

Translation of Rabindranath Tagore's Poetic Works: A Critical Survey

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Abstract

We, human beings, exist in a world where one witnesses ongoing communication in different languages. Everything is possible only with the help of translation. The translation is considered an automatic extension of anything verbal and valuable we intend to communicate. The process of communication passes through three different levels-personal, linguistic and cultural. Everything, full of philosophical ideas, is transferred from one generation to another, from the past to the present time, depending on persons who can move words, sentences, images, and themes from one language to another language. Translation has an essential and significant role in a country like India, where we come across different varieties of languages used by people living in other regions of the country. It is the result of translation that we get different versions after we translate any work. The Bhagavata stories, and retellings of the *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata* are examples of this regard. The *Kathasaritsagar*, the Jataka, and Hitopadesa are narratives that inspired the spread of hybrid stories. People from various corners of the world are familiar with well-known works only by utilising translation into different languages.

Keywords: Language, ideas, translation, art, target language, source language.

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Since ancient civilizations, human beings have been sharing their ideas through language. While translation, using one language results to achieve incredible feats and also building a grant tower towards heaven. But, with time, there have been several languages to articulate one's ideas and express them in different mother tongues. In that situation, the need for translation was observed by human beings.

In India, there are many languages spoken by people, but despite this, there is unity in diversity which means that the Indians are united using a bond. Language contributes in that direction a lot, as when we move from one state to another state or from one region to another region, we, certainly need a man who can make us aware of what the people from other states, territories, and regions are talking about. Our unity is also due to the understanding of different languages in India, as everyone can translate the regional languages into English.

In this age of globalization, one can find the importance of translation from earlier times. At present, the ideas spread like wildfire, and a single miscommunication can cause a war, so in that situation, the importance of quality translators is required more than ever, as George Borrow says that translation is, at best, an echo.

The term, 'translation' has variously been described and interpreted since time immemorial. Few interpret translation as the falsifier of the original. It is generally a carryover of meaning from the source language to the target language. For others, it is the transference of meaning from the source language to the target language. But, all these definitions of translation are not entirely accepted and rejected.

Translation study is the new academic discipline related to the study of the theory and phenomena of translation. By its nature, it is multilingual and also interdisciplinary which encompasses languages, linguistics, Communication Studies, philosophy and a range of cultural studies.

In this way, all the definitions given above are partially true, but inadequate to describe the meaning of translation in the true sense of words. All the latest theories have rejected the notion of the original being direct and translation as secondary. There is no such dichotomy that exists between the original and translated text as some consider that the original is itself a translation of ideas, perceptions, and so on.

Indian Writing in English is a rich reservoir of translated works. It has played a significant and vital role in shaping the crux of the different Indian philosophies and ideologies. There are some writers in the Indian context like JayantMahapatra, Kamala Das, BhishamSahni and GirishKarnadwho translated their works themselves. Rabindranath Tagore, a Nobel Laureate, is one such versatile genius whose translated works are as important and famous as his original works are. In the beginning, Tagore wrote his works in Bengali, but later on, he translated them into English.

Tagore's poetic style, which proceeds from a lineage, established by fifteenth and sixteenth-century Vaishnava poets, ranges from classical formalism to the comic, visionary, and ecstatic. He was influenced by the atavistic mysticism of Vyasa and other *rishi*-authors of the Upanishads, the Bhakti-Sufi mystic Kabir, and RamprasadSen Tagore's most innovative and mature poetry embodies his exposure to Bengali rural folk music, which included mystic Baul ballads such as those of the bard Lalon. These, rediscovered and re-popularised by Tagore, resemble nineteenth-century Kartabhaja hymns that emphasized inward divinity and rebellion against bourgeois *bhadralok* religious and social orthodoxy. During his Shelaidaha years, his poems took on a lyrical voice of the *monermanush*, the Bauls' "man within the heart" and Tagore's "life force of his deep recesses"; or meditating upon the *jeevandeavata*—the demiurge or the "living God within"; this figure is connected with divinity through appeal to nature and the emotional interplay of human drama. Such tools saw use in his Bhanusimha poems chronicling the Radha-Krishna romance, which were repeatedly revised over seventy years.

