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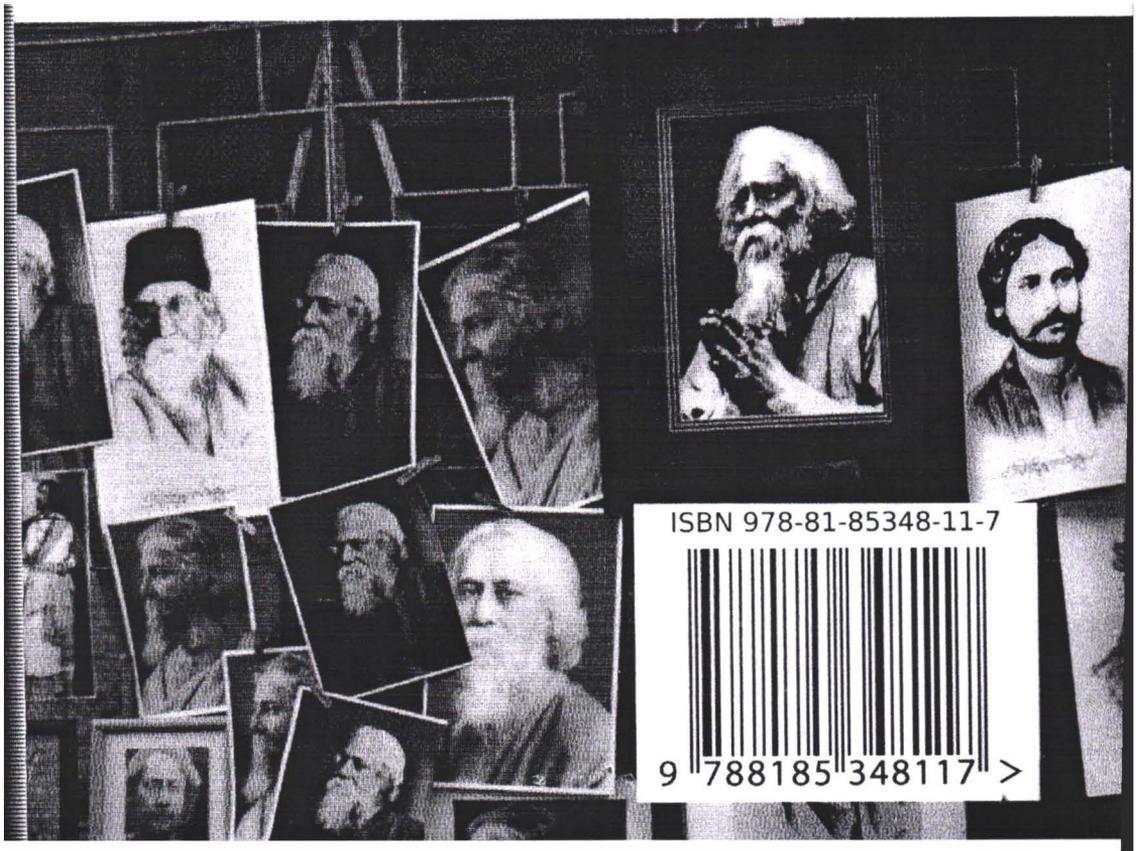
NAMELESS RECOGNITION

RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND
OTHER INDIAN LITERATURES

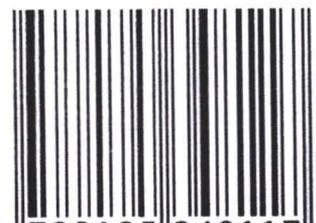
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This pride of name plucks feathers from others to decorate its own
self ... let the day come when only thy name will play in my tongue
and I shall be accepted by all by my nameless recognition.

Gitanjali MS 33 (unpublished),
Rothenstein manuscript, from the facsimile published by
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PART I
INTRODUCTORY

PREFACE

A national conference on 'The Impact of Rabindranath Tagore on Other Indian Literatures' was organized by the National Library on 20-21 January 2011 to mark the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of the poet. The present volume is a collection of the papers presented at the conference. We are grateful to Sri Jawhar Sircar, IAS, Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Culture, and to Dr T. Kumar, IAS, Joint Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Culture, for extending their generous support to the event. We are especially grateful to the speakers and delegates who attended the conference from across the country. Professor Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, distinguished historian and Chairperson, Indian Council of Historical Research, inaugurated the deliberations, while Professor Sumatheendra Raghevendra Nadig, eminent poet and former Chairperson, National Book Trust, delivered the keynote address. We are grateful to them for permitting us to reproduce edited versions of

their addresses. Sri K.K. Banerjee, Director, Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation, and Dr Ramkumar Mukhopadhyay, author and Regional Secretary, Sahitya Akademi, Kolkata, were Guests of Honour at the inaugural session. We are glad that we were able to record their addresses.

