

Vol 4 Issue 1 July 2014

ISSN No :2231-5063

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Golden Research Thoughts

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2231-5063

Golden Research Thoughts Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial board. Readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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CREATION AND INTERPRETATION OF TAGORE'S GITANJALI

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Abstract:- Translation of literature is the device that bridges the gap between different cultures, nations and of course lingual boundaries. It is the communication of the meaning of a source-language text by means of an equivalent target-language text. So far as Indian literature in English is concerned it has always remained an indispensable component of literary and cultural studies in India. Indian society being a multilingual composition requires the translation of its various works in such a common language that can be read and understood not only in India, but at world-wide level. The Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, a writer, poet, philosopher and a great artist in the field of translation, was a cultural ambassador of India to the rest of the world. To give a universal appeal to his vast literature originally written in Bengali, he translated it into English painstakingly and with an indefatigable zeal. His beautiful composition “Geetanjali” a collection of ‘103’ poems is the translated version of his various Bengali poems written under numerous different titles. It was only after the publication of “Geetanjali” that he was awarded Nobel Prize in the year 1913. My present paper attempts to explore a few of the poems of his translated work of Geetanjali, which no doubt retain the literary quality of the original to a great extent.

Keywords: Creation and Interpretation , communication , Indian society .

INTRODUCTION :-

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.*

Today if we are able to dive deep into the fragrant sea of these beautiful immortal words it is only because these lines are available to us in translated English version of an originally Bengali poem from Gitanjali. A Titan of the Bengal Renaissance, *Rabindranath Tagore's* magnum opus, *Gitanjali*, which won for him the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913, is actually a “translated” work by himself from Bengali, but quite different from the original in terms of material choice, textual form, narrative patterns or content framing. These translations create a space in which Tagore's poetic voice that is hauntingly musical, richly metaphysical, and delicately sensual can be heard.

Rabindranath Tagore, the minstrel of Mother India, occupies a frontal position in the galaxy of the prophets of humanism. He became the first-ever Asian writer to be awarded a Nobel Prize for translated version of his cycle of song-poems, *Gitanjali*. This crowning success of Rabindranath Tagore has already brought East and West closer together in a common fellowship and understanding. Where the forces of racial rivalry and religious division are so strong, it is indeed no small blessing to humanity when a generous voice can be clearly heard, above the discordant tumult of the times, which the whole world welcomes as a messenger and revealer of peace and goodwill to mankind.

A man with numerous dimensional personalities Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is distinguished for being the most eminent Bengali renaissance poet, philosopher, essayist, critic, composer and educator who dreamt of a harmony of universal humanity among the people of different origin through freedom of mind and spiritual sovereignty.

In *Gitanjali* we encounter a rainbow of cosmic dimension where Indian classical and folk traditions mingle with

western literature and thought, Sufi mysticism and Buddhist teachings. The best of his poetry is intensely personal and universal, spiritual and secular – reminding us of songs and ballads of the Romantic poets, of *Bhajans* and Bhakti poets, of *Ghazals*, Rumi and Sufi poets, of hymns and the Bible.

The main reason for Tagore's self translated English *Gitanjali* to be so widely and rapidly accepted by the West can be illustrated by the poetic norm of the reception context, ideology in the target culture, incorporation of the east and west religion and philosophy. The paper consequently tries to redefine the literary translator's identity and reassess the long run norm "faithfulness" historically and dynamically.

Gitanjali was originally written in his own mother-tongue, Bengali. He said "I wrote those poems for myself. I did not think of publishing them when I was writing." When Rabindranath Tagore first landed in London, in 1912, he had placed before his English friends some translations of his Bengali poems. He had offered them with singular diffidence, without at all realizing the value of his great achievement. He expressed "I found that I had to strip my Bengali verses of all their gaudy ornaments and to clothe them in the simplest English dress."

The original poems are marked by simplicity of diction, structural compactness and effortless rhyming and cadence; almost each and every lyric is an example of Tagore's mastery of craftsmanship. The translations, though in prose, retain the haunting quality of the original to a great extent as is evidenced by the enthusiasm with which the book was welcomed by W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound in England and the phenomenal popularity it enjoyed for at least one decade. The translations are more or less faithful to the Bengali original; the deviations, which are not many, that one might point out are not only legitimate but satisfying too.

