

TAGORE'S POETRY IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION : A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), generally regarded as the most important poet in Bengali, is also the most translated Bengali poet. It is well-known that Tagore himself is one of the significant translators of his poems, and he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913 for his first volume of translated poetry *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* (1912). Apart from Tagore there are many other translators whose translations have been published in book forms. My searches show that more than sixty volumes of translated poetry by individual translators have appeared in print by the end of 2011. The objective of the present article is to discuss the phenomena related to these translations such as the publishing agents, places of publications, the trends of translations over time and most importantly the distinctive features or the quality of these translations as far as possible.

Rabindranath Tagore's poems began to appear in English translation in the first decade of the twentieth century. Tagore's self-translated Nobel winning *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*, which contains prose translations of a collection of 103 poems translated from his nine different Bengali works, was first published in 1912. Before 1912 the only published work that included some translations of Tagore's poems is *Echoes from East and West*.¹ That Tagore himself played a significant role in translating his poems is well-known. For more than a decade he almost single-handedly translated his poems. Translations by other translators began to appear in print from 1922. The colonial phase of the 20th century (till 1947) produced at least twelve translated works from his Bengali poems, out of which six were by Tagore himself. Between 1948 and 2011 more

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1 In 1909 Roby Dutta translated eight poems from Tagore and included them along with other materials in his work *Echoes from East and West*. Roby Dutta, *Echoes from East and West* (Cambridge: Galway and Porter, 1909). This book is extremely rare. It has been listed in Meera Chhottopadhyaya's *Rabindra Racanār Imreji-Anubād Suci* [History of Tagore Translation], Vol. 1 (Kolkata: Sreeguru Prakashan, 1993).

than fifty-five translated volumes by individual translators appeared in print. Of course, there are some articles, reviews, books etc. that list and describe and/or criticize translations of Tagore's poems. The main objective of this article is to provide an overall idea about the stock of translations by individual translators till the present time and identify the phenomena related to these translations.

If translation of any poet is difficult, translating Tagore is more so. "The beauty that Tagore creates by a deft combination of words and rhymes is something... that cannot be remedied in any English translation however skilful it may be", says one of his translators.² Another translator has pointed out that Tagore has already "suffered greatly, in comparison with any other great literary figure from bad translation."³ Over the ages, however, Tagore has been translated and continues to be translated. While most translators have admitted the essential inadequacy of their translations, some claim that they have been able to incorporate all the nuances of the original poems. Andre Lefevere, a translation theorist, notes that translation is 'the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting' and translation is potentially the most influential because it is able 'to project the image of an author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their origin or culture.'⁴ Obviously, translation is a kind of rewriting, but some sort of relationship should be established between the original and the translation. Most translation theorists and practitioners feel that a translated poem should read like a poem and a good poem should not be a bad one in translation.⁵ In the present paper this view of translation scholars has been taken into consideration.

2 Abu Rushd, *Selected Songs of Rabindranath Tagore* (Dhaka: Rabindra Charcha Kendra, Dhaka), Introduction.

3 Pratima Bowes, *Some Songs and Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1984), p. xxiii.

4 Andrey Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 39.

5 For example Eugene Nida says that 'a lyric poem translated as prose is not an adequate equivalent of the original.' Eugene Nida, "Principles In Correspondence" in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed., Lawrence Venuti, (London: Routledge, 2000), p.126; According to Katharina Reiss the literary text should express the artistic and aesthetic quality of the original. Katherina Reiss, "Type, Kind and Individuality of Text: Decision Making in Translation" in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed., Lawrence Venuti, p.163; Donal Davie says that in translating a rhymed verse rhyme is the first thing to go, and meter the second. Quoted in Charles Tomlinson, ed., *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.xii.

Between 1912 and 1921 Rabindranath Tagore brought out six volumes of translated poetry from his Bengali originals. These are: *Song Offerings: Gitanjali* (1912); *The Gardener* (1913); *The Crescent Moon* (1913); *Fruit Gathering* (1916); *Lovers Gift and Crossings* (1918) and *The Fugitive* (1921). The success of his first work *Song Offerings: Gitanjali* (1912) was overwhelming.⁶ Within a year *Gitanjali* had gone through thirteen impressions. A year after the publication of *Gitanjali*, the poet was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, the first Asian to be thus honoured:

...the small collection of poems. . . creates such a surprisingly rich and genuinely poetic impressions that there is nothing odd and absurd in the proposal to reward it with such a distinction as it is a question here. . . . It is certain, however, that no poet in Europe since the death of Goethe in 1882 can rival Tagore in noble humanity, in unaffected greatness, in classical tranquility.⁷

