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## ■ TRANSLATING TAGORE IN SERBIA: CERTAIN INTER-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES<sup>1</sup> (AN INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>)

**DIPANNITA DATTA<sup>3</sup>**  
The Neotia University,  
Sarisa, India

Rad je napisan kao deo studije koja se bavi interkulturnim proučavanjem recepcije indijskog nobelovca Rabindranata Tagore u Srbiji. Proučavanje je urađeno iz prevodilačke perspektive, jer se analiziraju prevodi njegovih dela, ali i književno- kritički i književno-teorijski tekstovi objavljeni na srpskom jeziku u periodu od njegove posete Beogradu 1926. godine do danas. Dok se u Indiji malo govorilo o međukulturnim vezama između dve zemlje nastalim zahvaljujući delu ovog velikog pesnika i književnika, u Srbiji oduvek postoji bogata književno-prevodilačka tradicija njegove proze, poezije i esejističkih tekstova. Istraživanje se može okarakterisati kao doprinos postkolonijalnim studijama, jer se u njemu zanemaruju nacionalne, geografske i vremenske granice u cilju istraživanja preplitanja književnih veza.

Ključne reči: Rabindranat Tagore, studije prevođenja, interkulturno prevodilaštvo, književna recepcija.

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- 1 The lecture was delivered in the Department of English, The University of Belgrade, Serbia, on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2015. The lecture was to initiate the collaborative work of 'Translating Tagore in Serbia'. This article, therefore, is an articulation of an attempt to map the different rendering of Tagore's lectures and his works and their connotative values of acculturation in translations, unfinished though. On request, I have added two recent relevant translations, '*Nacionalizam*' and '*Rabindranath Tagore: The Golden Branch of Bengal*'. I take this opportunity to express my wholehearted thanks to colleagues of the English Department of the Faculty of Philology who coordinate this translation workshop. The voluminous work of this translation project could not have started without their initiative and support. My heartfelt thanks also go to the students for taking interest to attend the lecture and especially to those students who are putting in their sincere efforts to translate the Tagore materials: Isidora Miličević, Emilija Marković, Jovana Gajić, Milica Marković, Nevena Krunić i Ana Milovanović. The translations (in progress) not only display their dedication but also show the timeless value of the art of translation in interpreting cultures.
  - 2 The first part of the 'introduction', focusing on the theme of 'hospitality', reads mostly the translated Tagore-Lectures in Serbia. It is now published. See: Dipannita Datta. 'Nation and the Fairness of Justice: Tagore in Serbia'. *The Visva-Bharati Quarterly* (Founded by Rabindranath Tagore in 1923). New Series Vol. 23, Nos. 2 & 3, July 2014 - December 2014: 25-41. All translated Tagore-Lectures in Serbia are an outcome of previous translation workshops held in Zrenjanin. In this essay, I have included parts of two translations by Andrej Cvetić and Aleksandar Ivanov.
  - 3 Kontakt podaci (Email): dipannitadatta@gmail.com

This study attempts to explore certain inter/trans-cultural perspectives through the practice of translation and offer a discursive dimension to translation and translator's position in translation studies. In this regard, translations of reports on the visit of Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) to Serbia in 1926, his reception there and its aftermath will be explored from Serbian to English. The translation of Tagore in Serbia is practically non-existent in Tagore scholarship and translation scholarship in general. The fact that the texts (including valuable newspaper articles) focusing on Tagore's visit to Serbia and also the translation of Tagore texts in Serbian language have been overlooked explains our concern to revisit the interpretation of literary-cultural interaction that started to take place after 1926 and translate the available Serbian Tagore texts in English.

This translation exercise, therefore, will also involve back translation, which is integral to translation studies. It will address in a limited way that the translation trajectory is one of the finest ways to negotiate the boundaries between the past and the present, self and the other, and/or us and them within a country and across the world, though the constraints of knowledge divisions that translator's have to conform to will always remain questionable. In other words, this introductory essay, taking examples from Tagore texts in Serbia, proposes a discursive approach to translation as a decolonisation process so as to move beyond the limits of nation and geography: to exchange literary connections with the history in fragments of the present into the domain of continuous future of humanity's progress.

