

# OF DEFINING AND REDEFINING AN 'IDEAL' TRANSLATOR: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

SOMDATTA MANDAL

*Abstract:* With the problem of linguistic and cultural translation gaining predominance in post-colonial studies, my presentation will try to evaluate practical issues and problems related to translation primarily in four categories. The first is when the author himself/herself acts as the translator of his/her own text. References to Alka Sarogi's Sahitya Akademi award winning novel *Kalikatha: Via Bypass* and Amit Chaudhuri's fiction will support this section. Translating a work like Joginder Paul's *Khwabrau* (*Sleepwalkers*) by someone closely related to the author forms the focus of the second category. The third category comprises different versions of translating the same text by academics and freelancers. Different versions of Rajinder Singh Bedi's short story "Laajwanti" and Jibanananda Das's "Banalata Sen" will be discussed in this section. To focus upon the fourth and final category, I will use cinematic translations of adapted texts – Mahasweta Devi's *Hazaar Churashir Ma* and the film as well as theatrical adaptation of her short story *Rudaali*. My presentation will end with the contention that since there are no immediate solutions in sight, there is nothing called an 'ideal' translator.

I begin with a comment by Walter Benjamin that Homi Bhaba quotes at the head of a chapter in his *The Location of Culture*: "*Translation passes through continua of transformation, not abstract ideas of identity and similarity*", (Walter Benjamin 1994:214) which implies a language that is performative and active, or literary translation, where the language is formulative or enunciatory, the transformational process cannot (or possibly, doesn't want to) ensure a sense of belonging. The separated textuality of the translated text is proposed by, among others, the new signifying and stylizing practices, and a new order of expression that create a lot of ground between the *ur*-text and the finished product. A translation does not want to remain a mere mirror image of the original in a different language; it always aspires to appropriate elements of a new textuality, to assume a new identity and to transcend strict similarities with the *ur*-text. Both of these images are abstract activities, but are now subsumed under a new language game - that of growth, not simply transformation. This 'growth' is largely a product of reading (or misreading) of culture in which the reader brings his own ingrained ideas and cultural perceptions. The textuality of the translated text, in that sense, is a composite in which a cross-cultural dialogue marks a space of complicity and conformation.

Even if we agree with all these propositions, a basic question remains unanswered, viz. who is an 'ideal' translator? With the problem of linguistic and cultural translation gaining prominence in postcolonial studies, this paper attempts to evaluate practical issues and problems related to translation of his/her own text. References to Rabindranath Tagore's own translation of *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)* in 1912, and ninety

years later, Alka Saraogi's Sahitya Akademi award winning novel *Kalikatha-Via Bypass* illustrate this category.

Given that English, the only language into which Rabindranath Tagore translated his own work, was the language of his colonial masters, any evaluation of his work as a translator is essentially a 'colonial discourse'. But the extraordinary circumstances under which the poet started translating his own songs need to be recapitulated here (*Farida Majid 2001:85-100*). In 1912, the intelligentsia of Bengal decided to rectify the neglect of their greatest poet by celebrating his fiftieth birthday in the Town Hall of Calcutta (a very rare honour for a non-white in those days). After a string of other jubilee celebrations, the poet felt physically and emotionally exhausted and decided to have his vacation in England. He was due to set sail from Calcutta on March 19<sup>th</sup>, but being taken ill the night before, he retired to his family estate in East Bengal for rest and recovery. It was there that he began to translate some of his *Gitanjali* songs into English. In a letter to his niece, a year later, he wrote:

*That I cannot write English is such a patent fact that I never had even the vanity to feel ashamed of it ... I had not the energy to sit down and write anything new. So I took up the poems of Gitanjali and set myself to translate them one by one.*  
(Krishna Kripalini 1980:221)

As Majid rightly points out, one should keep in mind the fact that these were not 'poems' as such in terms of Tagore's entire canon.<sup>1</sup> (Majid: 100). Being the verbal parts of short musical compositions, their brevity was a factor singularly

suitable for a novice translator's enterprise under the circumstances. In the West, however, this simplicity was conveniently seen as "*the beauty and freshness of his Oriental thought*", not as a distillation achieved by consummate artistry.