The overwhelming success of *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* (1912) prompted Tagore to translate many more of his poems. But Tagore's translations of his other works came under much adverse comment and Tagore gradually lost his readership in the West. Mahasweta Sengupta in her PhD thesis titled *Colonial Poetics: Rabindranath Tagore in Two Worlds* (1990) has tried to explain why Tagore's readership in the west decreased so rapidly. One of the reasons, she mentions, is the colonial poetics:

The interesting point in Rabindranath's case—his own translation of poems written by himself in Bengali—is that the self that he was presenting to the other was in a large sense a creation of that other. The mystic or spiritual Indian was a familiar sphere in which the colonizer could accommodate a native; this self, which Rabindranath presented in his English versions was a constituted subject which conform to the boundaries of the discourse that legitimized the native within certain permitted areas. . . . The problem becomes apparent when Rabindranath started translating varied kinds of poems that were not of a specially devotional or spiritual kind.⁸

6 The book contains translations of a selection of 103 poems translated from nine different works. In October 1912, India Society published 700 copies. The next year Macmillan and Co., published the book for a general audience. Some valuable discussions about the book can be found in the following locations: Buddhadeva Bose, *An Acre of Green Grass* (Kolkata: Papyrus, 1948; Reprinted 1997), pp.13-25.; Meera Chottopadhyaya, *Rabindra Racanār Imreji-Anubād Sucī* [History of Tagore Translation], Vol. 1 (Sreeguru Prakashan, 1993) pp. 27-59; Fakrul Alam, "Translating Rabindranath Tagore's Poems" in *Translation Theory and Practice* (Dhaka: Academic Press and Publishers Ltd., 2004), pp. 42-45.

7 Quoted in Krishna Kripalani, *Tagore: A Life* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1986), pp. 132-133.

8 Mahasweta Sengupta, "Colonial Poetics: Rabindranath Tagore in Two Worlds", Ph.D dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1990, p. 117.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote a very short preface explaining the nature of the poems in *The Gardener* (1913).⁹ He admitted that the translations made from his original Bengali poems are not always literal – ‘the original being sometimes abridged and sometimes paraphrased’.¹⁰ About the quality of translation in *The Gardener* Sujit Mukherjee says:

... compared to the lavish texture of the originals, their English versions in *The Gardener* lack in depth and substance... Guided solely by the criterion of clarity, he has reconstructed the originals with the mere prop of meaning. Everything that is complex or intense in the original has been skipped over and large portions have been sacrificed for the sake of simple rendering. What remains is a bare framework of sentences, without any of the interaction between words that is the stuff of poetry.¹¹

Tagore’s third book of translated poetry from his Bengali originals is *The Crescent Moon* (1913).¹² This book contains translation of forty poems, most of which were selected from the original *Śiśu* (1903), which Tagore wrote for children. In translating these poems Tagore hardly took any care to retain the essential literary qualities of the originals. Mahasweta Sengupta comments that these translations ‘lack the concrete sensuousness of the originals, and seem to be rather wordy... sentimental and ponderous.’¹³

Tagore brought out *Fruit Gathering* (1916)¹⁴ being conscious of the failure of *The Crescent Moon* (1913). In this book he tries to bring variety by choosing poems from *The Balakā* (1916) volume. The original *Balakā* poems are remarkably free in form and intellectually abstract in content. It is exceptionally difficult to retain these aspects of the original in translation. Of course Tagore did not include the more complex poems of the originals. But obviously, the presence of *The Balakā* poems in the collection makes Tagore different from his earlier works in English. As Sujit Mukherjee remarks: ‘The presence of these poems in *Fruit Gathering* brings Tagore’s career as poet in English out of

9 Rabindranath Tagore, *The Gardener* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913). This book contains translation of eighty-five poems, the originals of which were selected from fifteen different works written and published over a span of nearly thirty years.

10 Rabindranath Tagore, *The Gardener*, *Ibid*, Preface.

11 Sujit Mukherjee, *Translation as Discovery and Other Essays on Indian Literature in English Translation* (Kolkata: Orient Longman, 1992), p. 1.

12 Rabindranath Tagore, *The Crescent Moon* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913).

13 Mahasweta Sengupta, “Colonial Poetics: Rabindranath Tagore in Two Worlds”, p. 124.

14 Rabindranath Tagore, *Fruit Gathering* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1916). This book contains translation of eighty-six poems selected from different works.

the familiar territory surrounding the English *Gitanjali*, but not far enough out to dispel permanently the initial impression of langour and misty effulgence'.¹⁵

Tagore included translation of 138 poems in *The Lover's Gift and Crossing* (1918)¹⁶ This book also suffers from bad translations. Some translations in the book are badly abridged and paraphrased. For example, the opening poem of the book 'Shah-Jehan', the original of which has six sections and 151 lines, have become six prose stanzas, altogether 17 lines. Some translations in the volume were done so freely that the original poems are difficult to identify in some cases.