In English, his works are equally significant as these translations enjoy the same reputation as in the original language, Bengali. Tagore is generally known for his masterpiece, *Gitanjali*, a collection of poems first published in Bengali and later on, translated into English. It was in the early year of the twentieth century that his translations of this collection came before the readers. *Echo from the East and West* is the collection that contains his translated works. Translating the poem from one language to another is very difficult, and it was also the same for Rabindranath Tagore.

After that, in 1913, *The Crescent Moon*, a poem written in Bengali, was translated into English. Most of the poems in this Volume are written about small children, as the title was also *Sisu*. The original literary features in this volume were not paid much attention to by Tagore as he did not retain the characteristics of actual writing. In 1916, another collection by Tagore, *Fruit Gathering*, was translated by keeping in mind the failure of the earlier groups. He took the poem from the *Balaka*, but he solved it by keeping in view the form and intellectual content of the poem. To possess all these qualities as is while translating is a very tough job. As Tagore does not include complex poems in this translated work, all the features incorporated by him make him a different poet.

In 1918, the translation of 138 poems from the collection, *The Lover's Gift and Crossing* was not of good quality. The author seems to be free while translating these verses. One cannot identify the original poems in many cases. Similarly, the poems from the collection, *The Fugitive* are highly deprived of poetic quality hardly any of these poems are abridged properly. After this translated work, Tagore did not try any other of his volumes to translate.

The reason behind it was the pitfalls and shortcomings of the translation that Tagore realized after going through his works. In this connection, in 1915, Tagore admitted to William Rothensteabout his translated was that his translations were prose, and he aims to make this composition as simple as possible by providing lyricism. He did not want to add any complexity and poetical conventions to his works in translated form. In this way, it is pretty evident that while translating his poetic works, Tagore was very much familiar with the true nature of his translated works.

The other translators in Indian Writing in English comprise authors like Bhabhani Bhattacharya, who also contributed a lot in the field of translation study. During 1922-1929, there was the translation of three significant works and Bhabhani Bhattacharya's *The Golden Boat* is the most prominent one. It includes 32 poems from his works having lyrical quality and story-telling features. The poet has arranged all these poems in which rhyme and meter are meticulously used by the author. But, while translating these works, the author considers only the element of the story. In that direction, the imitation of Tagore's style of prose can be witnessed vividly. He did not translate those words that were repeated and did not sound good in prose narratives.

In changing the title also, Bhattacharya felt relaxed while translating, as can be seen through the poem *Guru Govinda* where the source title was a little bit different. The freedom taken by Bhattacharya in this regard was to make the Western audience understand everything. This translated version had no more print or editions, later on, by India's Jaika Publishing House.

Among the Indian translators who worked on Tagore's poem to translate it from his native language to the English language, the name Nagendranath Gupta cannot be overlooked and underestimated. His collection of translations *Sheaves*, contains the translation of 80 poems, in 1929 by him. This collection was, further, published by Philosophical Library, New York in 1951. Gupta, in the introductory part of the publication, admits that it is written in free verse, and he faced a lot of difficulties in providing rhyme and meter while translating these verses. To solve a lyric poem is the most tedious and typical job, he admits in this connection. He says that a good lyric is a sparkling little jewel. One finds every facet carefully cut by the poet's jeweller, and its setting is the language in which it is composed. Duplication or imitation of such a gem may prove to be mere paste.

Between 1955 and 1957, there was the translation of four works by three authors. *Syamali*, a collection that was translated by Sheila Chatterjee in 1955, is a translation of Rabindranath Tagore's Bengali poem, *Syamali*, in Bengali. While solving this work, she showed remarkable skill and efficacy while showering appreciation, William Radice says that the author has demonstrated her efficiency to translate this collection (Radice, 1999, p. 23).

Aurobindo Bose, one of the leading translators of the time, also showed his accuracy and skill. While translating some works he shows his dexterity in translation in the poems, *A Flight of Swan*, and *The Herald of Spring* published in 1955 and 1957, respectively, by John Murray. Besides, the credit for translating three other volumes- *Wings of Death* (1960), *Latter poems of Tagore*, and *Lipika*. The reason behind translating the works for Tagore was that Bose showed reverence and respect for Tagore through his translated work.