From the time he was well enough to travel and his arrival in London a few months later, Tagore had filled an exercise book with English renditions of the *Gitanjali* songs. He presented it to William Rothenstein who later showed it to A.C. Bradley and W.B. Yeats. When India Society decided to publish a private edition of the book, Yeats was obviously chosen to be the editor and to write the preface. We are all aware of how the relationship between Tagore and Yeats soured. They parted ways and the very same man who was all praise for the Indian bard and was largely instrumental in introducing him to the western audience, wrote to Rothenstein in May 1935:

*Damn Tagore! ...he thought it more important to see and know English than to be a great poet, he brought out sentimental rubbish and wrecked his reputation, Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English. Nobody can write with music and style in a language not learned in childhood and ever since the language of his thought.*

I quote so many well-known historical facts just to emphasize that the crux of all these interrelated matters lies in



Tagore as a translator of his own work. Like many Bengalis of his time, and judging from his letters and speeches, Tagore had a good command of English. There are occasional phrases and lines in his rendition that capture the spirit of the original and are striking in English. Yet, *Gitanjali* is still a work of translation, which was made in the isolation of Tagore's village-estate in Bengal, with no other purpose than sharing some of his favourite songs with friends he would meet on his forthcoming trips abroad. There are inaccuracies and mistranslations in *Gitanjali*, but the apparent lack of any extra-literary motive make these mistakes tolerable in the days when there was no serious challenge to the assumption that literary translation is an inexact art, and when mistranslations of Oriental literature were even welcome (as in the case of Edward Fitzgerald's *The Rubbaiyat of Omar Khayyam*) as a creative activity of a sort.

If ability or command of English were in question, one would not be wrong to accept *improvements* in Tagore's translating endeavours after the *Gitanjali* experience. Though there are indications of improved English in his letter to Rothenstein over this period, yet we find that things went from bad to worse in his subsequent translations. In one of his letters Tagore stated:

*Please thank Yeats once again on my behalf for the help that he rendered to my poems in their perilous adventure of a foreign reincarnation and assure him that I at least never underestimate the value of his literary comradeship. Latterly I have written and published both prose and poetry in English, mostly translations, unaided by any friendly help,*

*but this again I have done in order to express my ideas, not for gaining any reputation for my mastery in the use of a language which can never be mine.*

The sincerity of this admission becomes suspect since Rothenstein, *in fact*, was being inundated with poems and translations, which Tagore kept sending him with a single-minded willfulness. Edward Thompson also accused Tagore of badly truncating his greater poems and inserting in his English translations "*pretty-pretty nonsense that was not in the original at all*". According to Thompson, Tagore's treatment of the Western public amounts to an insult to its intelligence, as he had managed to quarrel with everyone who criticized his English so far. Tagore claimed that being a Christian missionary, Thompson was incapable of understanding his idea of the *jiban-debata*.

Moving on to a similar phenomenon in very recent times, the problem of self-translation (also called 'auto-translation') manifests itself in a different form. Narrated in a chronological fashion, Alka Saraogi's novel *Kalikatha-Via Bypass* (Alka Saraogi 2002) gives us a brilliant picture of the Marwari business community that migrated from Rajasthan and made their second home in Calcutta. The novel was originally written in Hindi and later translated into English by the author herself within a short span of time. In the introduction of the translated version, she claimed that she had "rewritten" most of it and in the acknowledgements section admitted that her self-translation was faulty, and she had "*little*

*confidence in [her] Hinglish*". Though there is no perfect way of translating a text, one expected a little more finesse on the part of Saraogi, especially when she was confident that it was she who would be able to do justice to her novel. In spite of the help that she had received from her unnamed friend, it remains a great lapse on the part of the publishers to print the English version without correcting several grammatical errors and faulty literal translations. Phrases like "*the weekly schedule of the his classes*" (Alka Saraogi 2002:173), "*the British have broken the back of Bengal*" (Alka Saraogi 2002:202), "*Kishore Babu was put in mind of a three-month-old foetus*" (Alka Saraogi 2002:247); "*Perhaps it her fate*" (Alka Saraogi 2002:242); or "*making a flag out of the front of your sari*" (Alka Saraogi 2002:264) definitely lowers the charm of reading a Sahitya Akademi award-winning novel. Thus, as both these cases illustrate, the notion that the original writer is the best translator of his or her own work remains a myth.