*The Fugitive*¹⁷ was the last anthology of poems translated by the poet. The translations of poems in this volume are also highly deficient and none communicates the resonance and wealth of the originals. The poems of *Sonār Tarī* and *Balākā* are so ruthlessly abridged that they appear as riddles. The poem 'Urbaṣī' from *Balākā* labours to capture the original but the last two stanzas are left untranslated. However, some *Palātākā* poems in the volume are rendered comparatively well.¹⁸

After the publication of *The Fugitive*, Tagore did not publish any more new volumes of translations. He turned away from translating his poems. It was as if he could realize the defects of his translations and repented having attempted them at all.¹⁹ In 1915 Tagore wrote to William Rothenstein: "My translations are frankly prose—my aim is to make them simple with just a suggestion of rhythm to give them a touch of the lyric, avoiding all archaisms and poetical conventions"²⁰ Elsewhere, Tagore compares this process of simplification in a more elaborate manner:

Nobody in this country would accept that these are translations—everyone says that they are much better in their original form. I can not just disapprove of their opinion as entirely false. In fact, one can not just translate one's own works. Because my right regarding my own works is not of an adventitious kind...I try to represent in English the essential meaning of the poem. That creates a gulf of difference. You would not even be able to identify a poem unless I tell you which it

15 Sujit Mukherjee, *Translation as Discovery and Other Essays*, p. 109.

16 Rabindranath Tagore, *Lovers Gift and Crossing* (New York: Macmillan, 1918).

17 Rabindranath Tagore, *The Fugitive* (New York: Macmillan, 1921).

18 Sujit Mukherjee, *Translation as Discovery and Other Essays*, p. 112.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

20 Quoted in Mary M. Lago, *Imperfect Encounter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 195.

is. Many of the poems have actually become much shorter in this process. When a poem is expressed in Bengali, it appears with all the majesty of the language; she can not but display her patrimonial wealth in public. But all these ornaments become a burden when carried in a trip to a distant land. Whatever it is, jewellery and beautiful dresses are not meant for pilgrimages. That is why I am engaged in the act of divesting my poems of their adornments—she has not given up the signs of her marriage like vermilion mark or the iron bangle, she has not turned into a European lady, but shorn of her ornaments, she is wearing completely new attire.²¹

It is not surprising or accidental that Tagore, while translating his own poems, was well aware of the true nature of his translations. The audience in his mind were westerners. Victoria Ocampo cites an example as proof of this:

Leaning over the pages spread out before him, I could see, undecipherable, like the traces of bird's feet on the sand, the delicate, mysterious patterns of the Bengali characters. Tagore took up the page and started translating, literally, he told me. What he read, unhesitating sometimes, seemed to me tremendously enlightening. It was as if by a miracle, or chance I had entered into direct contact, at last, with the poetic material (or raw material) of the written thing without having on the pair of gloves translations always are....I asked Tagore to put the English version into writing later. On the next day he gave it to me, written in his beautiful handwriting. I read the poem in his presence and could not conceal my disappointment. 'But such and such things you read to me yesterday and not here' I reproached him. 'Why did you suppress them? They were the centre, the heart of the poem' He replied that he thought that would not interest Westerners.²²

Translations by others began to appear in book form by 1922. Between 1922 and 1929 three significant works were published. These were Bhabani Bhattacharya's *The Golden Boat*, published from London by Allen and Unwin in 1922; translations by Edward J Thomson that appeared in *The Augustan Book of Poems* published from London by Ernest Benn in 1925 and Nagendranath Gupta's *Sheaves* published from Allahabad by Indian Press in 1925.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *The Golden Boat*²³ includes translations of a selection of thirty-two poems from various works of the poet. Most of these poems in the original are lyrics and have a story-like quality. Each of these poems also has a distinctive form that is rhymed and metrically arranged. In translating these poems, however, Bhattacharya emphasised only the story elements of the

21 Quoted in Mahasweta Sengupta, *Colonial Poetics: Rabindranth Tagore in Two Worlds*, p. 135.

22 Victoria Ocampo, "Tagore on the Banks of the River Plate" in *Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume* (New Delhi: Sahitya Academi, 1961), pp. 43-44.

