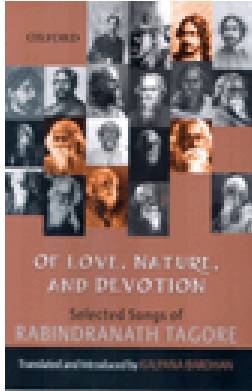


Book Received and Reviewed

Of Love, Nature and Devotion: Selected Songs of Rabindranath Tagore

Translated and introduced by Kalpana Bardhan



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Of the Oxford Tagore translations Kalpana Bardhan's *Of Love, Nature and Devotion: Selected Songs of Rabindranath Tagore* is unquestionably the most complex and most ambitious. A translator of Tagore for decades, Bardhan brings both her sensitivity to the music and the alertness to the lyric in her efforts at translation. Of the 2,000 odd songs, she chooses 300, classifying them into several sections- Songs of Love (*Prem*), songs of Nature (*Prakriti*), Songs of Devotion (*Puja*), Songs of Variety, Patriotism and Drama (*Bichitro, Swadesh, Natyagiti*). The finely crafted introduction notes how difficult a task she faces in the classification since numerous songs seem to slide effortlessly across multiple categories. Bardhan also classifies the songs of different sections in a chronological order, providing both the dates as well as the history of the composition of the song. Also provided are rhyme schemes and rabindranath's own translations wherever available. Her target audience being one which knows little Bengali, the originals are included along with the translations. The six essays appended to the volume include comments by Satyajit Ray, Buddhadev Bose, Abu Sayeed Ayub among others and serve to deepen an understanding about the complex nuances of the songs.

Bardhan notes right away Rabindranath's flexible attitude towards the songs. Groomed as he was in the Jorasanko household, Tagore's ear must have

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been tuned to a wide range of classical and contemporary Bengali music. His years at Silaidaha and the company of Kshitimohan Sen would have broadened that repertoire to various kinds of folk music. Consequently, Rabindranath could move across Eastern, Western and folk music to create a breath taking variety of musical compositions. This heterogeneity makes choice for Bardhan a rather daunting task.

The other great problematic of Rabindrasangeet is the intense relationship between lyric and music. Indeed, Bardhan is deeply influenced by Buddhadev Boses *Godyo Gaan* and she herself refers to these as song-poems. It is not the musical structure that gives completion to the song, the lyric functions to an equal degree. Bardhan notes in one of the end notes Rabindranath's close interaction with Dinendranath in grappling with the right musical structure to accommodate the density of the lyrics. For Bardhan, the matter is complicated further by the availability of many of these songs in Rabindranath's own translations. Tagore's own translations (or should we use the term transcreation for them?) use the form of prose thereby negating the musical pattern and structure of many of his songs. Bardhan's project is thus dual- she retains her faithfulness both to the lyric as well as fashion a rhythm that can address the statues of the poem as a song. This is where the quality of this book stands out. A line like *pagol haoa bujhte nare daak poreche kothay tare* is translated as "The crazy wind doesn't know / where its being called to go". (p. 77) retaining the depth, the sensuousness as well as the rhythmic musical quality of the song. There are occasional problems of course. *Ei Kathati Mone rekno tomader ei hashi khelai* is translated as "Do keep this in mind/ Amidst your laughing – playing ways. Would this have been better as 'Amidst all your play and laughter? It is also interesting to see Bardhan struggle with phrases like *Ki Jani, kankhon konkhane* that make the use of tense extremely difficult. The problem of translating from a language of gender-neutral pronouns into a language of gendered pronouns and of translating gendered nouns (dawn, dusk, river) into gender neutral nouns are engaging issues that Bardhan tackled in her translation.

The essays appended bring out the problems and issues of translation suggestively. Especially relevant are the essays by Dhurjatiprasad Mukherjee whose wonderful intellect opens up the range of musical influences on Rabindrasangeet while alerting us to its technical aspect. Bardhan deserves our gratitude in making the selection of essays available to an audience that has often thirsted for eclectic and incisive analysis of the songs.

Kalpna Bardhan's book is a must for any Tagore enthusiast. The painstaking and enthusiastic translations are tacked up by solid research and

references. This is a book that brings together some of Tagore's best songs in translation, caring to alert us to the melody within the translated text and aspiring to retain the complexity of both the content and the structure. There may be debates about individual translations, choices or phrases; but Tagore enthusiasts will have access to the themes of love, Nature and devotion, that consists the majority of Tagore's oeuvre. This is a book that has taken a lifetime of devotion and research and one that surely will make Rabindranath more accessible and critically discussed to a wide global audience.

The glossary is detailed but there are several questions that occasionally arise. In *He Mor Chitta* there is a continuous use of 'Bharat' in the translation. In Bharat is to be distinguished from India then the glossary should have somewhere indicated the rationale of Bardhan's choice. In fact, the Swadesh section of the book seems to be its weakest link, the translation rarely able to capture the verve of the original.

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