Members of the library staff organized an exhibition of Tagore's works in other Indian languages at the Art Gallery next to the Bhasha Bhavan auditorium where the conference was being held. Sri A. R. Bandyopadhyay, Chairperson of the Advisory Board of the library and its former Director, kindly inaugurated the exhibition. We thank Biswa Mahamanab Chakra for contributing portraits of Tagore to the exhibition.

It would be invidious to single out members of the staff many of whom worked hard to make the two events lively and useful. The administrative and professional wings worked as a team to ensure that the library reclaimed its academic and cultural mandate. However, I recall with gratitude the efforts put in by Sri Safalya Nandi and Syed Abuzar Hashmi for co-ordinating preparations, and wish to thank Sri Ashim Mukhopadhyay for his assistance with the editorial work.

SWAPAN CHAKRAVORTY

INTRODUCTION

SWAPAN CHAKRAVORTY

Rabindranath Tagore's impact on the literatures in other Indian languages may be said to have undergone three rough phases. The first related to those who came to know him and his writings through their association with the Brahmo reformist movement in the nineteenth century and the *swadesi* agitation against the proposed partition of Bengal in the first decade of the twentieth. The second followed the award of the Nobel prize for literature to Tagore in 1913, which fuelled translations and literary pilgrimages to Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati. The third phase was co-eval with the modernist turn in major Indian literatures, and the reassessment, if not critique, of Tagore's role in the light of *avant garde* experiments.

At the same time, one needs to keep in view the impact the literatures of other parts of India had on Rabindranath Tagore. To take a well-known instance, Tagore translated the poems of the fifteenth-century saint Kabir into English (*One Hundred Poems of*

Kabir, trans. Rabindranath Tagore, assisted by Evelyn Underhill, London: India Society, 1914). On their part, Hindi *chhayavadi* poets such as Suryakanta Tripathi (pseud. Nirala; 1896-1961), Sumitranandan Pant (1900-77) and Mahadevi Varma (1907-87) acknowledged Tagore as a major point of departure. The novelist and scholar Hazariprasad Dwivedi (1907-79) joined Rabindranath Tagore's university at Santiniketan in 1930 and was Director of its Hindi Bhavan from 1940 to 1950.

One could piece together stories of such literary intercourse in the case of most other Indian languages, as has been done, for instance, by the editors of the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature* published by Sahitya Akademi.¹ Take the instance of literature in the language of Assam, a contiguous state with a shared cultural history. The important periodical *Jonaki*, edited by Chandrakumar Agarwala, and later Hemchandra Goswami and Lakshminath Bezbarua, started life in Kolkata in 1889. *Jonaki* lent its name to the Assamese Romantic movement, and its contributors came to be known as writers of the '*Jonaki yug*' (the age of *Jonaki*). Lakshminath Bezbarua and his colleagues later brought out the flagship journal of Assamese literary modernism, *Baahi*, from Kolkata in 1909; its offices later moved to Dibrugarh and Guwahati in Assam. Lakshminath Bezbarua (1868-1938), the leading Assamese poet, novelist, playwright, satirist, essayist and journalist, lived for a stretch in Kolkata, studied at the General Assembly's Institution (now Scottish Church College), and married into the Tagore family. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan was one of Bezbarua's major inspirations, the other was Rabindranath Tagore. His love of Kolkata and Bengali was never at odds with his work for the Assamese language, and he founded Asamiya Bhasaunnati Sadhini Sabha (Association for the Development of the Asamiya Language) in 1889. The influence of Rabindranath Tagore can be seen in the work of Assamese poets such as Dharmeswari Devi Barua (1892-1960), Ratnakanta Barkakati (1897-1963), Nalinibala Devi (1898-1978), and the playwright and film-

maker Jyotiprasad Agarwala (1903-53). Others, such as the poet Nabakanta Barua (1926-2002), also spent time at Visva-Bharati.