23 The first Indian edition of the book came out in 1956 from Jaico Publishing House; First Jaico impression came out in 1999 and second in 2000.

poems. Perhaps he imitated Tagore's style of prose translation. He avoided translating those lines or words that were repetitive and did not sound good in prose narrative. Bhattacharya also took liberty to change the titles of some poems. One such example is the title 'Guru Govinda,' the source title of which is 'śeṣ śikṣā' (Literally 'The Last Lesson'). Obviously, Bhattacharya took such liberty to translate the poems because he wanted to make the translations easily accessible to the target audience (here the western audience). The book did not have any reprints or editions for a long time though it has been made available today by India's Jaica Publishing House.

Edward J Thomson's *Augustan Book of Poems* (1925) contains translations of 21 poems selected from various works of Tagore. Thomson²⁴ was a pioneering translator who thought of translating Tagore's lyric in verse and made an effort at reproducing an equivalent verse pattern in English. He criticized Tagore's prose translations of his beautiful lyrics and claimed his success of recreating equivalent verses in English. In the Preface of his *Augustan Book of Poems* (1925) he states that his 'translations are in the meter of the original or as close a meter as I could find'.²⁵ Thomson's claim has been criticized by William Radice who says:

The expressive form of Tagore's verse is that of the Padma, the Ganges, mighty in her calm. The expressive form of Thomson's translation is of an English country garden, which produces an odd discord between form and content. It is a case of the dangers of trying to reproduce a verse form in another language, rather than finding an equivalent form.²⁶

Nagendranath Gupta's *Sheaves*, containing translations of eighty poems, was first published in 1929 by Indian Press, Allahabad, and later in 1951 by Philosophical Library, New York. In the introduction to the volume, Gupta says that his translations are in free verse and admits the difficulty of maintaining rhyme and meter in translation. He comments that it is most frustrating to translate a lyric poem. A beautiful lyric, he says, 'is a sparkling little jewel of

24 Thomson was a Wesleyan missionary working in Bengal from 1910 to 1923 and became Principal of the college at Bankura. He knew Tagore personally and wrote two books on him: *Rabindranath Tagore: His Life and Work*, for the Heritage of India series (London: OUP, 1926, revised 1948) and *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist* (London: OUP, 1926, revised 1948). He was a poet himself and spent his later years teaching Bengali at Oxford to ICS recruits.

25 Edward Thomson, *The Augustan Book of Poetry* (London: Earnest Benn, 1925), Preface.

26 William Radice, "Tagore's Poetry in English Translation", *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, May-Oct., 1976. pp. 12-13.

which every facet is carefully cut by the poet jeweler and its setting is the language in which it is composed. A duplication or imitation of such a gem may prove to be mere paste.²⁷ Thus Nagendranath acknowledges the inadequacy that lies in his own renderings. However, his translations were appreciated rather extravagantly in one of the reviews:

‘Mr. Nagendranath Gupta has earned the best thanks of the lovers of Rabindranath in India and abroad for his excellent translations of the great poet’s songs and lyrics... His vocabulary is vast and as a translator he has the sense of the inevitable word... Taking the poet’s own matchless renderings as a standard, Mr. Gupta’s achievement does not fall far short of it and there are occasions when the translation rises to the beauty and dignity of the original, as we find in his *Urvasi* ... Here we have an example of that magic art of translation which faithfully gives us the sense, the spirit, the poetry, and the music of the original with a few apt, direct and absolute words.’²⁸

The nineteen thirties and forties saw a gap in Tagore translation. New translations were hardly produced during the period. The only significant works were the two compiled anthologies from Tagore’s own translations. One is the *Collected Poems and Plays* compiled and published in 1936 by Macmillan and Co., London and the other is *Poems* published in 1942 by Visva-Bharati Kolkata.

The fifties, however, produced a significant number of translations from Tagore. Between 1955 and 1957 at least four books were published by three translators. These were Sheila Chatterjee’s *Syamali* published in 1955 by Visva-Bharati, Kolkata; Aurobindo Bose’s *A Flight of Swans* and *The Herald of Spring* published from London by John Muray respectively in 1955 and 1957, and Kumaresh Ray’s *Glimpse of Tagore’s Poems in English Verse* published in 1956 by Economic Press, Kolkata.