It is a commonplace assumption since the early 1970s (approximately) that translation practice offers the space of discourse between the in(visible) transfer of the dominant language and the marginal language (Santoyo 2006: 11–40). In the 1993 essay 'Translation as a Discourse of History', Paul St-Pierre, taking after Michael Foucault (St-Pierre 1993: 82), proposed a spatiotemporal approach to translation that attempts not "to determine whether a translation transforms and thus – as conventional wisdom would often have it – betrays an original text, but rather the question [of translation] becomes one of defining how such a transformation is carried out and the conditions which make it possible". St-Pierre's observation is important to Tagore translations in Serbia: to know how it is through the process of translation practice transformations are carried out in 'translating cultures' without undermining the ambiguous interplay of dominance and resistance. That is, how the interplay of consent and coercion that constitutes the 'nature of the controls [are] placed on the production of discourse' (St-Pierre 1993: 63–64).

In Serbia, the culture of translation practice (in variable measures) went on amidst the Great War and internal conflicts. Tagore was also translated from English to Serbian and the translation practice was not limited to *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* – for which the poet was awarded the 1913 Nobel Prize for literature. Given the 2016 updated long list of translations of Tagore's works in Serbia, it is only natural to perceive that the translation discourse approach facilitates the discursive space of interaction between cultures at the margins while it opens up the process of decolonisation (not only of physical geographical spaces but also that of mind spaces/mental geographies). The analysis of decolonisation in translation discourse in literature (and one can start marking *Gitanjali* as an inspirational Tagorean moment) generates and emboldens

different spheres of interaction and blurs the boundaries between the source language and target language across Time and Space<sup>4</sup>.

That Tagore continues to inspire the contemporary Serbia translation scenario and that Tagore's lectures were meaningful to the citizens of 1926 Yugoslavia, even though he recited poems in Bengali, exemplifies the sameness in the perception of difference between cultures of the source language and the target language (of the marginalized races, even though the historical contradictions of Serbia and India were not the same). India in 1926 was a British colony and Serbia (Yugoslavia) was the lesser 'other' – 'the Balkan East' – of the West.

Yet, what needs to be noted is the representational value of translation: the effects of decolonisation on the Slavs (or the Slavic race) who were endlessly<sup>5</sup> looked down as "backward peasants, lacking national consciousness and Eastern" (Sluga 2001: 2). The complexities of the interdependence of cultural differences and the question of national identity consciousness apart, the so-called culturally backward Serbs (and/or the Slavs) could understand that "The poet could see" – "he sees, therefore he allows us to see" (Tagore 1926b: 5), and that was also what the culturally superior developed nations accepted for over a decade. That the Slavs cherished freedom of mind and free expression of joy, beyond the fixed linguistic superiority of the culturally superior races (the Germans, the Italians, the British), perhaps is an inadequate articulation of the same. Neither do this study intends to suggest or undermine the competitive oppositional value in the process of translation. The vision of peace of the poet-thinker Tagore, and his voice for cultural identities, surpassing the limits of nation and geography through free exchange of ideas while challenging the spirit of conquest, offers a non-hierarchical dialogue between cultures; the intricacies, involving his uneven reputation in Serbia, though, notwithstanding.

Beyond the historical contradictions of political, social and cultural precedence is the value of translation that carries the message from one generation to other: "Every deep impression in our mind is followed by emotions which make our mind shaking. That shaking causes a voice and expression of ours"<sup>6</sup>. It is not only that; the decolonising aspect in the discursive approach in translation also reinforces the meaning of cultural conditions that inform a translation piece. The separate racial status (imposed on the colonised countries and Eastern Europe) in a hierarchical order that became the rule of the time – the feeling of 'otherness', that diminished human races into the West and the rest (as backward, barbaric and hence inferior to the modern, civilised, nationally evolved superior West) – are harsh precincts of reality that the translations provide. For examples on this, from Tagore texts in Serbia, I will return soon. What demands a notice here from a theoretical point of view, is that "Translation makes visible the existence of such criteria and in so doing contributes to an awareness of the elements underlying one's own culture, conditioning the definition of one's collective self in terms of (and very often in denial of) another, the other" (St-Pierre 1993: 61).