Kumaresh Ray also contributed a great deal in translating Rabindranath Tagore's works. His most notable translated work, *Glimpses of Tagore's Poems* in English verses in which there is an amalgamation of 23 poems. He showed his assiduous and minute skill in translating Tagore's works. Tagore has endeavored to translate the selected poems after considering the form, theme and tone of the original lyrics. Although some others might have tried to solve his

poems, they did in a bit casual way, on the other hand, his effort is sincere, loyal, and consolidated.

In 1960 also, there was another productive and fruitful period of translation of Tagore's verses in one of the significant volumes of translation of *One Hundred and One*, which he edited by Humayun Kabir and published by Asia Publishing House. This anthology came with the effort of 18 translators all of which Amalendu Bose and Lila Roy rank at the top.

The year 1969 witnessed the emergence of two volumes translated by Sisir Chattopadhyay titled, *Patraput*, and another by *Fifteen Longer Poems* of Rabindranath Tagore by Rabindranath Chaudhary. *Patraput*, a translated work by Chattopadhyay, in which fifteen poems from Bengali are included. It does not comment anything about these translations and merely said that he translated the severes by Tagore because he did not have much time to do so.

Rabindranath Chaudhary translated the anthology, *Fifteen Longer Poems*, readers witnessed an essential and significant change in the title. It was, later on, published in 1975 with the title, *Love Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* by Orient Paperback. At the outset of the collection, he points out that the Westerners would not have neglected Tagore if they had come in contact with an authentic translation.

In the first half of the 1970s, we can get two books, one by P.Lal and Shymasree Devi, Last Poems, and the other was *The Last Poem of Rabindranath Tagore* by Pritish Nandy. On the review of both collections, William Radice did not find these volumes well translated. It was later on in the 1980s that Brother James Talarovic learned Bengali and then prolifically translated Tagore's poems. Between the years 1983-86, he completed the translation of five volumes published in Dhaka: *Gitanjali*, *Noibedya*, *Gitimalya*, *Gitali*, and *Sonar*.

In the 1980s, more than six new translated books published in which we can include Sudhamayee Mukherjee's *Some Songs of Rabindranath Tagore*, Aruna Chakravarti's *Songs of Tagore*, Pratibha Bowes' *Some Songs and Poems from Rabindranath Tagore*, in Sisir Kumar Ghosh's *Forty Poems of Rabindranath Tagore*, Shafi Ahmed's *Tagore Eleven*, Arun K. Sill's *Gitanjali*, and William Radice's *Selected Poems*.

In this way, several translators have shown their keen and minute interest in translating most of Rabindranath Tagore's poetical works. Their inclination towards Tagore's poetry speaks volumes of his popularity as a poet whose works were appreciated by the writers of subsequent generations.

In this way, translation from one language to another language requires adequate skill to transfer the meaning from the source language to the target language. While translating from one language to another there is only a transaction between two languages, but also a negotiation between two cultures. Culture is also a dominant factor because many difficulties arise in finding the equivalent textual and literary material of the source language in the target language. It is an essential important fact that both culture and language are interrelated aspects that should be taken as vital elements for the translation of one language into another.

About the Author

Dinesh Kumar has presently been working as an Assistant Professor of English at Dyal Singh College, Karnal (INDIA) for the last 17 years. He has 40 research papers to his credit. Apart from it, he is the sole author of three books: George Orwell's Social Vision: A Critical Study (ISBN 978-93-87646-79-7); and Voices in Literature. (ISBN 978-93-87276-79-6), Feministic Ethos in Pre-Independence and Post- Independence Indian Literature: A Comprehensive Study from Lambert Publication, Germany (ISBN NO. 978-620-3-921908). He has also reviewed two books by foreign professors-first, English Language as Mediator of Human-Machine Communication by Natalia Lazebna, Associate Professor, Zaporizhzhia Polytechnic University, Ukraine with ISBN NO. 978-81-948672-1-0, and the second is a poetry book, Drops of Intensity by an Italian poet, Gerlinde Staffler. He is also rendering his services as an editor and a reviewer in some reputed International Journals since 2014.

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