Sheila Chatterjee’s *Syamali* is a complete translated version of Tagore’s Bengali work *Syāmalī* (1936). Her translations have been appreciated in a review by William Radice who comments that Sheila Chatterjee had shown remarkable success in her attempt to translate the *Syamali* poems. Radice compares the Bengali original poem ‘Āmi’ with Chatterjee’s translation ‘I’ and comments:

Her translation has strength and elegance. There is a contrast of sound quality in lines such as ‘In a sky devoid of blue, / wrapped in the mathematics of impersonal existence’ that has much to do with the way the Bengali works. In the line ‘From distance to distance in the far away eternal myriad worlds’, the pairing of sounds—

27 Nagendranath Gupta, *Sheaves* (Allahbad: Indian Press 1922), Introduction.

28 *The Modern Review*, 5 May 1930.

distance, far/away, eternal/myriad— has something in common with the Bengali 'dūrānte ananta asaṃkhyā loke lokantare.'... It is not great translation, but it is serviceable. On the whole I would recommend this book as the best piece of extended Tagore verse translation I have come across.²⁹

Kumaresh Ray's *Glimpses of Tagore's Poems in English Verse* published translations of twenty-three poems. He attempted to translate Tagore competently. In the introductory note Ray stated: 'My attempt is to translate the selected poems considering the forms, themes and tone of the originals... there have been pioneers no doubt but their number is few and their work, casual and stray... my attempt is to make a more regular and consolidated presentation.' Ray's work, however, has not been able to create a significant readership because the book has not been in print for a long time.

One of the prolific translators of Tagore's poems in the fifties, sixties and seventies is Aurobindo Bose. Apart from the two books mentioned above, Bose published three other volumes. These are *Wings of Death* published from London by John Murray in 1960; *Later Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* published from New Delhi by Peter Owen Ltd. in 1974 and *Lipikā* published from London by Peter Owen Ltd in 1977. Bose translated Tagore mainly for his 'love for Gurudeb' and to present his greatness to western readers through translations.³⁰

In *A Flight of Swans* Bose translated all the poems from the original *Balāka* (1916). In the Preface he says: 'I have attempted to translate the poems literally though they may sound at places a little strange to English ears'. In *Herald of Spring* he translated 34 poems out of 101 poems of *Mahuā* (1929). In the Preface he says: 'I have translated roughly half of the *Mahuā* poems and the other half is beyond my capacity.' His *Wings of Death* contains translations of 71 poems selected from four different poetical works— *Prāntik* (1938) *Rogśayyāy* (1940), *Ārogya* (1941) and *Śeṣ Lekhā* (1941). Again, *Later Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* contains fifty-five poems selected from seven different poetical works— *Pariśeṣ* (1931), *Nabajātak* (1939), *Patrapuṭ* (1936), *Shyāmālī* (1936), *Bicitrā* (1932), *Sānāi* (1940), and *Pūrabī* (1925). Lastly in *Lipikā* Bose translated all the prose poems of the Bengali work *Lipikā* (1922).

Bose's translations were reviewed by William Radice who contested Bose's claim that he is literal in his approach to translation. Radice quoted from 'The Young

29 William Radice, "Tagore's Poetry in English Translation", p. 16.

30 Aurobindo Bose, *A Flight of Swans* (London: John Murray, 1955), Preface.

Bride' (Naba Badhu), one of the translated poems from *Mahuā*, and shows that 'Bose left nine important words untranslated', the phrase 'in robes of crimson' is not in the original, the word 'tender' is a downright mistranslation of the wonderful Bengali word *mlan* (thin, pale, emaciated, wraith-like).³¹ Radice commented that as Bose did not try to capture the technical aspects of the original such as rhyme and form he should have retained the richness of content adequately.³²

A more productive period of Tagore's poems in English translation is the sixties. The remarkable publication during this time is the volume, *One Hundred and One* (1966) edited by Humayun Kabir, handsomely published by Asia Publishing House, London.³³ Eighteen translators contributed to the making of this anthology. Amalendu Bose and the editor Humayun Kabir top the list as translators of eight poems each while Buddhadev Bose translated two poems and Lila Ray only one. In reviewing this book Sujit Mukherjee commented:

One Hundred and One is not an anthology of translations as translations, but a collection of assignments given to several people who shared a common devotion to Rabindranath. ... Any attempt at concentrating on the quality of these translations is diverted by the ills that customary Tagore translation is heir to... a

31 William Radice, "Tagore's Poetry in English Translation", p. 15.

32 A sample translation from Bose is given here as illustration:

Source Text

'chabi' (from Balākā)
tumi ki kebal chabi, śudhu paṭe likhā?
ai-ye sudūr nīhārikā
yārā kare āche bhīṛ
akāśer nīṛ
ai yārā dinrātri
ālo-hāte caliāche ādhārer yātri
graha tārā rabi,
tumi ki tāder mata satya nao?
hāi chabi, tumi śudhu chabi?