## II

Translating a work like Joginder Paul's *Sleepwalkers* by someone closely related to the author forms the focus of the second category. First published as *Khwabrau* in Urdu in Lahore in 1990, this novella was made available to Indian readers in its Indian edition in 1991. An excellent translation into English by Sunil Trivedi and Sukrita Paul Kumar now makes it possible for the non-Urdu speaking readers appreciate the story. Apart from being a labour of love, what moves the reader most is probably the theme of the story, which harps upon the universal ideas of pain, anguish and trauma of separation following the partition of India. Briefly speaking, it tells the story of one Deewane Maulavi Sahab, who migrated from Lucknow to Karachi like the other *mohajirs* after the

partition but transported the entire city "*within the fold of their hearts*". While some of the other *mohajirs* are shocked into insanity, the protagonist does not feel the pain of separation because he is a sleepwalker and finds security in the world of dreams. Other call him mad, but it is his madness that helps him keep his sanity.

Apart from the gripping storyline what appeals to the readers is the epilogue entitled "*On Writing Sleepwalkers*" where Paul himself provides the background of conceiving such a tale. Visits to Lahore in the mid-eighties made Joginder Paul realize that "*the situation itself is the meaning that inspired [him] to attempt the novella*". He candidly admits, "*Suffer did I no less than Deewane Maulavi Sahab, the suffering having driven the old man out of his wits, and me to an insane pursuit of premature sanity*". Personal experience of the writer therefore made the translation of the feelings of the protagonist much more authentic. Again, the universality of the theme of the story is also reiterated when the author narrates how a German Indologist burst into tears after reading the story, managing to say between sobs, "*But this is my story. This is the story of all of us living on either side of the Berlin wall*". Though the wall has come down, the mental barriers still remain. Such a theme probably helps to transcend the limitations of translation.

### III

The third category comprises different versions of translating the same text by academics and freelancers. To illustrate my point I focus upon different translated versions of



Sadaat Hasan Manto's famous Urdu short story "*Toba Tek Singh*" and Jibanananda Das's eponymous poem "*Banalata Sen*". A comparative study of selected portions from the three translated versions of the Manto story reveals interesting details as the translation depends a lot on the qualification and background of the translator. Whereas the first version done by Tahira Naqvi (Alok Bhalla 1994) in 1994 is more condensed, with simple direct sentences (with Naqvi, settled in the United States herself, probably having the western readers as her target), the second translation done by Khalid Hasan (Rushdie 1997) in 1997 is more textual. The translator here seeks out more culture-specific words to remain as faithful to the original as possible. For example, instead of using just 'sweets' in the earlier version, he mentions 'rice crispies'. When M. Asaduddin (Ravikant & Saini 2001) ventured to translate the same story in 2001, he was already aware of the drawbacks of the earlier versions and therefore added a detailed explanation with notes at the end of his work. I quote from this note:

*Towards the end of the story, by a brilliant metonymic process, Bishen Singh becomes Toba Tek Singh; the person becomes the place where he was born and had his roots. They merge inextricably with each other, so much so, that towards the end of the story, at least in the Urdu text, it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. To my knowledge, no English translation of the story has endeavoured to retain this tension and ambiguity. I have endeavoured to retain it even if it meant sacrificing a BIT of lucidity.*

(Ravikant & Saini 2001)

Thus the physical description of Bishen Singh or Toba Tek Singh changes from "*ghoulish appearance*" of the first version, the "*frightened appearance*" of the second, to "*a fearsome look*" in the third. Again in another instance, the mention of Toba Tek Singh's daughter becomes much more explicit with details as one analyses the versions between 1994 and 2001.

1. *He had a daughter who was grown up now. As a child, she cried whenever she saw her father, and she continued to cry for him when she was a young woman. (Naqvi)*
2. *When he was first confined, he had left an infant daughter behind, now a pretty young girl of fifteen. She would come occasionally, and sit in front of him with tears rolling down her cheeks. In the strange world that he inhabited, hers was just another face. (Hasan)*
3. *He had a daughter who had grown up a little, every passing month, during these fifteen years, and was now a young woman. Bishen Singh could not recognize her. She used to cry at the sight of her father when she was an infant. Now a grown woman, tears still flowed from her eyes, seeing her father. (Asaduddin)*

The climatic end of the story also focuses upon the personal interpretations of the translator.

