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Book Review

Remorphing the Creations: English Plays by Tagore- An Archival Study

By Srutinath Chakraborty

Kolkata: Ekush Shatak, 2015.

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Reviewed by

Indranil Acharya, Vidyasagar University

Remorphing the Creations: English Plays by Tagore- An Archival Study by Srutinath Chakraborty is a scholarly attempt to trace the history of inception of the English plays of Tagore. Though eminent Tagore scholars like Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay, Pulinbehari Sen, Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, Pranati Mukhopadhyay and Swapan Majoomdar did a thorough research on the bibliographical works on Tagore with their writings in Bengali, no such remarkable venture has been attempted yet with the English works by Tagore. *Remorphing the Creations: English Plays by Tagore - An Archival Study* fills the gap.

As stated by the author, this volume is the beginning of the exhaustive project which will cover the criticism on the English works of Tagore. In the brief but substantial foreword written by Srutinath Chakraborty, he mentions his humble effort to make a descriptive bibliography, along with multifaceted archival information on the English works by Tagore. An objective comparative study with the original Bengali plays has also been attempted in this book. The Introduction of the book explores Tagore's career as a drama-translator and highlights some essential features of the plays. It also emphasizes the fact that the experienced translator Tagore was aware of the problems of translation which he tried his best to overcome while translating his plays. He was, in fact, well acquainted with the problems and challenges of translation. Specially while translating literary works or creative writings, the translator has to confront with multifarious problems and difficulties. Tagore translated *Gitanjali (Song Offering)* when he was nearly fifty years old. The Nobel Prize that he received for translating *Gitanjali* boosted Tagore's confidence in his skill of translation. Tagore's career as drama- translator began with the play *Chitra* – the translation of his play *Chitrangada*, published in 1914. Tagore's last translation was *Red Oleanders*, published in 1925. Within the period of 12 years (from the announcement of the Noble Prize in 1913 and publication of *Red Oleanders*) Tagore translated 11 plays along with some books of poems and few collections of short stories, novels and essays. In this volume, Srutinath has included plays like *Chitra* (original *Chitrangada*), *Sanyasi or The Ascetic* (original *Prakritir Pratisodh*), *Malini* (original *Malini*), *Sacrifice* (original *Visarjana*), *The King and The Queen* (original *Raja O Rani*), *The Autumn Festival* (original *Sarodatsav*), *The Trial* (original *Lakshmir Pariksha*), *The Waterfall* (original *Muktadhara*), *The Car of Time* (original *Rather Rashi*), *Red*

Oleanders (original *Raktakaravi*), *The Crown* (original *Mukut*) and *The King and the Rebel*. All the plays were translated by Tagore himself except the short play *The King and the Rebel* which was originally written by him in English.

The archival items on *Chitra* in the first chapter with frequent references to contemporary contexts and several epistolary correspondences create an ambience of a genuine work of research in an otherwise unrepresented domain of study. The Sanskrit slokas and their English renderings beautifully capture the source materials and their adaptations in a new language and medium of expression. Many lesser known details are also brought to the fore like the dedication and relation with Mrs. Moody. The history of media responses to the stage production is another important module of research. A very rare yet significant technique is a comparative study of the manuscript and the printed copy to make certain variations self-evident. The critics' symposium at the end of the chapter is quite evident of the honest labour the author had undertaken to enrich the content of the book.

Much in the line of John Dryden in the composition of heroic tragedies in the Restoration period, Tagore's *Malini* was a Bengali play written in rhymed verse. The source of the narrative in Mahayani Buddhist Literature is reproduced in Sanskrit followed by an English version in Rajendralal Mitra's Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal (1882). The whole intellectual exercise is extremely rewarding for the connoisseurs of Tagore plays. Once again a columnar structure of three different indices- Manuscript 74, Manuscript 72 and printed copy provide an excellent in-depth view of textual variations and departures. The critical reception to the play at the end of the chapter is brief yet eminently relevant to the context of the play.

As a delectable variation of style *Sacrifice* is composed in blank verse. Tagore experimented with both rhyme and blank verse. Once more it harks back to a popular Restoration debate on the relative merit of rhyme and blank verse as mediums of dramatic verse as reflected in a famous critical essay of the period, *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. The epistolary correspondences between Tagore and Maharaj Virchandra Manikya, the King of Tripura and the court history of Tripura dynasty, as salvaged from *Rajratnakar*- are all very pertinent circumstantial data towards a better understanding of the play. Rave reviews of the play in eminent organs of theatre appreciation like *The Observer*, *The Stage* and *The Christian Commonwealth* are duly mentioned in the right place. The precious little information on the cinematic version of *Sacrifice* is also a surprise inclusion in Tagore research oeuvre. In this case, too, the parallel study of manuscript and printed form provides a ringside view of the differences in different versions.

The King and the Queen follows the argumentative structure in a more elaborate manner. It was very interesting to know a number of English actors who were cast in the maiden production of the play in English at the Comedy Theatre in London. The intelligent way of putting the critical observations chronologically from Tagore to Hirankumar Sanyal is quite laudable.

Red Oleanders has secured its place in the translated oeuvre of plays. Many universities now-a-days have been offering the play in English translation. The genesis of the play, its publication history, various theories on the translator and the translations, the draft manuscripts and the production history of *Red Oleanders* are all discussed with in-depth scholarship and penchant for minute details. The long, encyclopedic observations of Tagore have been included with utmost care. The ever increasing number of critics adds to the play's canonical status in the pantheon of Indian Writing in English translation.

The elaborate Notes and References section is a scholar's delight. It inspires a researcher to access these very useful titles with a sense of purpose. It will come handy in the case of many scholars with ongoing research projects. The Index part is quite meticulously prepared. All the important head words are mentioned with great accuracy. It is a truly laudable effort.

The descriptions of the plays and the languages used are emotive as well as thought provoking. The book can be seen as a discursive form of Tagore's plays. There is a vibrant possibility of rebuilding the concepts of Tagore drama. This work of genuine scholarship is an essential reading for those who want to have an in-depth knowledge of Tagore's plays. The readers will wait eagerly for the promised sequels on the English works of Rabindranath Tagore by Srutinath Chakraborty.

Indranil Acharya is Associate Professor in the Department of English, Vidyasagar University, Midnapore (West Bengal). He obtained his Ph.D. on Yeats and Eliot in 2004. He also completed one UGC Research Project on Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Fiction in 2008. Dr Acharya had been the Deputy Coordinator of the UGC Special Assistance Programme on the documentation and translation of the oral and folk literature of the dalit and tribal communities in West Bengal. He has implemented one UGC Major Research Project as the Principal Investigator on the documentation, translation and analysis of Bengali Folk Drama in the context of endangerment. In the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) project of Bhasha, Baroda, Dr Acharya is the State Coordinator of West Bengal. His first published book is *Beyond the Sense of Belonging: Race, Class and Gender in the Poetry of Yeats and Eliot* (ISBN: 81-902282-7-7). He has also edited a book, *Survival and Other Stories: Anthology of Bangla Dalit Stories* (ISBN: 978 81 250 4510 6) with Orient Blackswan. Another edited volume entitled *Towards Social Change: Essays on Dalit Literature* (Orient Blackswan; ISBN: 978 81250 5344 6) has been published in 2013. Dr Acharya has finished one Sahitya Akademi publication project on the translation of representative short fiction by twenty women writers of Bengal.