Translated Text

Art thou a picture, only a picture?
Art thou not as real as the distant stars?
Which cluster in the heavens, traveling through the darkness
With lights in their hand
Art thou not as true as these?
Alas, only a picture, nothing more.

33 *One Hundred and One* remains out of print for a long time. In 2005 this same book was reprinted by UBSPD under the title *Poems of Rabindranath Tagore*.

large number of these translations do not sound like contemporary work at all, they seem to echo our Victorian past.³⁴

In the sixties other works of poetry translation from Tagore include *Poems from Puravi* (1960) by Kshitis Roy; *The Later Poems of Tagore* (1961) and *Tagore for You* (1966) by Sisirkumar Ghose; *Anthology of One Hundred Songs of Rabindranath Tagore in Staff Notation*, Vol 1 and 2 (1961, 1967); *A Bunch of Poems* (1962) by Monika Verma and *Boundless Sky* (1964). *Poems from Puravi* (1960) by Kshitis Roy is a slim volume that was published for private circulation. This book contains translations of seven poems— six from Tagore's *Purabi* (1925) and one from *Ses Lekhā* (1941). Monika Verma's *A Bunch of Poems* (1962) is also a slim volume containing translations of only five poems from *Shyāmali* (1936). The book was published by Writers Workshop, Kolkata. In the introductory note Monika Verma claims that each of her translated poems 'must stand on its own merit, as a poem, not as just a translation.'³⁵ *Boundless Sky* (1964) is an anthology handsomely published by Visva-Bharati. This book includes translations of forty-six poems along with other translated items. The translations chosen are from Tagore's own English versions, excepting a few that were collected from the published translations in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* between 1925 and 1937. Sisirkumar Ghose's *The Later Poems of Tagore* (1961) and *Tagore for You* (1966) are not exclusively works of translation. In *The Later Poems of Tagore* Ghose translated some poems partly or completely while discussing the greatness of Tagore. His *Tagore for You* is more or less of the same nature. The book includes translations of a total of twenty-seven poems along with some essays, parables and letters. *Anthology of One Hundred Songs of Rabindranath Tagore in Staff Notation*, volume one, was published in 1961 and volume two in 1967. Each of the volumes includes 50 songs. Transliterations of the songs were by K.P Biswas and Trina Pandit transcribed them into staff notation. Most of the translations were by Kshitis Roy and a few were by Tagore.

The year 1969 saw the appearance of two volumes of translated poems from Tagore. One was Sisir Chattopadhyay's *Patraput* published from Kolkata by Pathikrit Prakashani and the other was Rabindra Nath Choudhury's *Fifteen Longer Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* published by Shri Rabindranath Choudhury from Orissa. *Patraput* includes Sisir Chattopadhyay's translation of

34 Sujit Mukherjee, *Translation as Discovery and Other Essays*, pp. 60-63.

35 Monika Verma, *A Bunch of Poems* (Writers Workshop, 1962), Introduction.

all the fifteen poems from the Bengali *Patrapuṭ* (1936). Chattopadhyay said nothing about his translations or his approach to translation beyond declaring that he had ‘attempted to translate these poems as Tagore did not have the time to translate them.’ With Rabindra Nath Choudhury’s *Fifteen Longer Poems*, an interesting variation in title is noticeable. The same book was published by Orient Paperback in 1975 with the title *Love Poems of Rabindranath Tagore*. In the Introduction of his work, Choudhury comments: ‘the westerners would not have neglected Tagore if they had come in contact with authentic translations’. About his nature of his translations he says: ‘I have not attempted versification in English translation of the poems, which was beyond my capacity.’

In the early seventies two books containing translations of Tagore’s *Śeṣ Lekhā* poems appeared in print. One was P. Lal and Shymasree Devi’s *Last Poems*, published by Writers Workshop, Kolkata, and the other was Pritish Nandy’s *The Last Poems of Rabindranath Tagore*, published from Kolkata by Dialogue Publications. William Radice reviewed both these works and commented that translations of neither of the works are adequately competent.³⁶

The eighties were remarkable for producing many translations of Tagore’s poems. The most prolific translator during this period was Brother James Talarovic.³⁷ Talarovic learnt Bengali and was attracted to Tagore’s poems. Between 1983 and 1986 he brought out five volumes of translations, all of which were published from Dhaka. These volumes are: *Gitanjali*, *Noibedya*, *Gitimalya*; *Gitali* and *Sonar Taree* respectively, published in 1983, 1984, 1984, 1985 and 1986.³⁸ Most of these works had no reprints or editions till 2000.