The pattern can be seen to repeat itself in most other Indian literatures. The religious reform of the Brahma sect and nineteenth-century nationalism shaped in Bengal cut deep into the Telugu consciousness. Numerous translations of Bengali authors were made into Telugu, especially of the works of Tagore. Of the Telugu poets inspired by him since the 1890s are Devulapalli Krishna Sastri, Vedula Satyanarayan Sastri, Rayaprolu Subba Rao, Abburi Rama Krishna Rao, Achanta Janaki Ram, Bezwada Gopala Reddy, Mallavarapu Visveswara Rao, B.V. Singaracharya, Jaggaiah, T. N. Anasuya Devi, Mutnuri Krishna Rao, Gurajada Appa Rao and Amarendra. There were a few who went on a literary pilgrimage to Santiniketan. These included Akulathi Chalamaiiah, Rayaprolu Subba Rao, Abburi Rama Krishna Rao, Pattabhi, Mallavarapu Visweswara Rao and Bezwada Gopala Reddy. More recent poets such as Ismail (1928-2008) have also been enthusiastic about Brahma ideas.

If literary aspirants trekked to Kolkata and Santiniketan to meet the poet, there have been instances when the literature of a place was energized by Tagore's own visits. Tagore made at least eleven trips to the district of Darjeeling where Nepali is the major language spoken, staying mainly in Kalimpong and Mangpu. Important Nepali translations of Tagore were later made by authors such as Iswar Baral (1923-2000). Rabindranath Tagore's difficult novel *Gora* has had a competent Manipuri translation by N. Kunjamohan Singh, years after the poet had himself been inspired by the Manipuri dance form, using it for his dance-drama *Chitrangada* (1936).

Rabindranath Tagore visited Sindh in 1923. Sindhi writers were deeply enthused. Jethmal Parsram, a theosophist who had founded the Sindhi Sahitya Society in 1914, translated one of his novels into Sindhi. A literary and dramatic club named after the

poet was set up by Khanchand Daryani and Mangharam Malkani in Hyderabad (Sindh), and its first performance, translations from the poet's works, opened in the presence of the poet himself during his visit.

Tagore's friendship with eminent Indians outside Bengal was another catalyst, although not always an uncritical one. The most fruitful contact between Gujarat and Bengal followed in the wake of his friendship with Mahatma Gandhi. Among Gandhi's associates, Kaka Keelkar, a Marathi who also wrote in Gujarati, taught at Santiniketan, while Mahadev Desai, translator of the Mahatma's autobiography into English, rendered Tagore's and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's works into Gujarati. Gandhi sent some of the pupils of his school, Gujarat Vidyapith, to Santiniketan. The impact of the decision may be seen in the close links with Bengali literature in modern Gujarati writers such as Nagindas Parekh, Prahlad Parekh, Raman Soni, Pulakin Trivedi, Bachubhai Sukla and Kusandas Manek. Umasankar Joshi (1911-88), a renowned poet and novelist in Gujarati, was for a while Chancellor of *Viveka Bharati* (1979-82).

However, it would be an error to consider Tagore's influence in isolation; he was part of a number of reasons that drew Indians to Bengal and its literature. For instance, the influence of Tagore, the religious movement of Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda, and the English writings of the poet and philosopher Aurobindo Ghosh equally impelled modern Kannada writers to study the literature of Bengal. B. Venkatacharya (1845-1914) was an early translator of prose fiction from the Bengali, while Tagore influenced K. V. Puttappa (1904-94) and Sivarama Karanth (1902-97). It is said that Karanth's father stopped him from studying in Santiniketan apparently because Bengali brahmans ate fish. Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam were both influential for Maithili Romantic poets of the twentieth century, such as Vaidyanath Misra (pseud. Nagarjun and Yatri; 1911-98).

