

## Multiple Approaches to Translating the Poems and Songs in *The Essential Tagore*\*

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### Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a universal poet winning the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913, draws global attention through translation – his work is retranslated or reformed through new translation from time to time. Whenever Tagore’s work in translation comes into discussion, *Gitanjali*, a seminal anthology of poems and songs, appears before us since the poet himself translated the book into English. If *Gitanjali* had not been translated, Tagore, needless to say, would not have drawn attention of the west. As a result, there would be little prospect for him to win the Nobel Prize. Critics take special interest in Tagore’s own translation alongside other translations because his work is still translated and retranslated with a variety of approaches. Many renowned Tagore translators have rendered his work into modern English, eschewing traditional approaches. One of the finest poets from India with his footsteps across borders and cultures, Tagore generates enormous interest among scholars for his vast and varied oeuvre translated in multifarious ways. Taking Radha Chakravarty’s observation that “translating Tagore today can be interventionist, transformative, and even utopian” into account, this paper attempts to explore multiple approaches that the translators have undertaken to render a selection of his poems and songs into English published in *The Essential Tagore* (2011).

### Keywords

*Tagore, translation, approaches to translation, retranslation, the essential tagore.*

### Introduction

Translation is now considered an emerging field as many people throughout the world are either studying translation in universities or translating the major works of their own language into other languages, especially English. Different cultures and communities of the world have a scope of knowing one another and coming closer for either similarities or divergences – translation, in this respect, certainly creates the opportunity. People from various communities, countries, nations and languages like to experience diversities in literature and culture. Literatures of many cultures and languages are rich in tradition, content, style, technique, theme, and, above all, in diversity, but they remain pigeonholed and

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reach only a certain number of readers. Translation of the literatures into the standard international language can change the whole scenario – people worldwide have an opportunity to be familiar with new literary voices and novel trends in literature. Readers experience something new about other peoples and their cultures. Translation, in this sense, is an important means for strengthening bonds thereby between countries and cultures. It plays a great role in integrating nations and giving life to the literary works that exist only in a narrow space beyond the grasp of world readers. Mohammad Shafiqul Islam (2018) stresses on the necessity of literary translation thus, “Literary translation...breaks the barrier of borders for the writers who play a crucial role in building nations, connecting cultures and bridging fissures” (p. 38). There is no denying that literary translation opens windows for nations and cultures to bridge gaps, discourage polarities and extend warm relationships between countries and cultures.

Translation now enjoys the wide attention of writers, critics and readers around the world. Scholars have offered a wide range of definitions, features, elements and processes of translation. Serious attention to translation was not given long before, but major texts of the world literature had been translated a long time ago. Many renowned translators or Translation Studies scholars have explained the term in numerous ways, but over time, translators’ approaches have changed to a great extent. We find differences among them even in the same decade – approaches to translation differ from person to person, from practitioner to practitioner. Translators experiment on different approaches to translating literary texts into other languages – interestingly, they also intervene. Fakrul Alam (2015a), a well-known academic, essayist and translator, explains that translation is used:

to mean anything which is to be conveyed or borne across languages, cultures, or places, from one place or situation or context to another...to translate is to change in form or appearance and to even transform. (p. 1)

The first part of this observation is mostly related to the existing space of translation, but the next part, relevant to the aim of this paper, deserves attention. It is a new idea for many people to consider translation a kind of transformation. Alam (2015b) further asserts that “translation is necessarily an act of interpretation and an enthralling excursion into the territory of unending differences” (p. 44). A renowned Tagore translator himself, Alam states this while discussing the legacy of Tagore’s *Gitanjali* in translation. The Nobel Prize winning anthology of poems and songs, *Gitanjali*, along with other poems by Tagore, enjoyed warm reception worldwide. Readers, translators and Translation Studies scholars have contributed variously and done considerable research about this ground-breaking work. As far as different versions and editions of the anthology are concerned, translators have gone beyond the forms and spirits of the original poems and songs – even Tagore himself created something new in his own translation of *Gitanjali*, making substantial changes to the originals.

Translators take recourse to a range of approaches while translating a literary text because literary translators enjoy more liberty than other kinds of translators. A text, especially if it is a classic, evokes a number of translated versions and editions as the approaches that translators take differ from one individual to another. Regarding the unending attempts of the translators, Alam (2015b) offers some important points, including the following:

...no attempt to translate a text can be seen definitive and all attempts at translation of a classical text must ultimately be seen as provisional...translation of a lyric by different hands will differ considerably from each other because even competent readers interpret poems in the source language differently and adopt different

strategies in creating their versions in the target language...such variations and the stream of translations that issue out of a text that has achieved the status of a 'classic' must not be regretted since the results can often be immensely interesting and surely instructive for the student of translation. (p. 45)

Readers should not expect and need not be content with only one version of a translated text because the same text may have a number of versions created by several translators, and each version will appear new in style, technique and diction. A translation of a text should, therefore, be taken as provisional, but not permanent. Interpretation of a text is not absolute as readers may interpret the text in various ways – not only in the source language but in the translated version as well. Alam thinks that many variants of a classical text are inevitable in the case of classical works, and so readers should not feel uneasy about them because the results may often appear exciting and enlightening.