Rabindranath Tagore's Bengali anthology *Gitanjali* earlier comprised 156 Bengali poems. With the addition of '*divas yadi sāmga halo*' the number increased to 157. Although for *Gitanjali* Tagore translated songs / poems from different collections, the translations are threaded together by a common theme. Most of them express different moods and feelings of a devotee whose Lord enchants him as a lover, a singer, a flutist, even as death. The relationship has been viewed from a numbers of viewpoints -- pang of separation (Poem 84), preparation for a tryst (Poem 93), waiting for the beloved (Poem 41), failure to recognize (Poem 26), the necessity to do off ornaments impeding perfect union (Poem 7) and so on and so forth. These themes are well-known to all readers of Tagore's poetry. Besides these angles, the bereaved heart of the poet lacerated by the death of his wife Mrinalini and his daughter Renuka (in 1902), of his father Debendranath (in 1905) and his son Samindra (in 1907) in a span of just six years finds expression in singing so ecstatically that ultimately tries to hide the mirth of his heart.

*Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf, my darling,
and gladness without measure. The heaven's river
has drowned its banks and the flood of joy is abroad. (Poem 57)*

It ends with a paradox-embedded prayer about sound flowing into silence as depicted

*Let all my songs
gather together their diverse strains
into a single current and flow to a sea of silence
in one salutation to thee (Poem 103)*

The God of *Gitanjali* is seldom a Superpower whose abode is in distant heaven. So seeking deliverance by praying to God in the 'lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut' is bound to be futile. In Poem 73 the idea has been voiced in a purposeful suggestion:

*Leave this chanting and singing and calling of beads
whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner
of a temple with doors all shut? Open thy eyes and
see thy God is not before thou?*

*Deliverance is not for me in renunciation,
I feel the embrace of freedom
in a thousand bonds of delight. (Poem 73)*

The last few poems of *Gitanjali* are about death -- a death that is not annihilation but a fulfillment. Hence in Poem 100 the poet uses a climax figuring out death as deliverance, a step to immortality:

*And now I am eager to die into the death less.
Into the audience hall by the fathomless abyss where
swells up the music of toneless strings
I shall take this harp of my life (Poem 100)*

Translating literary language, especially that of poetry, has always been the toughest challenge to translators and often it is claimed not without reason that poetry is literally untranslatable. As poetry shows a unique cohesion of sound and sense, of form and content, in translating poetry one must murder to dissect, that is, one must dismantle this cohesion in order to abstract the embedded idea for translation. Translation is both Tagore's supreme strength and singular weakness. While it is his translation of *Gitanjali* that made him world famous and earned him the Nobel prize for literature, some of his hurriedly done and less successful translations subjected him to scathing criticism

Be that as it may, what we want to examine here is to what extent the aroma of the original composition has been retained or improved, got diluted or lost in the translation of *Gitanjali*. The panoramic view of Rabindranath Tagore's poems will reveal that in some poems the original context has been omitted in translation. In a majority of cases the original has been rendered satisfactorily though occasionally the force of the original has been enhanced in translation. For example in Poem 27 the line '*duhkha diye rākhen tor mān*' -- which may be rendered in English as 'honors you by making you suffer' -- has been dropped, although the other line of the stanza '*niśithe ghana andhakāre/ dāken tore premavisare*' has been faithfully reproduced in the expression 'he calls thee to the love-tryst/ through the darkness of the night'. In Poem 75 the speaker reflects on how the life of a river or a flower, a creation of nature, does not end in meeting human needs -- 'its last service is to offer itself to thee'. There is a superb reconciliation in the second stanza of the original poem, '*sampūrna kariyā tavu sampūrna nā hay*'. This reunion, which in translation would read 'ends (its task) yet it remains to be completed', has not been retained in the English rendition. Again, in Poem 26 there is a charming description in the Bengali original -- '*kena āmāra rajanī yāy/ kāche peye kāche nā pāy*' which Tagore did not care to retain in the English version.