4 A Tagore translation in Serbia 'doesn't seem less sensible today than it was during the First World War' (Stojanović 1932: 23).

5 For a study on the cultural difference as a tradition of representation going back to the Enlightenment and the construction of the eastern Europe, see Larry Wolff. 1994. *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford UP.

6 From Rabindranath Tagore 1926 Lecture.

Questions of 'fidelity' or 'accuracy' to the language of culture that informs a text, therefore, can only persist in problematic ways. It is known that in the act of translation (of a literary text) precision in language transfer is important. The transformative value in the act of translating cultures also needs a careful handling. For that, an understanding about the mechanisms of power operative in a society is crucial. The problem is, cultures are often interpreted from a dominant point of view. The marginal/subaltern language and cultures are subordinated to the dominant ones. Giovanni Pontiero while speaking of literary translations alerts the translators of several risks involved in the practice of translation, especially of "grotesque distortions" of cultures in translation (Pontiero 1997: 23).

Any pre-conception of cultures (like, 'imperial culture' and 'peripheral culture'/small culture'), in the act of translation crystalizes the hegemonic relationship between the languages from the dominant point of view. It often leads to the suppression of freedom of the translator to express different forms of engagement with knowledge perceptions. The aim of translation practice – to enhance the potential to exchange or transmit knowledge through the act of translations – is lost (mostly resulting in misrepresentations of marginal cultures). Most importantly, the pre-conception often veils the specific connotation of a particular translation piece and the transformative proposition of inter/trans cultural perspectives encompassed in it. This brings us to draw the links between theoretical ideas as much as its praxis and go beyond its limitations which translation and its politics of knowing can only impart; though any attempt to draw up the boundaries of translations can offer a partial account of the same.

However, I suggest, to understand the meaning of the practice of using translation as a tool for the transmission of ideas between small/marginal cultures and ruling/dominant cultures, we should engage with specific conditions of time and place. Any political strategy against cultural translations without attending to the specific significance in the social realm and the ideological context, runs the risk of complicity with dominant social and political structures. The pain and triumph of the translator's position repeatedly juxtaposed by the ideas of the marginal and the dominant will have to be addressed in this regard.

Needless to say, the effacement of Tagore translation in Serbia is because of the lack of translations in the dominant language. Yet, when a translator uses the dominant language as a medium of translation it is difficult to efface the tricky issue of language-transfer linked indivisibly and invariably with culture-transfer. Tagore himself experienced the effects of this bipolar culture that divided the society into the imaginary of 'us' and 'them', 'the West' and 'the rest' or the 'superior self' and the 'other'. It was one of the most formidable challenges and indeed a promethean task Tagore took upon himself to live and exceed the racial imperialism and its attendant oppositional rhetoric of cultural difference through translation and decolonise what Raymond F. Betts has termed as "the peculiar geography of imperialism wherein [Western] Europe was the centre of world affairs (Betts 2004: 7)". Nevertheless, Tagore was an avant-garde translator who started to translate from the age of eleven. He experimented with a variety of translations from Sanskrit to Bengali, Bengali to English, English to Bengali including prose and poetry, and he undertook all risks to negotiate the divisive cultures operative in society so as to gradually cross the cultural frontiers of languages.

His attempt to bridge the boundaries of language and culture through translations took him to translate Kalidasa, Kabir, and Shakespeare (for example) at different phases of his life, suggesting that valorisation of a culture “denies the discursive nature of the translation practice and wishfully attempts to reduce translation to a mere mirror image of its object” (St-Pierre 1993: 63).