The poems of the original *Gitāñjai* (1910); *Gītimālya* (1910); *Naibedya* (1901); *Gītāli* (1916) and *Sonār Tarī* (1894) are exquisitely rhymed and metrically arranged and many of these poems had been set to music. In his English rendering Brother James did not try to capture the musical aspects of the verses or the meter or rhyme. But he tried to provide a form of the poem by arranging

36 William Radice, “Tagore’s Poetry in English Translation”, pp. 24-25.

37 Brother James was born on 4 May 1915, in Cleveland, Ohio. He studied science at the University of Notre Dame and taught Chemistry in Indianapolis, Indiana. He arrived in East Bengal, India, in January 1941 and worked as superintendent of schools in Toomilia (Dhaka District) and later became Headmaster of St. Gregory’s High School in Dhaka. Source: Brother James, *Gitanjali* (Indiana: Sorin Book, 2002), p. 5.

38 All these works were the translation of the complete works under the same Bengali titles.

the line structures. Obviously, Brother James avoided capturing the technical crafts and nuances of the original. His main target was to present the content of the original as far as possible in simple English. Most of his works did not have reprints or editions till 2008.

More than half a dozen new books were published in the eighties. These include Sudhamayee Mukherjee's *Some Songs of Rabindranath Tagore* (1981); Aruna Chakravarty's *Songs of Tagore* (early eighties); Pratima Bowes' *Some Songs and Poems from Rabindranath Tagore* (1984); Sisir Kumar Ghose's *Forty Poems of Rabindranath Tagore*; William Radice's *Selected Poems* (1985); Shafi Ahmed's *Tagore's Eleven* (1985); Arun K Sill's *Gitanjali* (eighties); Kawser Ali Shaik's *Verses from Rabindranath Tagore* (1989). Sudhamayee Mukherjee, the wife of Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay, translated only five poems and privately published them under the title *Some Songs of Rabindranath Tagore*. Kawser Ali Shaik's *Verses from Rabindranath Tagore* that included translations of a few songs was also published for private circulation. Aruna Chakravarty's *Songs of Tagore* was published (undated, but probably in the eighties) from Bombay by an organization called Vaitalik. This book includes translations of 100 songs. The Bengali text is transliterated into Devangri, and the book, according to the introduction, was not for sale but for distribution to the educational institutions and Rabindra Sangeet Societies on request. Arun K Sil's *Gitanjali* was also published undated and also without the name of any publisher. Sil, a physician by profession, translated all the poems of Tagore's Bengali *Gitanjali* (1910). The book includes a prefatory note by Asit K Banerjee who appreciates Sil's endeavour for not to follow 'the usual practice of Tagore subjectivism, but to enliven him with the original aroma.'³⁹ The most successful work in the decade, however, is William Radice's *Selected Poems*.⁴⁰ Radice⁴¹ took a challenge to translate Tagore's poems more

39 Arun K. Sil, *Gitanjali* (Kolkata: eighties), Preface.

40 William Radice, *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 1985). In its first edition this book includes translations of 48 poems selected from various poetical works of Tagore. First reprint with revision came out in 1987; Second reprint with revision came out in 1993; Reprint with new preface and an additional appendix was in 1994; First Indian edition was brought out in 1995. After that several reprints were made.

41 Radice is a British poet, writer and translator. He learnt Bengali and became a teacher of Bengali in School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His research interest is in Bengali language and literature.

competently and adequately than any of the earlier attempts. Published by Penguin the book has got wider focus and readership.

The last decade of the twentieth century has also been significant for producing new and fresh translations from Tagore's poetical oeuvre. Significant works during this period include Ketaki Kushari Dyson's⁴² *I Won't Let You Go*, first published from London in 1991 by Bloodaxe Books; Abu Rushd's *Selected Songs of Rabindranath Tagore* published from Dhaka by Rabindra Charcha Kendra in 1992; John Thorpe's *Let My Head Bow Down* published from Dhaka by SIM International in 1993; Mohit Chakrabarti's two books *Songs Eternal: A Hundred Songs of Rabindranath Tagore* and *Convalescence And Selected Songs* published respectively in 1992 and 1996 by Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi; Joe Winter's *The Gitanjali of Rabindranath Tagore* published in 1998 by Writers Workshop, Kolkata; Muhammad Anisur Rahaman's *Songs of Tagore* published in 1999 by Pathak Samabesh, Dhaka; and Radice's *Particles, Jottings, Sparks: The Collected Brief Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* first published in 2000 by Harper Collings, New Delhi. This closing decade of the twentieth century is also remarkable for compilation of all the English translations by Tagore himself and published under the title *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*.⁴³