Translators at times take considerable freedom in carrying a text across another language, especially if it is a classic, and more particularly if it is a classic of poetry. The best example is *Gitanjali*, a text that has many translated versions. While translating his own poems from Bengali into English for *Gitanjali*, Tagore created a different version of the original poems, going sometimes far away from the source language text. Many critics argue that the poet Tagore was at work while translating the poems for *Gitanjali*; i.e. he was creative and enjoyed freedom during translation. Amit Chaudhuri (2004), an eminent academic, writer and critic, observes that Tagore's translation of *Gitanjali* poems "turned out to be substantial reworkings, many of them different in almost every imaginable sense from the originals" (para. 2). There is ample proof that the translated poems in the book are markedly different from the originals in terms of structure as well as sense, and one may easily conclude that the translations are reworkings. William Radice, one of the most eminent Tagore translators and scholars, is quite critical about the English *Gitanjali*. Radice claims that the English *Gitanjali* is "in many respects a betrayal of what Tagore originally had in mind" (as cited in Alam, 2015b, p. 51). Tagore could not do what he actually intended to do in his English translation since there are noticeable differences between the translations and the originals.

### Theoretical Aspects

Some significant deliberations on translation propounded by renowned critics and scholars need to be addressed here in order to support the theoretical framework of the article. Eminent scholars of Translation Studies from different parts of the world have enriched the area of translation offering varied definitions and identifying manifold features. Edwin Gentzler (1997) notes, "In translation, texts are reborn, given new life, stimulated with new energy...the translator can be most faithful to the true meaning of the text by being unfaithful to the specific meaning...of the language of the text" (p. 29). Modern theories of Translation Studies stress on 'sense-for-sense' rather than 'word-for-word' translation – meaning, not words, matters in literary translation. True meaning, i.e. intended meaning of the original, Gentzler suggests, is more important than the literal meaning. According to Gentzler, a text is transformed into a new text, or it receives "a new life" and fresh reading through translation.

Culture, in this context, plays an important part in literary translation. Susan Bassnett (2007), one of the best known scholars of Translation Studies in the contemporary world, postulates that "Translation is about language, but translation is also about culture, for the two are inseparable" (p. 23). Translation is not only a transition from one language to another, but it is the transfer of cultures as well. We cannot separate language and culture from one another. To do justice to a literary text during translation, a translator has to remember both source

language and target language cultures and cultural nuances because literary translation focuses not only on words but also on cultures. Nowadays, translation is also considered creative work as Peter Bush (1998) asserts “. . . learning to translate is about writing creatively and imaginatively, about being sensitive readers and writers” (p. 3). There is no denying that translators now enjoy the status of creative writers as they also create something new while translating a text. They develop the content of a source text in the target language text – the source text is not completely relegated in translation, but something new certainly emerges in good translation.

Translation as art is similar to creative writing as translators ultimately become writers-a text finds a new writer when it is translated into another language. Many critics consider translators to be rewriters of poetry; translating poetry is indeed distinctive from other kinds of translations. Here Bassnett’s observation about the translation of poetry is relevant; she thinks that a translator is a rewriter of a poem because “Poetry is not what is lost in translation, it is rather what we gain through translation and translators” (1998, p. 74). Bassnett refutes the popular comment of Robert Frost about loss in the translation of poetry. She believes that poetry also gains something through translation. Many others agree, too, that translation sometimes enriches the original and creates a new world for a text. Gentzler (1997) points out that “translation serves as a metaphor for writing that frees, transforms, and multiplies rather than possesses, controls, and defines” (p. 197). This is, indeed, an important point about translation because translation like writing does not confine or control anything; rather, it liberates, makes changes and opens up new windows. Translation gives freedom to texts to travel across the world, and also to translators to create rather than remain confined in fear of loss.

We sometimes find that a poem or a story has more than one versions of translation, but each version is markedly different from the other. A book may be published in many versions – especially if the book is a popular one – and the translations differ from one another. In this context, Ortiz-Carboneres and Dixon (2013) rightly point out that “no two translations of a single poem will be the same, and a comparative study of a number of attempts will show that while there are absolutes, there remains the possibility of consensus on a number of points” (p. 93). In case of literary translation, no one expects that a text should have an absolute version, so translators hardly reveal similarities if they work individually. But the translators come to agree on many points as there are universally set rules for translators and writers. John Bester observes, “Translation, like politics, is an art of the possible; compromise is inevitable and universal” (as cited in Landers, 2010, p. 10). As far as literary translation is concerned, the translators somehow overcome the challenges they face during translation, but they often have to compromise with the meaning, sense, context, the source culture, target audience and so forth. The comment by Landers is interesting – translation, in this respect, truly corresponds to politics. A translator, no doubt, faces many problems during translation, but he or she cannot find a solution to the problems in a single way as there are various forms of translation for the same text. Landers (2010) rightly observes:

Translation problems are not math problems that have only one or at most a strictly limited number of right answers. As a subfield of literature-and literature is indisputably an art rather than a science-translation is subjective in essence. (p. 5)

Translators do not depend on a particular rule for overcoming challenges because unlike science, there is no imposed formula for literary translation. A particular challenge in translation may have many kinds of solutions that the translators strive to find and choose; therefore, a translator will look for one out of many options. So literary translation is relative to context, text, culture as well as language.