Culture and its translation or the act of cultural translation as embodied in a text is a crucial process of assimilation, amalgamation and improvisation. When commenting on the act of translation of cultures, Homi K. Bhabha observes:

Cultural translation is not simply appropriation or adaptation; it is a process through which cultures are required to revise their own systems and values, by departing from their habitual or “inbred” rules of transformation. Ambivalence and antagonism accompany any act of cultural translation, because negotiating with the “difference of the other” reveals the radical insufficiency of our own systems of meaning and signification. (Bhabha 1997: 14, Chaudhuri 2010: 16)

What Bhabha suggests is that ‘cultural translation’ is not only about the transfer of languages but that it is also about a process through which the interface between the dispossession of one’s own language and the negotiation with the dominant language starts.

*Gitanjali*, the 1913 book of poems of Rabindranath Tagore, is a case in point. The once deeply appreciated *Gitanjali*, about which the celebrated Shakespearean scholar Andrew Cecil Bradley wrote “It looks as though we have at last a great poet among us again – ‘(Kripalini 1980: 224)<sup>7</sup> ‘moved soon to firm neglect or even shrill denunciation” (Sen 1997: xviii). The observation of Sukanta Chaudhuri, a renowned Tagore scholar, is pertinent. “The receiving culture becomes in effect the controlling and assessing power”. That is, “the host admits the guest very much on his own terms”. (Chaudhuri 2010: 17) This was exactly Tagore’s case post-*Gitanjali*<sup>8</sup> in West Europe. “Damn Tagore”, wrote William Butler Yeats. “Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English” (Dutta & Robinson 1995: 4). Many scholars have repeatedly discussed the reception of *Gitanjali* in the West from various points of view. The objective of this lecture/article is not to highlight the debates surrounding *Gitanjali*. This is not to suppress the debate on translation, which, anyway, one cannot. For, the complexities *Gitanjali* (and its translation) encountered continue to have its sway in the contemporary world.

A fairly recent comment may be considered: “the time has come for us to forget [that] Rabindranath was ever a poet, and think of his more intelligible achievements” (Jack 2011). Tagore’s poetry can never be intelligible unless we try to understand what segregated the poet as an ‘Eastern Oriental sage’ from mainstream poets, or, try to

7 See Kripalini. The letter was written to the artist and a friend of the illustrious Tagore family Sir William Rothenstein who introduced Rabindranath Tagore to the London literary circle.

8 For more details on the intricacies involving Tagore, translation and *Gitanjali*, see Kripalini. 1962, 221-222; Sisir Kumar Das. 1994. ‘Introduction’; Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, 1997, 132; William Radice. 2003. *Poetry and Community: Lectures and Essays* (1991-2001). New Delhi: Chronicle books (especially pages 219-222); Georges L. Bastin, Paul Fadio Bandia (eds). 2006. *Charting the Future of Translation History*. Canada: University of Ottawa Press, 23.

remove from our mind the old trope – “Eastern spiritualism” – for new attitude towards the mould of his poetic perception.

Here one will notice that the exotic caste of Tagore’s poetic language was not essentially different from the history of the Orient West:

[The] orientalist exoticism cultivated by English poets for over a century by that date, from Moore and Southey through Edwin Arnold to James Elroy Flecker; but this, as it were, was the real thing, straight out of the east. Yet beyond this confirmation of a trend in English poetic language, there was the decisive factor of colonial patronage, the certification of a subaltern culture in terms not its own and therefore leaving the field open for its subsequent dismissal by the dominant culture when the later acquired new tastes made demands of poetry. (Chaudhuri 2010: 17)

There are many predicaments and/or risks involved in translation practice. The process of acceptance/reception of a translated piece (even if we do not consider several aspects of rejection) and questions of the alleged racial, cultural and linguistic superiority all contribute to the afterlife of the translated piece. These complexities change with time and still translation as “a ground and medium of cultural exchange, is organically invested with destabilizing and distancing factors” (Chaudhuri 2010: 22). The translator has to appropriate a cultural system defined in other terms and contexts. The defeatism and often-invisible myriad conflicts that translators face in the process of translating are disturbing.