Tagore's poems continue to be translated with a lot more enthusiasm beyond 2000. More than a dozen volumes can be found by 2011. These are: Wendy Barker and Saranindranath Tagore's *Rabindranath Tagore: Final Poems* (2001), a selection of 38 poems from Tagore's original *Arogya* (1941), *Rogsayyāy* (1940), *Janmadine* (1941) and *Sesh Lekhā* (1941); Devi Mitra's *500 Songs of Rabindranath Tagore* (2003) published by Writer's Workshop, Kolkata; *Songs of Rabindranath Tagore* and *The Flute: Selected Poems of*

42 Ketaki Kushari Dyson was born in Kolkata in 1940 and studied English literature at Kolkata and Oxford. She received a doctorate in English from Oxford. Though she has lived in Britain for more than half of her life, she has never given up her writing in her first language i.e. in Bengali and her links with the literary life of her native Bengal. *I Won't Let You Go* has been reprinted almost every year since its first publication. *I Won't Let You Go* was reprinted 9 times till 2000 since its first publication. Source: *I Won't Let You Go* (Reprinted 2000).

43 This book was brought out by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. Of the four volumes three were published in 1996 and volume eight came out in 2008. *Volume one* include translations of poems along with a good introduction and annotation of the translations by Sisir Kumar Das.

Rabindranath Tagore translated by Jadu Saha, published in 2003 by Shipra Publications, New Delhi; Sailesh Parekh's *Rabindranath Tagore: Prantik* (2003) published by Writer's Workshop, Kolkata; *Selected Poems: Rabindranath Tagore* (2004) published by Tagore Translation series undertaken by Oxford University Press in collaboration with Visva-Bharati; *Of Love, Nature and Devotion: Selected Songs of Rabindranth Tagore* (2008) by Kalpana Bardhan and *Rabindranath Tagore and The Singer and His Song* (2009) by Reba Som. In 2011 translations of 56 poems appeared in *The Essential Tagore*,⁴⁴ a mega volume edited by Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakravarty and published jointly by Harvard University Press and Bisva-Bharati. The book has received a global focus immediately after its publication and translations have been appreciated by many scholars.⁴⁵

By way of conclusion, I have the following observations in the area of Tagore's poems in English translation: Although Tagore is the most translated Bengali poet so far, not more than one fourth of his total stock of poems has been translated into English till now. Most translations, however, are poor in quality. Some poems or volumes have been translated by various hands. For example, all the poems of *Gitanjali* (1910) have been translated by at least three translators (Brother James, Joe Winter and Arun K Sil); As far as the readership is concerned Tagore's self-translated work *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* is the most widely read and most published translations so far. Most translations have been published from London, Kolkata and Dhaka. In the colonial phase publication originated and was almost always confined to London. In the post Colonial phase majority of the works were published from Kolkata. Tagore's Visva-Bharati and Sahitya Academi of Delhi played a significant role in publishing these translations. Some libraries are good repositories of translations. These are: National Library, Kolkata; Visva-Bharati Library, Santiniketan; Sahitya Akademi Library, New Delhi; The Library of School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and the British Library (Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books, India Office Library and Records and the Department of Printed Books). Since Tagore's own translations are no more under copyright, these are being published by different publishers, sometimes with different titles. One such

44 This is the largest and most comprehensive single volume of Tagore's works available in English. The book includes translations of ten genres: poetry, songs, autobiographical works, letters, travel writings, prose, novels, short stories, humorous pieces and plays.

45 One of the reviews published from Bangladesh: *The Daily Star*, August 11, 2012.

example is *Here I Send My Poems* published by Ankur Prakashani, Dhaka. This book is Tagore's self-translated work *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*, but with such a new title. The Same work with different title can also be found with some other translated volumes. For example, Rabindra Nath Choudhury's *Fifteen Longer Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* (1969) is his *Love Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* (1975) published by a different publisher. Similarly, *One Hundred and One Poems* (1967) became *Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* with a new edition (2005) published by UBSPD, Kolkata. Today, as far as the editions, reprints and the reviews are concerned the following books of translated poems from Tagore's oeuvre have more readership than the others: William Radice's two volumes— *Selected Poems* (1985) and *Particles, Jottings, Sparks: The Collected Brief Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* (2000), Wendy Barker and Saranindranath Tagore's *Rabindranath Tagore: Final Poems* (2001), Ketaki Kushari Dyson's *I Won't Let You Go* (1991) and *Selected Songs of Rabindranath Tagore* (2008) by Kalpanan Bardhan. Finally, I think that there is enough lacuna in the area of translating Tagore's poems in English. True image and greatness of a poet are badly distorted through bad translations, and Tagore is no exception to that. In order to present Tagore well to the English speaking audiences there is no alternative to good translations.