Tagore translated his own *Gitanjali* poems into English prior to his visit and during his journey to England, but the poet did not have confidence in his translation because he thought that his English was not good enough for the readers of the west. He expressed such concern to some of his close friends. Here is how Tagore expressed his concern, “I am misrepresenting myself...to the Western reader...I never can trust my own English” (as cited in Chakravarty, 2013, p. 291). Literary circles in the west were fascinated by *Gitanjali* after its publication in Tagore’s own English translation, but the anthology lost its appeal soon. Critics have found numerous reasons for this decline in popularity of the anthology of poems and songs, but one of the key factors, many indicate, is the misrepresentation of the original. As a Nobel laureate, Tagore drew international attention rapidly. His work, therefore, has been translated extensively by both subcontinental and western translators. Those translators have undertaken different approaches in rendering his works into English. Aware of the development in the field of Translation Studies, the translators enjoy more freedom at present because translators, as far as modern theories are concerned, are also considered creative writers. “In translation the original,” asserts Benjamin (1923/2000), “rises into a higher and purer linguistic air,” (p. 79) which is why translation is taken as an important form of creative work as well. Translation, one can say, is no more considered inferior to the original. So translators create and at times intervene while carrying across a text. Chakravarty (2013) observes that:

Translators look for a voice of their own because they play an important role in giving a new life to a book. As far as the binary between superiority and inferiority – between the original author and the translator – is concerned, the translators no more undergo identity crisis; rather, they are now more self-confident than any other times in the past. The binary, which is nowadays considered false, has almost disappeared. Tagore translators at present, indeed, feel more liberated, even playing interventionist roles as well.

### **Translation Approaches Adopted for The Essential Tagore**

Edited by Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakravarty, acclaimed academics and translators, *The Essential Tagore* – an influential book paying due tribute to Tagore and an elevating work of multiple genres – reflects large-scale varieties in translation. A good number of distinguished translators have contributed quality translations to the collection, which are distinct in diversity. Chakravarty (2013) claims:

Breaking away from the conventional mould of uniformity, our collection aims to demonstrate the widely divergent ways in which Tagore can be translated today...We encouraged our contributors, located in different parts of India and abroad, to express their individual perspectives and practise their own methodologies, which are too varied to dovetail neatly with each other in a clearly demarcated ‘house style’. (p. 295)

The collection aims at bringing diversity into Tagore translation rather than establishing traditional uniformity, which is why translators are given freedom to use their own style, technique and methodology, but to draw attention of contemporary readers, they are encouraged to use modern English idiom. On this perspective, Tejaswini Niranjana, a famous translator, theorist and author, is worth quoting here as she proposes “a practice of translation that is speculative, provisional, and interventionist” (as cited in Chakravarty, 2013, p. 300). Niranjana’s proposal is an added direction to translation in general, and *The Essential Tagore* gives, in this case, space to the translations that are “speculative, provisional, and interventionist”.

Translations of the poems in *The Essential Tagore*, no doubt, are varied, and the translators do not follow any uniform or prescriptive rule in the process of translation. They play, however, an interventionist role, and the translations, too, are provisional and speculative. In regard to the general strategies of and approaches to translating *The Essential Tagore*, Chakravarty (2013) recounts:

In our anthology, we have avoided italicizing Bengali words and allowed variants of Bengali spellings. Culture-specific terms, such as the names of days, months and seasons, the terms for family relationships, and words for food items and items of clothing have in most cases been left deliberately untranslated, allowing the context to make their meaning clear; although there is a glossary, we have kept it to a minimum. (p. 301)

The translators of *The Essential Tagore* do not appear concerned about the use of some words in the translated text just as they are in the original. They do not even italicise them, or if they use glossary, they use it to a minimum. In such ways, the translations in *The Essential Tagore* have become innovative, provisional and interventionist. But generally, translators use notes, glossary, italicisation and so forth in the translated texts. A translator is no doubt an interventionist, but translating is also utopian. Lawrence Venuti claims, "Translating is also utopian...translation becomes not merely a linguistic exercise, but an active attempt to imagine into being a diverse community of imagined readers" (as cited in Chakravarty, 2013, p. 301). Translation today has gone beyond merely a linguistic practice as it connects people of different communities worldwide. Readers of various communities feel a kind of bond in imagination through translation – hence, translation, of course, is utopian.