Yet, these ‘unsettling’ aspects that accompany the process of translation practice validates the dynamism of the translator: to move beyond the entrenched confines/hierarchies of the dominant/target language into participating in the transmission of culture through translation while the incongruous insertion of the culture-specific terms (here, in Bengali language) – like ‘dharma’, ‘rasa’, or like the *babla* flowers, the *neem* leaves (Tagore 2010: 66) – in the dominant language (here, in English), are kept in place. Thereby, there are satisfaction and joy in the process of translation. This ‘hybrid’ nature of the process of translation that informs the theorizing of translation, thus, is implicit in the term ‘ambivalence’; that is, moving beyond the modernist marginal language/dominant language, white/other binaries, and by extension the self/other, the West/ the East, the lesser half of the West/ the West binaries without opposing it. The translator opens up different aspects and spaces of negotiation with cultural exchange and cultural difference, and the produced values are measured against the disavowal of the translator’s desire to produce an account of a fixed cultural system.

Rabindranath Tagore’s own English version of his Bengali poems in *Gitanjali* lodged a variety of these implicit nuances of ‘beyondness’ in translation, which carry the meaning – the burden and value – of cultural exchange across boundaries of time and space. For example,

[...] What emptiness do you gaze upon! Do you not  
feel a thrill passing through the air with the notes of  
the far away song floating from the other shore? (Tagore 2010: 29)

Or

[...] Though hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou has brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.

[...] When one knows thee, then alien there is none, then no door is shut. (Tagore 2010: 75)

The exotic blend of the real and the transcendent reveals the capacity of the poet-translator to stir the imbalance of the organizing principles of 'nationness' that divides the planet Earth into home and the world, the West and the East (and hence, as discussed before – the West as materially superior, modern, and progressive and the rest as inferior, traditional and anti-progressive). Tagore's was an uncompromising and non-dogmatic defence of individual creativity and agency that admits of no artificial boundaries – political, ideological or geographic. It is useful to note here that while acknowledging the value of translation and the difficult translator's status of being a subject in the web of the other, Tagore, taking after Bhabhabhuti an eight century Indian poet-scholar, said: it is the "presence" of the "endless time and the vast world [that enables literatures to link] one human being to another, one age to another with the bonds of life" (Tagore 2001: 184). He also said: "If we are to understand what people are saying through their work, or what their purpose and endeavour are, we have to follow the course of human intention through all history." (Tagore 2001: 148) Although Tagore made these observations in a slightly different context, it is relevant to cultural translations. (Why does a certain text or texts of an author get translated more often than some other, or, otherwise?)

An excursion into an answer to this question is vast and varied. For one perceived submission is, a translator seeks to ensure the channel of expression in the creation of 'Art'; and that art of/or translation is not just the process of word transfer (from the source text to the target text) – that display word equivalence and/or certain metres (in the case of poetry) which would make this channel communicable. Translation is also about the internal response to the world of target text: the arrangement of the power of understanding the world of perceptions and emotions of the translator in relation to the source text and further correlating the source text to the target text, in an uncomplicated sense. That is, the internal response to the world of source text (of the translator) is not directly opposed to the external response to the world of the target text. That is, the translator must keep a note of the structural (dis)similarity (of languages, for example) and combine the internal response with the world of reality – the daily life and/or particular account of history (the response to external). The interaction between the external and the internal suggests the culmination of the ultimate 'rasa' or the source of creation in translation, which is synonymous with 'joy' and 'beauty'.

Yet, the question of propriety (in language transfers and problems of cultural difference between the source text and the target text) in relation to the force of circumstance remains a preoccupation of the translator. The question is intimately connected to

[...] that of “foreignness”, since translation brings into contact readers of one nation and tradition with a text and the values of another. As a result, the translator must determine whether the translation should reduce to the greatest possible extent the differences separating the two, or whether it should maintain such differences (St-Pierre 1993: 81).