1. *But he was adamant and would not budge from the spot where he stood. When the guards threatened to use force, he installed himself in a place between the borders and stood there as if no power in the world could move him. ...Before the sun rose, a piercing cry arose from Bishan Singh who had been quiet and unmoving all this time. (Naqvi)*
2. *The guards even tried force, but soon gave up. There he stood in no man's land on his swollen legs like a colossus ... just before sunrise, Bishen Singh, the man who had stood on his legs for fifteen years, screamed and as officials from the two sides rushed towards him, he collapsed to the ground. (Hasan)*
3. *When they tried to move him forcibly to the other side, he stood on his swollen legs at a spot in the middle, in a posture that seemed to suggest that no power on earth could move him from there ...Just before sunrise, a sky-rendering cry emerged from the gullet of Bishen Singh, who till then had stood still and unmoving. (Asaduddin)*

With the different versions of Jibanananda Das's poem "*Banalata Sen*" the problem manifests itself further. Jibanananda Das (1899-1954) was one of the foremost figures of modern Bengali poetry and his work combines the substance of international modernism with the timeless experience of rural Bengal, and both these with the complex and disturbing patterns of urban life and political upheaval of his times. Since Jibanananda's poetry has a major contribution to Bengali poetic idiom, his work becomes specially challenging for the translator.

In his book *Translation as Discovery*, Sujit Mukherjee compares six different versions of "*Banalata Sen*" that had been published by 1981, including the translation by Martin Kirkman, as well as a "transcreation" of the poem by Mukul Sharma (Mukherjee 1994). Published in 1935, "*Banalata Sen*" may or may not be the best poem that the poet had written, but it is undoubtedly the most popular one. Built up through a series of opulent images of sea and island, lashing storm and quiet resting place, fragrant forests and shipwrecked sailors, captures the old fairy-land magic, that merges the geography of mythical and historical times only to culminate in the frustration and hope of the modern age. Asok and Vimbisara, Sravasti and Vidisa, the Malay Sea and the Sinhala Sea cease to be the luxurious backdrop of a romantic escape. Apart from heightening the contrast between the past and the present, and intensifying the pain and agony of modern man, the poem connects the narratorial voice with the ever-moving forces of history<sup>2</sup> (Chaudhuri 1998). The haunting rhythm, the rich imagery, the magic of proper names and the ethereal beauty of



the concluding sestet have contributed to its immense popularity. A comparison of the closing stanzas from some of the translations would help us to understand the problem better.

Sukanta Chaudhuri's translation reads as follows:

*At the end of all the days, dusk comes like the sound of dew;  
The kite wipes off the scent of sunlight from its wings.  
The earth's colours all quenched, the manuscript prepares  
To tell its stories, lit by firefly gleams.  
All the birds come home, all the rivers - all life's trade  
ends.  
Only the dark abides; and, to sit face to face, Banalata Sen.*

(Chaudhuri 1998)

Clinton B. Seely's translations in his book on Jibanananda Das's life and works are always competent and as faithful to the original meaning as possible. Seely's primary interest in his translations appears to be to reproduce the words of the source poems as accurately as possible. But in trying to avoid misreading and in following the sense of the original faithfully, the American largely ignores the formal and tonal quality of the original poem. He has translated it in free verse. Thus his version of the closing stanzas of the "*Banalata Sen*", reads like this:

*At day's end, like hush of dew  
Comes evening. A hawk wipes the scent of sunlight  
from its wings.  
When earth's colours fade and some pale design is*

*sketched,*  
*The glimmering fireflies paint in the story,*  
*All birds come home, all rivers, and all this life's*  
*tanks finished.*  
*Only darkness remains, as I sit there face to face with*  
*Banalata Sen.*  
(Seely 120)

In a note prefacing his translations, Chidananda Dasgupta, a distant relative of Jibanananda Das, reveals that the poet has given his "blessings readily" to five of the poems he had rendered into English shortly before Das's death in 1954 (Dasgupta 1972:28). Moreover, Dasgupta informs us that the poet had agreed to the translator's decision to avoid too literal renderings. Apparently, the poet had allowed Dasgupta "a certain degree of sacrifice of the literal meaning" and even some tampering with the sense of the original to make the meaning of a poem "comprehensible in a foreign idiom". The poet seemed to have also consented to Dasgupta's decision to have "smoothed out to a clear flow ...Jibanananda's very complicated and apparently arbitrary syntax". Thus Dasgupta decided to depart from the original as often as he felt necessary. Terming the tendency of translators in general to "convey all of the many layers of thought, feeling and rhythm of the original" as a "temptation" to be avoided and as the wrong kind of "enthusiasm" he describes himself as someone opting for "restraint". (Dasgupta 1972:28) Thus in his translation of "Banalata Sen" we read that "The raven wipes the smell of [sic] warm sun/ From its wings; the world's noises die". (Dasgupta 1972:28)