Translators take various approaches into consideration while translating modern verse. Approaches vary widely from translator to translator when they attempt to translate Tagore's poetry since his poetry is imbued with musical qualities. While discussing Tagore's poetry in translation, Alam (2012) comments:

...translating Rabindranath's verse is something that one cannot do piecemeal or without thought given to a carefully worked out translation strategy that is flexible, idiomatic, colloquial and faithful to the movement of mind of the original as well as close as is possible in translation to its music. (p. 168)

According to Alam, no translator can do justice to Tagore if he or she does not pay deep attention to the movement of the poet's mind in the original poems. Since music runs through Tagore's poems, the translators have to think about appropriate translation strategies. The poet has special fondness for rhyme, musical tone and sound – moreover, his poems are mostly song-lyrics. "...the translator therefore must pay special attention," Alam (2012) suggests, "to the line patterning as well as the sound patterning" (p. 172). Both lines and sounds are what matter in Tagore's poems, which is why translators should give a serious thought to them while rendering the poems and songs into English.

While the poems in *The Essential Tagore* are well-chosen, they also bear a mark of variety in content and style. There are, of course, debates about loss in translation, especially in the translation of poetry, as far as the contemporary theories of translation are concerned. While commenting on the selection of poems for *The Essential Tagore*, the editors do not repudiate the possibility of loss in translating Tagore's work, especially his poems and songs, as far as the following statement is concerned:



No doubt, this selection of his poems hardly does justice to Tagore. No doubt, too, the magic he wove in his Bangla poems has been largely lost in translation. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that the English versions of the poems presented here will give a new generation of readers an impression of Tagore's infinite versatility and immense power as a poet. (Tagore, 2011, p. 204)

A towering figure of Bengali literature, Tagore cannot be presented decisively in one volume, so the editors humbly acknowledge their limitations. They also know that the richness of Tagore's work in the originals is certainly lost in translation, but *The Essential Tagore* should be considered indisputably an important book of his oeuvre in translation. Alam and Chakravarty (2011) claim in the introduction to the book that:

Instead of the rather archaic, stilted translations of the earlier versions, our contributors, in tune with the spirit of this book, have attempted lucid, idiomatic English translations that will make Tagore's writings accessible for a new generation of readers... Instead of expecting them to conform to a single, prescriptive style of translation, we have encouraged a diverse and flexible approach, with the aim of demonstrating the varied directions in which Tagore translations have evolved after the lapse of copyright in 2001. Tagore, our collection shows, can be translated in multifarious ways. (p. 27).

The translators of the poems and songs in *The Essential Tagore* have avoided traditional approaches as the common spirit to the collection is to retain lucidity and idiomatic English in the translations. The translators are given the liberty to take on varied approaches that result in extraordinary translations. *The Essential Tagore*, therefore, demonstrates that Tagore's work can be translated in a number of ways that proficient translators may adopt.

### **Analysis of Poems and Songs in Translation**

Translators from different backgrounds with varied levels of experience and skills have rendered the poems and songs of *The Essential Tagore*. Selection of poems and songs deserves special mention as they are wide-ranging in content and style. They are translated, too, in a wide variety of ways – the translators adopt multifarious approaches in rendering them into English. No translator follows a single strict guideline to carry them across. They enjoy freedom to use their own approaches, and so diversity is manifest in the translations. But all the translators have avoided the kind of archaic forms of translations that Tagore chose when he translated the *Gitanjali* poems.

The poem "Pran," a wonderful Tagore poem, is translated by Fakrul Alam as "Life" in *The Essential Tagore*. Among Tagore's many untranslatable poems, this is one, but Alam translates the poem retaining the lucidity of language. The lines "Marite chahi na ami sundar vubane, / Manaber majhe ami banchibare chai" are translated as "I don't want to leave this lovely world / I want to stay in the midst of mankind" (Tagore, 2011, p. 208). The first two lines of the poem are beautifully rendered as the translator does not seem to face any challenge here. But the next two lines "Ei soorjakare ei pushpita kanane / jeebanta hriday-majhe jadi sthan pai" are supposed to be challenging for any translator because of the tone, mode of expression and Tagorean diction in the original. Still Alam beautifully renders them as "In this sun-drenched flower-filled garden / I'd like to be at the pulsating heart of life" (Tagore, 2011, p. 208). It is the translator's craftsmanship that makes the translation so beautiful, and the word choice is remarkable as well-the translator adds to the beauty and appeal of the poem.

