively brought out in the translation the passionate feelings of young lovers. It is in the winter season that the passions of lovers rise high:

“Rich with ripened ears are field of rise;
Oft is heard the Krauncha’s mating voice;
Now winter comes and makes women younger
By passion’s sharper hunger.”

(Canto-V, St-01. P-75)

And their efforts to cheat the winter make lovers pitiless:

“Young men enjoy young women pitilessly.”

(Canto-V, St-07. P-77)

Next few stanzas have description of the union of the young lovers. But when it is carefully read the translation of stanzas from 11 to 15 the poet/translator has brought out different and varied experience and expression of lovers particularly women / young girls after their graceful union. But the fact to be noted is that there is no description of men and what they were doing. The translation has been equally graceful like the original Sanskrit poem. The canto ends with the hope that let there be sweeter like jaggery and lasting prosperous life.

In the last and sixth canto “*The Spring*” (Vasanta) which contains 28 stanzas is always said to be the liveliest season all over the world. But this canto fails to impress the readers. Somehow the readers get disappointed because the translator fails to keep up the expectations of the readers as done in the earlier cantos. However, there are a few stanzas where the translator has done justice to the translation in the present canto. The Nature and the creation of Nature everything on this earth is full of pleasures:

“Tis lovely spring; lovely everything is!”

(Canto-VI, St-02. P-81)

The translator has put in a lot of efforts to maintain the genius of Kalidas in his translation:

“On the vermeil-marked face of a lovely girl
Bright as golden lily, there glistens a pearl
Of sweat, lit bright amongst her jewels,
Ever-enlarging in its beautiful whorl.”

(Canto-VI, St-07. P-83)

The effect of god of love, Madan has on lovers has been emphatically described:

“So passion-ridden are they that they sigh in unrest
Even when their lovers are by their side.”

(Canto-VI, St-08. P-83)

And one cannot keep oneself away by reading the beautiful as well as truthful expression of the description of the mango trees:

“Still in red juvenescence, bunched leaves
Bend mango branches blossoming in thick sheaves;
And as they sway to the gentle flow of breeze,

They stir young women's hearts to anxious heaves!"

(Canto-VI, St-15. P-85)

There is also the description of the blossoming of the Nature in all aspects:

"What soulful man who but chances to see
The new-sprung bough of the Kurabaka tree"

(Canto-VI, St-18. P-87)

And again:

"With the insolent clumps of Palasha trees
Flourishing fiery blossoms in the breeze
The earth looks quite like some new-wed girl
Clothed in red for spring-time festivities."

(Canto-VI, St-19. P-87)

However there are a couple of stanzas which catch the eye, the mind and the heart of the reader because the translation has been emphatic and remarkable describing the transformation of the season from winter to spring:

"From clensing frosts of the winter set free,
The wind romps through the blossoming mango tree,
And carries cuckoo's song to far-off places
And fills young peoples' hearts with expectancy."

(Canto-VI, St-22. P-89)

Equally well caught expression is again the beauty of nature:

"Trees of motley colours hem them around.
On their peaks Koel's joy-motes sound.
--Mountains make delight in every heart!—
Glades of brush on curving slopes abound."

(Canto-VI, St-25. P-89)

And there is the wailing lover who wants to end his lonely journey:

"He shuts his eyes, he weeps, see how he wails!

With hand he tries to choke his sobs!—he fails!

The lonely journeyman parted from his mate,

Espying mango blossoms shaped like her finger-nails!”

(Canto-VI, St-26. P-91)

And the canto ends on a note of affirmation hoping that the God of love Madana and his Friend Vasanta (Spring) will bring delight in life which is auspicious:

“That Voctor of the World, Madana, invisible king

With his inseparable friend Vasnata, unto you may bring

Auspicious delight.”

(Canto-VI, St-28. P-91)

There may be certain lacunas in the translation but the translator says, “The main aim is to create that colourful pleasure worthiness, that intense cultivation of the minutiae of senses, that accurate awareness of the rhythm of life in climate, vegetation, cloud formation and the agonies and joys of a whole people. However, I must also say that I have tried my best to be accurate, more as sop for my own nerves than our of any faith in accuracy. I have carefully maintained the change in versification in the closing stanzas of each canto which seems to have served as an aural index. -----
----- . There is the poem and fortunate is he who can recreate in himself the whole milieu and cultural sensibility out of the debris of a translation.”

Thus, the remarkable translational harvest of Sanskrit literature into English created the right stage for a new area of specialization study to appear on the academic scene generally referred as ‘Translation Studies’. This new discipline has created a lot of vigour and passion in disseminating Sanskrit literatures rich harvest to the English speaking world. In other words, in the present day translation has the target group and they are non-Indians—the English speaking countries—that have been in close interaction with ‘the Indian culture.’ This is why because, most of the translators opt to the translation into English which insists them to reach out to a global readership and prompts them to translate native literature into English. After all, English translation enjoys a larger target readership as it has been operating on a universal footing.

References:

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