Having a series of translations before him already, Fakrul Alam is more conscious about his method of translation of the same poem. In the detailed introduction to the volume of Jibanananda's poems that he translated<sup>3</sup>, (Alam 1999) he explains his *modus operandi* as well as drawbacks in some of the earlier translated versions of the same poem. Confessing that he knew full well that a lot of the poetry of the original has got lost in his renderings as well, he states that to think that *"all or even much of the poetic qualities of Das's poems can be transmitted into another language is therefore to indulge in wishful thinking"*. For instance, the tonal qualities of a line such as this one from the *"Banalata Sen"* is uncapturable in translation:

*Chul tar kabekar andhokar Vidishar Nisha*

Even if one did not know any Bengali one could still hear the rich music of these lines coming from the extensive sound patterning - the internal rhyme and the repetition of the "a" "h" "r" and "s" sounds (Alam 1999). Alam further states that he has always worked on the assumption that translation of poetry should involve not only following the words of the source poem, but also in recovering something of the poetic qualities of the original, in transmitting the tone of the poet, and in conveying as much as is possible of Das's formal experiments and idiosyncrasies as a poet. Another goal that he had set himself was that *"the translated poem should be capable of being read as a poem in English in its own right"*. So the last stanza of his translation of the *"Banalata Sen"* reads as follows:

*At the end of a long day, with the soft sound of dew,*

*Night falls; the kite wipes the sun's smells from its wings;  
The world's colours fade; fireflies light up the world anew;  
Time to wrap up work and get set for the telling of tales;  
All birds home - rivers too - life's transactions close again;  
What remains is darkness and facing me - Banalata Sen!*

(Fakrul Alam 1999)

#### IV

To focus upon the fourth and final category, that of translating the text from one medium to another, I will use cinematic translations of adapted texts - Mahasweta Devi's *Hazaar Churashir Ma* ("Mother of 1084") and the film as well as theatrical adaptation of her short story "*Rudaali*" as examples. In the Indian context, the problem of authenticity acquires a newer dimension in the sense that, often, regional languages create more distance. The general problems pertaining to literary translation from SL to TL (source language to translated language) also becomes apparent in films. For instance, we can cite the example of *Hazaar Churashir Ma*. Told in simplistic terms, it narrates the story of an unsuspecting mother who faces the trauma and tribulations after the death of her young Naxalite revolutionary son in Calcutta when she is called upon to identify his corpse and the narration centers around how she gets involved in her son's political activities only after his death.

Though Govind Nihalani, the film director, was true to the spirit of the translated text, and though Mahasweta Devi herself had given a most heartening endorsement for the performance of Jaya Bachchan in the lead role of the mother,



for serious viewers across Bengal, the film seemed to have failed in capturing the haunting memories of the turbulent 70's and the actual Naxalite movement seemed too insipid. Yet considered from the psycho-sociological angle, the film can be called successful in the depiction of the lead role of Sujata, the mother, who is the prototype of every urban Indian woman who pretends to have established a great channel of communication with her children, but seldom digs deep to understand what might be bothering them. And after she does, she often gives up, saying that she cannot handle them any more.

Another interesting variation of the same problem occurs when the original text as well as the filmic version involves masters in their respective fields. Take the case when Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*) is made into a film by the world-class filmmaker Satyajit Ray. Tagore's 1916 novel, written in the dairy form of narrative is a significant, yet rather complex work of fiction. Embedded in it, is a historical moment of the *swadeshi* in Bengal around the years 1903 to 1908 - a period in Indian nationalism when the concerted demand for self-government and the boycott of British goods seemed for a while to rock the very foundation of imperial administration in India. This theme is dealt in detail by juxtaposing the character of the fire-brand revolutionary Sandip with Nikhil, the noble but misunderstood hero who personally believed that each individual has a freedom to choose his own way of serving the cause of social and political emancipation. What is more significant is how Tagore portrays the invasion of this *swadeshi* political movement to "home", and ultimately brings in a threat to feminine virtue.