The third line goes well with the original, but the fourth line, to a great extent untranslatable, must be an uphill challenge for translators. The original line is so powerful that any translated version may seem to be inferior to readers. And the lines "*Hashi mukhe niyo phul, tar porey hai / Phele dio phul, jadi shey phul shukay*" are translated as "Please accept my blossoms with a smile / And when they wither, cast them away!" (Tagore, 2011, p. 208). In the last line of the translated poem, the expression "cast them away" does not seem to retain the tone of the original, but the question arises what else the translator can do. Alam exerts his admirable effort, but it is Tagore's work to which the translators cannot do justice all the time. Alam also translates "*Aaji Hote Shata Barsha Pare,*" one of Tagore's most famous poems, as "A Hundred Years from Now" – the translation is so fluent that readers experience the same flow as they do in the original. The poem begins like this, "A hundred years from now / Who could you be / Reading my poem curiously" (Tagore, 2011, p. 226). There is no stilted or archaic expression in the translation; moreover, rhythm and tone are wonderfully maintained.

Alam translates "*Aaji Jharer Raate*" as "This Stormy Night," which goes well with the rhythm of the original, but as the poem has rhyme and the features of songs, it sometimes seems to falter only on the area of rhyme and tone. Instead of maintaining line-breaks, the translator rewrites the lines on his own, but the translation, no doubt, is free and idiomatic. The lines "*Aaaji jharer raate tomar avishar / poran shokha bandhu hey amar*" seem to be untranslatable. If a translator attempts to render the lines, it must be a daunting task for him or her, but Alam renders them in such beautiful lines as "Are you on an assignation this stormy night, / My soul mate, my friend?" (Tagore, 2011, p. 244). But again the word '*avishar*,' of course, cannot be perfectly translated into English. '*Avishar*' may have equivalents, but it is almost impossible to retain the depth and appeal of the word in translation because this is a culturally nuanced and very powerful word in Bengali. Alam's use of 'assignation' seems to be an ordinary equivalent for '*avishar*'. The translation of the word '*poran shokha*' as 'soul mate' resonates with the original – the translation, indeed, does justice to the original. The translator renders the rest of the poem so beautifully that readers should have a smooth reading experience.

Alam also translates the poem "*Balaka*" with the title "A Flight of Geese," Tagore's famous poem that contains an important line "*Hetha noy, hetha noy, onno konokhane*". Alam translates the line as "Not here, not here, but somewhere far away," (Tagore, 2011, p. 246), but Chaudhuri translates the same line – he also translates the whole poem for *The Essential Tagore* – as "Not here, not here – elsewhere" (2011, p. xxiv). There is a mark of precision in Chaudhuri's translation whereas Alam adheres to the words in the original. Enriched with deep meaning, the line is used as a refrain in the poem. In translating the entire poem, Alam follows stanza, punctuation and style exactly as they are in the original.

Kaiser Haq, a leading English language poet from Bangladesh and renowned translator, carries across the poem "*Banshi*" as "Wind Instrument". An ordinary translator would render the title simply as 'Flute,' but there is a mark of high literariness in Haq's translation of the word as "Wind Instrument," through which the translator takes recourse to interpretation instead of attempting to find an exact equivalent for the original. Haq translates "*Pother dharei*" as "right on the road" (Tagore, 2011, p. 260) beautifully. It is worth mentioning that an ordinary translator would attempt to write "right by the road," but Haq's translation goes beyond the literal meaning of the original. He translates the line "*Nei taar onner ovab*" as "it never wants food" (Tagore, 2011, p. 260) – many readers may take the translation for a completely different meaning from the one intended in the original. The line in the original actually means 'a gecko is not in want of food,' but Haq translates it for a



wider meaning of the word 'want' with his great dexterity of maintaining precision of language. Those who have not read the original may take the line for a different meaning. This, however, is a general problem of translation – the intended meaning in the original is not always conveyed in the translated version.

English for the Bengali words of relationships like 'debar' and 'bhashur' is 'brother-in-law'. Tagore uses "*debarer meye*" in the poem that Haq translates as "brother-in-law's daughter," (Tagore, 2011, p. 261) so readers may take any one from the two or many other relationships that are meant by brother-in-law. Something is lost in such translation, so the translator could have retained the original words in the translation. But it may be asserted that this sort of loss neither harms the task of translation nor the final product at all. After all, the translated version of the whole poem is beautiful – it seems that the poem has got a new life at the hands of a skilled craftsman. Another poem "Patralekha" is well recreated as "Letter Writing" by Haq. The translation is so smooth, flowing and lively that readers must feel like reading an original poem. Haq also translates "*Roop-Naraner Kule*" as "On the Banks of Roop-Naran" in which there are the oft-quoted lines "*Satya je kathin, / Kathinere valobashilam – / Shey kakhano kare na banchana*". Haq renders them as "for truth is tough; / and I learnt to love this harshness – / it never betrays" (Tagore, 2011, p. 291). The translation is quite fine, and other versions of the same lines may sound weaker, but still there is, it seems, something missing in the translation because some lines of Tagore poems are so powerful that they are always far better in the original. For "*kathin*" the translator uses two different words "tough" and "harshness" – I just wonder if he could use only one word.