Translation, then, is that creation of the ‘rasa’ that bears that deathless message of indeterminacy of time and space beyond the simple relational display of equivalent words, sound patterns/ onomatopoeia and forms into connecting histories of the past and the present, the local and the global cultures from one generation to another within and across a country and the globe. While speaking of the culmination of efforts of the task of a translator (in *Gitanjali*), Tagore said:

I did not undertake this task in a spirit of reckless bravado. I simply felt an urge to recapture through the medium of another language the feelings and sentiments which had created such a feast of joy within me in the days gone by. (Sisir Kumar Das 1994: 11)

Tagore was talking about living in an atmosphere of domination and transcending the offence of crossing the boundaries of marginal languages. He was also expressing the experience of the discursive space of ‘joy’ in translation that makes communication possible – through an enlargement of habit and taste that extends the interpretation of culture – beyond the relation of sound and sense impressions and imitation of external reality into a semantic whole that speaks of a larger human relationship. Translation then becomes an institution, like language itself or any work of art, created and sustained by a community to achieve togetherness, and not only about self revelation of the translator but also about the urge of the individual for self expression as a part of a larger community. Let us consider an example from the translation of Tagore’s first-day lecture in Serbia:

I, who came from a distant land and am speaking to you in the language which is not my language, nor your language, I do not know precisely what do you expect from me, I do not know how you see the truth that I see, and whether I will be able to express to you how I see it.

This morning, the representatives of your public had visited me, and asked me what message to your people I can give to them. I was reluctant to answer. I am a poet, and I am asking you to receive me as a poet.

I can compare poetry with a wonderful garden full of flowers, but without fruit. There is nothing useful to the body, but only those that ennoble the soul, that has beauty. But, I believe that most people are carrying within themselves some message with the universal significance. I, myself, have one such message, almost an avowed altruism. I tell you: do not let be tempted by the spirit of progress, forget what the modern civilization is.



It requires some explanation. I am only afraid, that it will be difficult to do in such a short time and in this language.

I would like to remind you on time before Christianity appeared, when people who had different view on the world, religion, and other habits and comprehensions inhabited Europe. Even now, there are whole continents in which the people have their particular view of the world, different from the European.

At that age, each nation had its own, tribal god. Then, the idea of deity was limited. On which that limited idea of deity was founded? The very awareness that people have gathered into communities and grew the feeling of friendship and solidarity, gave them literature, music, beauty. It is a mystery of aggregation, which can lead to the cognition of great truths, which means the birth of something deeper, truth for truth's sake, not for facts' sake. (Tagore 1926: 5).

This discursive dimension of cultural translation instituted by translation of what Tagore would say – “truth in the vessel of fact” (Tagore 2001b: 11) – underlines the interplay of continuity and discontinuity in translation practice of the power to reproduce reality and its power to discern truth from facts in traditional ways of appropriation and adaptation. What Tagore suggests is: in translation practice the ‘spirit’ of a work should be translated and not just the ‘words’. For word/s (fact/s) are fragments of the whole (truth) in the translation practice, suggesting a shift in the meaning of translation. In translation practice for Tagore, just as in any creative art, the focus is on the power to generate and celebrate a greater unity of truth and fact beyond the efflux of consciousness into a narrative of transmission of culture while negotiating with the ‘difference of the other’. It is this space of interaction or the ‘beyondness’ in translation practice that prompts the transformation – the revealed truth – wherein the principle of truth in translation upholds the facts that links.

The urgency of bringing this example within this study, although it is inadequate to expose reality and its power to differentiate truth from facts, is to touch upon the several issues of interpretation – of “togetherness” and “otherness” – whereby the two meet each other in complementary relationship without rejecting the inherent contradictions between the binary division of the East and the West or the lesser West and the West. This articulation of the new aesthetics of translation practice is what Tagore advocates. It is the advocacy of compassion, coexistence, cooperation, and the free and unbridled expression of the state of his mind that exemplify his response to the world of love and hatred, pleasure and pain, fear and wonder to a channel of communication that endorses the relationship between human beings (between readers across the world), which is the role of translation.