In some cases the force of the original effect stands attenuated in translation. The following lines from Poem 12: '*savār ceye kāche āsā/ savār ceye dūr/ bada kathin sādhanā, yār bada sahaj sur*' read in English Gitanjali as:

*It is the most distant course that comes
nearest to thyself and that training is the most intricate
Which leads to the most utter simplicity of a tune (Poem 12)*

Such examples are rare; but in most cases the effect as well as the force of the original has been retained in the translated work as it retains in Poem 3 where the spill of melody all around overwhelms the speaker. The original line is '*āmāre tumi phelecha kon phā(n)de/ caudike mor surer jāl vuni*'. The idea has been finely retained in the translation:

*Ah, thou hast made my heart captive
in the endless meshes of thy music, my master ! (Poem 3)*

Similarly, the line 'the joy that sits still/ with its tears on the open red lotus of pain' is a faithful reproduction of the original which reads '*ye ānanda dā(n)dāy ā(n)khi jāle/ duhkha vyāthār rakta śatadale*'. But what is most interesting is that in quite a number of poems the beauty of the original message has got enhanced in the translation. For example, the lines '*rātri yeman lukiye rākhe/ ālor prārthanāy/ temani gabhūr moher mājhe/ tomāy āmi cā*' have been translated in Poem 38 as:

*As the night keeps hidden in its gloom
the petition for light
even thus in the depth of my consciousness rings the cry
I want thee, only thee. (Poem 38)*

The surprise consists in looking upon night as the womb of dawn, the source of light. The word 'gloom', its Bengali counterpart not found in the original, adds additional support to the revelation. The translation is better in the sense that it tells us not only who hides 'the petition of light' but with what (with the wrapper of 'gloom'). Analogously, in Poem 41 the destitute speaker has nothing but her poverty to offer to her lord:

*How could I utter for
shame that I keep for my dowry this poverty. (Poem 41)*

Whatever be the content, the beauty of *Gitanjali* is essentially poetic beauty, which springs from the expression of spiritual experience in terms of felt human experience, from an expert translation of ideas into images. Tagore translated creatively and did not always care to capture the original melody by using corresponding phono-tropes or rhythm. Of course, there are glorious exceptions like the opening lines from Poem 45: 'Have you not heard his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes?' or from Poem 57: "Light, my light, the world filling light, the eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light!"

When a great poet expresses himself in two diverse tongues, he would phrase his thought, feeling creatively in a style and diction that is nearer that of the target language. The poet is the best judge and a mere rendering would leave odd ends sticking out. One would not be a mere replica, linguistically, for each language has its own genius. Language conditions the thought process and the process of expression when languages differ would not be the same. The idea has been supported by the example of poem 35:

Tagore's original poem in Bengali written in 1901:

*Chitta jethaa bhoyashoonya, vuchcha jethaa shir
Jnaana jethaa mukto, jethaa gruher praachir
Apanaa praangana tale, dibasa sharvaree
Vasudher raakhenaai, khanda kshudra kor'
Jethaa baakya hridayer, utsamukha hote
Vuchhswaasaa vuthe, jethaa nirvaarita srote
Deshe deshe dishe dishe, karmadhaara thaai
Ajasra sasraavidh, charitaardha taai
Jethaa tuchcha aachaarer, marabaalu raashi
Bicharer, srotha patho, pheeve naai graasi
Paurusher koreni shataadha nitya jethaa
Tumi sarva karma chintaa anander kori pitah
Bhaarater seyee swarga koro jaagarita.*

Tagore's rendering of his own poem into English

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depths of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert land of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.*

In Tagore's rendering the Bengali original underwent transformation, not merely trans-creation. If we study the original and the rendering, many modifications are apparent:

1. *aapno pragana tale* is not retained in the English version.
2. The extra word 'World' is brought in.
3. *karma dhaara tai* has been transformed for focus where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection.
4. More significantly, *tumi sarva karma chintaa anander netaa* – the line relating to God is transformed: to describe Him as one who is powerful to lead forward the mind into ever widening thought and action.