Amit Chaudhuri discusses some variations in the translations of Tagore's work in his foreword to *The Essential Tagore*, criticising particularly the poems from *Gitanjali*. The opening lines of the first lyric in English *Gitanjali* are "Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. / This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, / and fillest it ever with fresh life" (Tagore, 2002, p. 1). Tagore's own translations of his original poems, to a great extent, are archaic and stilted. The poet sometimes deviates from the original, so the meaning becomes different from the source text. Chaudhuri attempts to translate the same lyric thus, "I've become infinite: / such is the consequence of your play. / Pouring me out, you fill me / with new life once again" (Chaudhuri, 2011, p. xxiv). There are many differences between the two translations – the differences range from word selection to syntax, from style to line number and from line-breaks to punctuation. Tagore uses 'endless' whereas Chaudhuri writes 'infinite,' Tagore chooses 'pleasure,' but Chaudhuri 'play'. Chaudhuri avoids using the word 'vessel' – he also uses 'new life' instead of 'fresh life'. This is one of the best examples of how translation is provisional, and how Tagore translators are interventionists. Chaudhuri (2011) explains:

The original- '*Amare tumi ashesh korechho / emoni leela taba*' – is remarkable, as I've said, on many levels. The word *leela* can be translated as divine play...Tagore translated the word as 'pleasure,' to denote the primacy of delight and desire, rather than moral design, in divine creation...Tagore introduces the notion of chance and coincidence into the story of man's emergence, and removes the human narrative from its familiar logical movement (an ascent or a decline) from the past to the present, from tradition to modernity. (p. xxv)

Here is indeed a wonderful explanation of the differences between the two translations of the same lyric in *Gitanjali*. Chaudhuri's translation is modern, idiomatic, and it goes better with the meaning of the original. Tagore himself deviates from translating the word *leela* appropriately because he translates it as 'pleasure,' but Chaudhuri rightly renders the word as

'play'. Tagore brings in denotative meaning through his translation, removing the logical and familiar movement of human narrative from tradition to modernity.

We find two translations of the same song titled, in Bengali, as "*Akash bhara*" in *The Essential Tagore* – one by Amit Chaudhuri and the other by Ratna Prakash. It is explained that "Two translated versions of the song 'Akash bhara' have been included in this section to demonstrate our belief in the diverse ways in which Tagore's writings can be translated today" (Tagore, 2011, p. 299). The song is a famous one that claims analysis; it is given importance in the collection. Chaudhuri gives the title "The sky full of the sun and stars" whereas Prakash titles the poem as "Stars fill the sky". There are noticeable differences between the two translations, and to show the differences both the translations of the poem are worth a discussion. Here goes Amit Chaudhuri's translation of the song ("The sky full of the sun and stars") :

The sky full of the sun and stars, the world full of life,  
in the midst of this, I find myself –  
so, surprised, my song awakens.

Wave after wave of infinite time, to whose ebb and flow earth sways,  
the blood in my veins courses to that measure –  
so, surprised, my song awakens.

I've pressed upon each blade of grass on the way to the forest,  
my heart's lifted in madness, dazzled by the scent of flowers,  
all around me lies this gift, outspread –  
so, surprised, my song awakens.

I've listened closely, opened my eyes; poured life into the earth,  
looked for the unknown in the midst of the known,  
so, surprised, my song awakens. (Tagore, 2011, p. 333)

And how completely different the following translation – rendered by Ratna Prakash – of the same song ("Stars fill the sky") is!

Stars fill the sky, the world teems with life,  
And amidst it all I find my place!  
I wonder, and so I sing.  
I feel in my veins the ebb and flow of Earth's eternal tides  
Pulling this Creation  
I wonder, and so I sing  
Walking along the forest's grassy paths,  
I have been entranced by the sudden scent of a flower,  
Around me lie strewn the gifts of joy  
I wonder, and so I raise my song.  
I have seen, I have heard.  
I have poured my being upon the breast of Earth,  
Within the known I have found the unknown.  
I marvel and so I sing. (Tagore, 2011, p. 332)

Readers cannot but be surprised at looking at the variations in the translation of the same text. In terms of style, technique, diction, syntax, punctuation and line-break, two translations are noticeably different. Prakash does not maintain the stanza form whereas Chaudhuri divides

the poem, in his translation, into four stanzas. The third line in both the translations is striking because it appears in the whole poem repeatedly, so it draws attention of the readers as the refrain. Chaudhuri uses 'surprised' in his translation for the word '*bismaye*' in the original whereas Prakash uses 'wonder' and 'marvel'. These two translations of the same poem bear witness to the fact that *The Essential Tagore* translators have enjoyed unrestricted freedom in translating the poems and songs. It seems that the readers, interestingly, experience reading two different songs having merely a few similarities. Chaudhuri (2011) explains the justification of his translation in the following way:

I have translated Tagore's word *bismaye* as 'surprised,' though it could plausibly be rendered as 'in wonder'. The role of the naïve or nature poet, or even a certain kind of romantic, is to wonder at the real, at the universe, but the speaker in the song is not just transfixed by the beauty of the universe but by the happenstance that's brought him to it: 'in the midst of this, I find myself.' This is what gives to the poet-mystic's *bismay* (his sense of wonder) the element of the unexpected, of surprise – the surprise of the time-traveler...moving between worlds and phases of history. (p. xxvi)

As far as the above explanation is concerned, and the tone of the poem makes it clear, Chaudhuri's use of 'surprised' seems to be more logical and justified as Tagore's role in the poem is not of a naïve or ordinary nature poet. The speaker in the poem is mesmerised by something which takes place in a moment and mood that he cannot but be surprised. Readers seem to feel at ease with the third stanza in Chaudhuri's translation as they can understand the meaning easily, but in Prakash's translation, the lines lead readers, for sure, into confusion. Chaudhuri's translation proves more fluent and lucid – readers have the pleasure of enjoying a complete poem. The penultimate line in both the translations shows how interventionist, provisional and even utopian Tagore's translation is because the meaning changes for the variations that the translators bring forth. The use of 'flowers' as plural by Chaudhuri is more accurate than the use of 'a flower' as singular by Prakash. Chaudhuri writes "looked for the unknown in the midst of the known" whereas Prakash writes "Within the known I have found the unknown". 'To look for' and 'to find' are never the same, so the readers are transfixed at how such differences are possible and permissible in the translations of the same lines of a poem. Chaudhuri's translation also represents the meaning of the original poem more closely than Prakash's translation because he does not deviate from the original, but she does.

The song "*Tumi kemon kore gaan koro*" is translated by Alam as "How wonderfully you sing". The first two lines are "*Tumi kemon kore gaan koro hey gunee, / Ami abak hoye shuni, kebal shuni*" that are rendered as "How wonderfully you sing, O master musician, / I listen in amazement, I am all attention!" (Tagore, 2011, p. 300). The first line is well carried across with an excellent choice of words, especially "O master musician" – the translator also forms alliteration here. In the second line, for "*kebal shuni*," the translator writes "I am all attention," which is quite logical, but there remains, however, a scope for a different version with different words. In comparison to the original, "I am all attention" sounds weak and commonplace. Translation of the rest of the song is beautiful – readers may experience the music of the song in the translation as well. Chaudhuri's translation of "*Tomai notun kore pabo*" as "In order to find you anew" is an adroit attempt, no doubt, of a distinguished translator. "In order to find you anew, I lose you every moment" (Tagore, 2011, p. 304) adds, we can say, beauty to the original line, the first line of the song, "*Tomai notun kore pabo bole harai kshane kshan*". Other two lines "When I seek you, my heart trembles with fear – / I am rocked by a wave of love" (Tagore, 2011, p. 304) deserve special mention as they are the

translations of “*Ami tomai jakhan khunje firi bhoje kanpe mon- / Preme amar dheu lage takhan*”. This is an example of a translation that certainly improves upon the original. The line “I am rocked by a wave of love” truly soothes the hearts of the devotees – depth, appeal and powerful feeling prevalent in the original words of the song also remain unaffected in the translation.

“I will place a garland,” translation of the song “*Haar mana haar parabo tomar galey,*” is another fine song, which is translated by Reba Som. The first two lines “I will place a garland conceding defeat around your neck / How much longer can I stay away deceived by my imagined strength” (Tagore, 2011, p. 308) appear wordy in translation. For “*apan baler chhaley,*” the translation “deceived by my imagined strength” is rather longwinded. “As I seek total surrender,” (Tagore, 2011, p. 308) translation of the last line “*Param maran lavibo charanatale*” seems weak in comparison to the translation of other lines in the song, especially the word “total” – the translator, it may be said, could choose a different word that suits the meaning better. Sanjukta Dasgupta uses “thee” (Tagore, 2011, p. 315) in the first line of her translation of the song “*O amar desher mati*” – “O my motherland’s soil”. In the rest of the translation, she avoids the archaic use of words. It is not clear why she writes ‘thee’ instead of ‘you’ in the line – the translator’s freedom of adopting individual approaches bring such varieties in translation. Dasgupta translates the song “*Aji Bangladesher hriday hotey*” as “Suddenly from the heart of Bengal,” (Tagore, 2011, p. 318) which evokes thought and merits discussion because the translator uses “Bengal” instead of Bangladesh. It is interesting that Bangladesh is mentioned in the original, but the translator deliberately uses “Bengal” for Bangladesh. Dasgupta is well aware that when Tagore composed the song, Bangladesh was not born as an independent country, but the poet actually meant the whole Bengal. So the translator’s use of ‘Bengal’ is not illogical; rather, she renders the intended meaning of the original in her translation – hence is the justification of a translator’s intervention.