However, it is the uncertainty of the relations instituted by translation permitted this play (what Tagore calls ‘lila’) between ‘dominance’ and ‘resistance’. Under colonial situation the equation of language-transfer linked indivisibly with culture-transfer could not have been a simple one just as in the case of the lesser Westerners/‘the Balkan East’. Advocating solidarity, Tagore said:

Something else should appear, something that will run down the limits of nations that will be within every man. This is what the East brought. The East brought the idea of universality; it brought spiritualism and gave the idea of single deity, a god of us all, not a god of one tribe. (Tagore 1926: 5)

This negotiation and opposition of the range of knowledge operative across the world society did not reject the ideas of hierarchies between the colonizers and the colonized or/and the Westerners and the lesser Westerners. Keeping the impossibility of rejection in its place, Tagore offered an alternative translation practice that was a combination of both: the Vedantic position of the theory of *rasa* inclusive of the perception of the supreme reality (the experimental values of the world of impression) and the obscure balancing reality of cultural appropriation – the sense of fulfilling what the lesser predecessors had begun, while looking for a due place in the quasi-colonial world hegemony<sup>9</sup>.

The idiosyncratic expressions of the poet-translator and the deep reserves of his creative self, which incorporated a vast corpus of the bilingual poet, set a new, yet, in the words of Sukanta Chaudhuri, “uniquely valuable” (Chaudhuri 2010: 45) trend in the public life of translation. The ultimate formalization of marginal culture in the public realm, which was “heroic in its faith in spiritually that united mankind”, was a creative process counterpoising “that nationalism of which Europe [the West] made a religion” (Tagore 1926: 5) Dušan Stojanović’s observation is useful here:

Rabindranath Tagore is a man of many gifts, famous throughout the world as a thinker and a poet equally. However, the world primarily marvelled at his personality and his poetry. The first collection of his poems in English was published in 1912. As early as 1913, Tagore won the Nobel Prize [...] Tagore won over the West with his poems easily and swiftly like no other poet had ever before [...] He was unassumingly remarkable, effortlessly eloquent, precise without exaggeration [...] firm in his knowledge and he always took a holistic approach when dealing with any matter as a poet [...] Tagore conquered the world with the magic of his words, tones, colours, with the magic of his subtlety and simpleness of his spirit [...] Tagore presented himself to the world as an embodiment of a remarkable inner harmony, a poet whose inner, private self was in harmony with the other worlds, a poet constantly searching for the meaning of their elevated truth [...] [He] portrays a life of a spiritual person who remained faithful to the world and the eternal spirit, the reconciliation of which is the inspiration for poetry. (Stojanović 1932: 5-7)

Tagore had a penetrative mind – that not only had a range of a scholar, but also his insights into the deplorable condition of ‘common humanity’ celebrated the equal worth of all human beings regardless of the communities to which they belonged. What needs to be noted is that within his very essence as a human being Tagore articulated a new extension of his spiritual ideas that harboured the auspices of Indian tradition as well as a new spiritual Indian as well as world consciousness in which “the Indian is

9 For more on the historical reality in Tagore-translation, see Sukanta Chaudhuri, 2010: 18-21.

reconciled with the foreign" (Dasgupta 2006: 1). That is why he could say: "Where truth is concerned there is no question of East or West" (Dasgupta 2004: 66).

He became a household name in Europe equally as a poet and as a thinker whose spirituality is his greatest asset. In poetry, he presented himself as a liberated spiritual man in whom the country and everything that comes from it gets a higher sense through the emanation of the infinite spirit within it, where infinite forms of reality can be reached through the everyday life [...] Tagore was and remained a spiritual reality that was materialised through poetry and had its own idea and its own laws when it came to metaphysics. In both of these areas Tagore offers us the same – a world of his own. Thus his poetry and his philosophy are two sides of the same coin, two fruits of the same plant, two mirrors reflecting the same world. Tagore doesn't seem as a philosopher-poet or poet-philosopher in general terms; rather, he embodies a spiritual life where poetry and meditation are equal means of realization of a personality within its various functions. (Stojanović 1932: 5-7)

Tagore perhaps could not have offered a "neutral" space to translation practice for the lesser lot in India or in Serbia. Yet, he opened another path to the great progress – to the great force of imperialist culture in the science that wants only to achieve what it desires, that progress that hides a great temptation within itself<sup>10</sup>. That path, although may appear too reductionist to the Indians or to the lesser Westerns (who suffered varied forms of subordination, hence marginalisation of their own discourse – that of the cultural hegemony of major and minor languages), Tagore underlined the importance of mediation between the given culture and the imposition of hierarchies on "native verbal habitat" (Chaudhuri 2010: 24) through an inclusive programme of translation. Yet, "the appearance of Rabindranath Tagore is another surprise, a new **problem**." (Miletić 2002: 5-9)<sup>11</sup>