A translation should follow the original text exactly like a shadow, which follows the original object. But on the other hand, if we notice, as a shadow can differ from its original object, depending on the intensity and the angle of light falling on it, a translation may also have a different form depending on the nature of light thrown on it by the translator by his interpretation. Tagore must have had his reasons, very strong ones, considering that we were then under an alien yoke. Even by scientific comparison of original Bengali poems and English translation one can notice certain changes:

1. In the English translation number 61 of *Khoka* from *Shishu* the last two stanzas were deleted.
2. The translated poem number 95 comprises two poems; complete poem number 89 of *Naivedya* and last stanza of 90th poem in Bengali.
3. Only the first part of the poem "*Utsarga*" has been translated in the English translation number 102.

It is not easy to identify the Bengali sources of all the poems that Tagore translated into English. His translations are not always faithful to his own Bengali. He admitted in the Preface to *The Gardener* that his 'translations are not always literal- the originals being sometimes abridged and sometimes paraphrased'. On several occasions he has used more than one Bengali poem to create a single poem in English. Poem 95 of the English *Gitanjali*, for example is a translation of two Bengali poems of *Naivedya* (no. 89 and 90). Some of his translations are so remote from the original that they should be considered as distinctly separate poems with a very slender connection with their Bengali counterparts. Tagore himself was very aware of this problem. In a letter to Ajit Kumar Chakravarti (13 March 1913) written from Illinois, USA, Tagore wrote, 'What I try to capture in my English translation is the heart and core of my original Bengali. That is bound to make for a fairly wide deviation. In another letter written two months later from London (12 May 1913), he admits that 'the form and features of the original become difficult in my translations- the way I do them these days. My translations are more a reflection than an exact replica of the original.

An anthology of the Poems of *Gitanjali* from different *Kavyagrantha* written over one decade can best be analyzed through this table:

Sl. No.	Book	Year of publication	No of poems
1	Chaitali	1912	1
2	Kalpana	1900	1
3	Naivedya	1901	15
4	Smaran	1903	1
5	Shishu	1903	3
6	Utsarga	1903	1
7	Kheya	1906	11
8	Gitanjali	1910	53
9	Achalayatan	1912	1
10	Giti-malya*	1914	16
	Total		103

*Note: collected from the manuscript for Gitanjali, before publication as book in 1914

Described by Tagore as 'revelations of my true self to me' (pg xv), there is no doubt that Gitanjali is the work of a deeply spiritual man. It is in Gitanjali (and his later songs) that we encounter his fully realized personal-poetic vision. In one of his letters, Tagore wrote about Gitanjali: "I can assure you they are not literary productions at all, they are life productions." (pg iv) In another letter he wrote the poems (in *Gitanjali*) were "an expression of my inmost feelings, they were my humblest prayers, my sincerest *sadhana*, and a reflection of my joys and sorrows." (pg viii) The poems reflect a sense of creative rapture, emerging from a period of intense spiritual crisis and personal suffering.

Tagore's Gitanjali has spread his fame across the horizon of western life like a rainbow. Sarojini Naidu said that Gitanjali to the west went as a simple direct immortal and memorable message. The very first line of the opening song of Gitanjali seems to have the power to set the heart ablaze: "thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure". Gitanjali thrilled Yeats as no other work of imagination had done, and he spoke of these lyrics as "a work of supreme culture" and reveals its influence on himself:

"I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me".

The emergence of Rabindranath Tagore into the world of English literature coincides with the publication of the English version of Gitanjali for the first time in November 1912. Why Tagore did translations in the way he did, in a rhythmically free, slightly biblical style of prose-poetry. Perhaps Tagore was open about his limitations: he wasn't an English poet, he couldn't match in English the metre and rhyme of the Bengali texts, so the style was partly *faute de mieux*. But – maybe instinctively and unconsciously – he hit on a style that would enable his reputation to spread rapidly not only in the English-speaking world but elsewhere, because the style was very easy to translate into other languages. About his use of English language Tagore observes:

"Once the unguarded movement, I translated my Gitanjali into English prose. At that time distinguished English writers accepted my translation as a part of their literature. May, they spoke so highly of it that I felt embarrassed as I thought to be an exaggeration. I am a foreigner. There was neither rhyme nor metre in my poetry. Even if they found some aesthetic pleasure in it, I could not accept their verdict. It occurred to me then that I lost nothing but by giving poems a shape of prose. On the contrary, if I had translated them in English poetry, they could probably have been censured and looked down upon."

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