In the song “*Eki maya*” translated as “What maya made you hide yourself,” (Tagore, 2011, p. 348) Alam, the translator, keeps the word ‘maya’ as it is in the original. In Hindu philosophy, ‘maya’ means illusion, but as a Bengali word, it has a number of meanings, and the translator keeps the word for its depth as an original word – this method resonates with the objectives of the editors of the book. One of their objectives is to retain some original words in the translated version without italicising them. Alam’s translation of “*Megher parey megh*” as “Clouds pile up on clouds” takes place in *The Essential Tagore* – the song has indeed been translated by many others. I would like to place the first four lines of the song’s translations by four renowned translators along with the one by Tagore himself to show how varied Tagore translations are. The Bengali version is “*Megher parey megh jamechhe, andhar kare ashey / Amai keno bashiye rakho eka dwareer pashey*” that Tagore translates as “Clouds heap upon clouds and it darkens. Ah, love, why dost thou / let me wait outside at the door all alone?” (as cited in Alam, 2015b, p. 46). Tagore’s translation is close to the sense of the original, but it is obviously a prose translation, and he uses archaic forms of words. His translation does not attract the readers of the contemporary literary world. The same lines are in Brother James’s translation:

Cloud has piled upon clouds  
They darken my world  
O why do you  
Leave me alone,  
Sitting at the side of the door? (as cited in Alam, 2015b, p. 52)

James's translation seems to be much better than Tagore's because he avoids the archaic use of English words, and readers must feel more comfortable with this version. Alam (2015b) considers James's translation to be "more free-flowing and lighter in its movement" (p. 52). James translates "*andhar kare ashey*" as "They darken my world" whereas Tagore writes only "it darkens". Interestingly, James uses 'cloud' and 'clouds' – singular and plural – in the first line for the same context. I do not find any valid reason in using the singular form of the word in the beginning of the line and plural at the end of the same line. But, in every way, James's version of the translation is more beautiful than that of Tagore. Joe Winter, an eminent English poet, also translates the song:

Cloud on cloud has gathered  
Dark is coming near.  
Why am I in the doorway?  
Why do you keep me here? (as cited in Alam, 2015b, p. 54)

Winter maintains rhyme, and in so doing, he seems to lose the strength of the content. He uses 'cloud' in the singular, and instead of 'heap' and 'pile,' he uses 'gather' as the verb for '*jamechhe*'. In Winter's translation, "The refrain...is split into two questions which seem almost melodramatic" (Alam, 2015b, p. 55) though the translator attempts to retain the tune and structure of the original. Radice, one of the most famous Tagore translators, also renders the song "*Megher pore*" that marks some differences from others:

Cloud piles on cloud  
Gloom grows  
Why keep me waiting  
Alone by the door? (as cited in Alam, 2015b, p. 56)

Radice maintains the refrain throughout the song as it is in the original. He presents "*andhar kare ashey*" as "Gloom grows," absolutely different from other versions of the translation-Radice's version certainly sounds better than anyone else's. "Gloom grows" exhibits the translator's admirable sense of precision in the target language. Precision, which is important for any creative work, is indeed the hallmark of Radice's complete version of the song. There is the presence of rhythm in his translation as well. And his translation holds a mark of simplicity that attracts attention of the readers.

At last I present here Alam's own translation that appears in *The Essential Tagore*, "Clouds pile up on clouds; darkness descends. / Why keep me sitting all alone, outside your door?" (Tagore, 2011, p. 335). Alam attempts to keep the flow and readability intact in his translation as it is in the original song. He beautifully renders "darkness descends" for "*andhar kare ashey*," that captures, I believe, the depth of the original – there is also alliteration both in the original and the translation. The whole song afterward moves smoothly in Alam's translation which, for sure, is marked with simplicity and merits praise. The translation is also flowing, so readers feel at ease gleaning out the meaning from it. We experience so many variations in a few lines of a single song like this – the translators have their own way of rendering a piece of literary work from one language to another. Varied approaches are certainly widespread in the translations of Tagore's song-lyrics that find home in *The Essential Tagore*.

## Conclusion

Exploring variations in the translations of Tagore's poems and songs, we may conclude that the various translations have made the poems and songs more beautiful to us. Translation, no doubt, is an arduous task, and only a translator knows what happens when he or she translates a text. It is befitting to note here that "Despite centuries of debate about translation, however, we lack an adequate vocabulary for the descriptions of what we do when we translate" (Ortiz-Carboneres & Dixon, 2013, p. 89). As far as this statement is concerned, translators sometimes solve the problems that they encounter during translation, but no one can say how it happens, and what they really do, and what strategies or techniques they adopt during the translation process. While translating Tagore poems and songs, the translators face, of course, innumerable challenges and difficulties, but they quite often successfully end up with beautiful renderings. So many variations and diversities in Tagore translations entail us to agree with Chakravarty's (2013) observation that "translating Tagore today can be interventionist, transformative, and even utopian" (p. 302). The translators of the poems and songs in *The Essential Tagore* have indeed applied multiple approaches, intervening in and transforming the originals, and sometimes creating a utopian space for imagined readers.

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