The European, in his insatiable desire for something new, has drained the entire course of history, has piled up molehills ahead, an entire pyramid of spiritual diggings and has buried himself with them, while remaining blind for their contents and deaf for the music of eternity which kept humming inside them. The European is unable to understand the great Lao Tzu, or Buddha, or Moses, or Christ; he found regulations, laws, rituals, but not the living spirit within them: the spirit of reconciliation, the spirit of forgiveness, the spirit of love which does not create the war, hate or hell in people...

Thus spoke David Pijade, while Tagore in the last song of the *Gardener* leaves us with a question, which will probably last for centuries to come:

"Who are you, reader, reading my poems a hundred years hence?  
I cannot send you one single flower from this wealth of the spring, one single  
streak of gold from yonder clouds.  
Open your doors and look abroad..." (Miletić 2002: 8-9)

10 For more on restrictions of marginal languages under long subordination, see *Politika* 17<sup>th</sup> November 1926: 5.

11 All translations in this book were done by Samuilo Pijade (1881-1942).

The philosophical question of personal feelings and beyond local deviation continues to inform translated texts in complicated ways. For, texts that are translated are 'irreducible' to original texts, even when all questions are answered as to – 'under what condition', 'why', 'how', and 'for whom' a specific text gets transformed. Yet, we are dealing with a translation practice (within its discursive constraints and discursive possibilities) that seeks to declare another voice that speaks of the intimate relationship between the creative power of the translator and the creativity in translation. It is the realm of the beyond, as discussed, where translation begins its *presencing* from an "absolute caste restriction in human cultures" (Kumar Das 1994: 585) into 'Chitto jetha bhoi sunno' (translated as 'Where the mind is without fear' (Tagore 2010: 43))<sup>12</sup> – opening further possibilities to explore new lights in translation practice. This reading, though, might have offered a biased understanding of the reality of translation practice.

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### 12 Molitva

Tamo gdje je misao bez straha i glava se drži uspravno / Gdje je znanje besplatno / Gdje svijet još nije polomljen u komade / Tijesnim poznatim zidovima / Tamo gdje riječi izlaze iz dubine istine / Gdje neumorna težnja pruža svoje ruke prema savršenstvu / Gdje bistra struja razuma još nije izgubila put / U turobnoj pustinji mrtvih navika / Tamo gdje je um vođen tvojom rukom / U uvijek rastuću misao i akciju / U tom slobodnom raju, moj Oče, / Probudi moju zemlju.

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## SUMMARY

### TRANSLATING TAGORE IN SERBIA: CERTAIN INTER-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Cultural narratives play an important role in translation practice. This essay picks up Rabindranath Tagore's ideas of translation from his 1917 book *Translation Practice* (Anubad Charcha). Taking examples from his lectures in Serbia and Tagore texts translated in Serbia, the essay offers a place of cultural interaction of knowledge through the practice of translation. Tagore has said: "the collaboration between different language descents, races and Nations [is] crucial for a continuous existence of the mankind in this world"<sup>13</sup>. While interrogating Tagore's views the essay problematises the politics

13 R. Tagore. *Translation Practice* (Anubad Charcha). Bolepur: Visva-Bharati, 1917, 160.

of difference (of language – of dominant language and the marginal language, and of the ambiguous interplay of dominance and resistance in the complex whole of culture's diversity), and attempts to address on the one hand the 'impossibilities' of pure language transfer<sup>14</sup>; on the other hand it suggests – it is only natural to perceive that the translation discourse approach facilitates the discursive space of interaction between cultures at the margins while it opens up the process of decolonisation. The essay also briefly considers the effects of bipolar culture on the translator's position, suggesting any feeling of 'otherness' can only persist in problematic ways.

**KEYWORDS:** Rabindranath Tagore, translation studies, inter-cultural translation, literary reception.

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14 *Ibid.* 'Preface'.