Modernist iconoclasm had often turned its back on Tagore, in Bengal as much as elsewhere in India. Odia and Bengali literatures have had a long and productive history of translation and mutual influence. Yet, although Tagore was a potent influence on the generation of Kalindicharan Panigrahi, Jibanananda Das has been a far more important source for later poets such as Guruprasad Mohanty (1924-2004) and Dipak Misra (b. 1939). Nevertheless, Tagore continues to be studied by writers and scholars in every part of the country, and this process of continuous recovery and resuscitation lends to his writings an undiminished vitality. Such interest is far from a scholarly attention given to a canonical poet. This is clear from the number of writers important in their own languages who have thought Tagore worth their while to translate. G. Sankara Kurup (1901-78), a leading poet in Malayalam, translated *Gitanjali* in 1959; Marathi lyricists such as B. R. Tambe (1874-1941) and B. B. Borkar (1910-84) emulated his poems and songs, while the Marathi writer and actor P. L. Deshpande (1918-2000) learnt Bengali in order to be able to read Tagore in the original; contemporary Rajasthani writers such as Manohar Singh Rathore and Ramswarup Kisan have done important translations; and the eminent Tamil musicologist T. S. Parthasarathi (1913-2007) alone translated seven of his plays.

That one is tempted to speak of an Indian literature rather than of 'literatures' in the plural is more an effect of Tagore's success than of the lexicon of post-colonial state bureaucracy. On 7 April 1895 Tagore delivered an address at the annual meeting of the Bengal Academy of Literature (later Bangiya Sahitya Parishat) entitled 'Bangla Jatiya Sahitya'. The paucity of a national literature, according to Tagore, is the cause of the absence of national ties:

The vital links between our past and present have been snapped because of this paucity of literature. A major reason for this paucity is the absence of national ties. In our country, Kanauj, Koshal, Kashi, and Kanchi have all gone their own separate ways; nor did they desist from destroying

one another occasionally by letting loose the horse of the ashvamedha sacrifice. The Indraprastha of the Mahabharata, the Kashmir of Rajtarangini, the Magadha of the Nandas and the Ujjayini of Vikramaditya were not joined by a running strand of national history. Hence our national literature could not establish a firm foundation on the collective heart of the nation...Kalidasa belongs only to Vikramaditya, Chandvardi to Prithviraj, Chanakya to Chandragupta. They did not belong to the entire India of their times; even within their respective regions, there are no links connecting them to earlier and later periods.²

Tagore expressed the hope that *sahitya* would unite the nation through its virtue of *sahitatva* or union, and that the Bengal Academy of Literature would lead the way. When Tagore delivered the Presidential address at the Bengali Literary Convention at Varanasi in 1923, this hope had grown into confident prophecy. The Nobel award was by then a decade old, and a chair for Bengali had already been instituted at Marburg University. Tagore claimed with barely concealed pride that this was unimaginable ten years back, and predicted similar literary glory for the rest of India:

If Bengal achieves special glory through such diligence, will it not redound to the whole of India? ... There is no harm if today's guests stream through the courtyard of Bengal. Indians will have to recognize that all these travellers are meeting on Indian ground.³

However, the national literature that Bengal's ostensible success brought to light was incontestably plural, covering the entire range from élite letters to the oral productions of indigenous peoples. One of Tagore's most precious legacies is his acknowledgement of this extraordinary diversity, and his generous understanding of the national, one which had a place for everything from the literature of minor cults to children's rhymes and rural songs. It is to be hoped that the plural 'literatures' used in the title of the conference would encourage us to celebrate this inclusive spirit.

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2. Rabindranath Tagore, 'Bengali National Literature', trans. Swapan Chakravorty, in *Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, gen. ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 180-1.
3. Rabindranath Tagore, 'Presidential Address at the Bengali Literary Convention of North India, 3 March 1923', trans. Swapan Chakravorty, *ibid.*, p. 319.

TAGORE'S RECEPTION IN INDIA: REFLECTIONS OF A POET

SUMATHEENDRA NADIG

I was a teacher, but am no teacher at the moment. I continue to be a student, and since we are all students, you are in a sense my colleagues. About my experience of Bengal I have written a poem called 'Banalatasree' in Kannada. That is different from Jibanananda Das's 'Banalata Sen'. For me Banalata symbolizes the whole of Bengal. In this poem there are names of most of the important Bengali poets – men and women – and Banalata Sen appears as an allusion.

I hesitate to speak on Tagore and his impact. It is better that I speak as a poet. A historian such as Professor Bhattacharya cannot go wrong on facts. But a poet is like a child and is allowed to make mistakes. I said to myself that I would go and stand before my people, and they will accept my mistakes. I am going to speak about Tagore's reception in the literatures of other Indian languages

The Director General of the National Library Professor Swapan Chakravorty has thrust the heavy responsibility to deliver