When such a complex story is made into a film, one is naturally interested to see how the symbolic meanings of the "home" and the "world" are analyzed. Closely following the text, Ray's statement that he "*did not use a single line of Tagore's dialogue in the film ... The way people talk in the novel would not be acceptable to any audience*" puzzles us. Again, though Tagore presents his introspective story through multiple points of view, shuffling through the narratives of the three main characters at random, Ray's straightforward narration in the film makes some critics feel that the film is structurally weak. One such view endorses that the film is divided into three separate watertight compartments. The first section deals exclusively with Bimala. The political involvement of Sandip and Nikhil covers the second section. The third section primarily focuses on the Hindu-Muslim riot and clash. These three sections do not seem to be well coordinated, or in other words, one section does not automatically lead to the other. Again, though critics and the viewers in general accept the changes when a work of art is transferred from one medium to another, from one set of codes to another, one of the most frequently raised questions regarding *The Home and the World* is that whereas Tagore left his novel rather "open-ended" (with the communal riots breaking out, Sandip runs away to safety and Nikhil rides off into the night to face the hostile mob), Ray makes his story rather "well-closed". In the film, Bimala is seen looking out of the window and she sees the people carrying Nikhil's dead body in a procession and immediately the image of the widowed Bimala fills up the screen. The film, considered one of Ray's failures, is now merely referred to as a definite 'period'

story. Much earlier, Tagore had come to realize that "*cinema continues to be a sycophant to literature because no creator has yet liberated it from this servitude by the strength of his own genius*" and Satyajit Ray attempted to do just that.

A deviation of the medium and the problems of translation are also witnessed in the case of theatrical adaptations. Take the case of Mahasweta Devi's short story "*Rudaali*". The stark setting and Usha Ganguly's remarkable acting in the role of the protagonist *Sanichari* had made this theatrical production by the Calcutta - based *Rangakarmee* group a memorable event (Devi & Ganguly 1999). Though a Hindi production, this play had received rave reviews from all kinds of audience in Calcutta, which included the snooty Bengali theatre-goers who are used to viewing only avant-garde productions and also not very much conversant with the national language. Years later, Kalpana Lazmi's directional venture made the film version of the same story more a vehicle for presenting a matured Dimple Kapadia along with full support from Bhupen Hazarika's soul-rending music [*'Dil hoom hoom karey ghabraye'*]. But I think since this film remains the only medium of approach to Mahasweta Devi's work for the pan-Indian audience, the positive side of any transcreation has to be accepted as an equally important genre. The only exception ofcourse is the rare and enterprising viewer who would read up the translated English version of the text before going to the movie hall or vice-versa.

After considering all these various forms of translation, I am still confounded with the question that forms the title of this paper: "*Who is an 'ideal' translator*"? Though the choice of the medium alters the message, the question still remains as

to how far the translator can construct those messages effectively. In a recent article, the noted critic Susan Sontag opined:

*To translate means many things, among them: to circulate, to transport, to disseminate, to explain, to make (more) accessible. By literal translation we mean, we could mean, the translation of the small percentage of published books actually worth reading: that is to say, worth rereading...In what I call the evangelical incentive, the purpose of translation is to enlarge the readership of a book deemed to be important. (Sontag 2003)*

Sontag further explains that the translators were "*the bearers of a certain inward culture*" and that to translate "*thoughtfully, painstakingly, ingeniously, respectfully, is a measure of the translator's fealt to the enterprise of literature itself*". Though she propagated such values as '*integrity*', '*responsibility*', '*fidelity*', '*boldness*', '*humility*', and '*ethical understanding*' in the translator, she does not define who an '*ideal*' translator is. She avers what is obvious: that '*literary translation is a branch of literature- anything but a mechanical task*'. This article thus ends with the naïve contention that since there are no immediate solutions in sight, there is nothing called an '*ideal*' translator.

## Notes

1. In terms of Tagore's entire canon, Bengalis use the word *kobita*, poems, poetry, to refer to his longer and



children's poems as opposed to Rabindra-sangeet, his songs, of which there are more than 2,000 in existence. In most cases, the verbal and musical portions of each of these songs were composed simultaneously.

2. In his *"Translation Editor's Preface"*, Chaudhuri tells us that the translations emerged out of a workshop where the eleven translators had agreed to do away with the rhymes but preserve *"the general movement and impact of the original poems"* (xvii). The translators, we learn, had decided to be pragmatic rather than consistent in using Bengali names of plants, birds, seasons, etc.
3. In his introduction Alam also points out that Faizul Latif Chowdhury's collection of translations of Jibanananda Das's poems *I have Seen the Bengal's Face: Poems from Jibanananda Das* (Dhaka: Creative Workshop 1995) is uneven in quality and significantly the better translations in the volume are the ones by the foreigners - an Englishman, an American and an Australian. *"The Bengali translators fail probably because in translating verse the translator must have a much surer command of the target language than of the source language"*.

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