



English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Poems

v. 1

Rabindranath Tagore

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Tagore's English writings originals and translations have not received the attention that they deserve. The purpose of this edition is to make the English writings of Tagore available to the widest possible range of readers interested in the writings of Tagore all over the world, with just the bare, minimum information necessary for appreciating the writings, and leave the critical assessment to the readers themselves. There may be two possible reasons for the neglect of Tagore's English writings. Firstly, Tagore's prolific output, Shakespearean felicity and protean plasticity as a Bengali poet, who, though well-versed in English, chose to write in the medium of his mother tongue for nearly the first fifty years of his life, and there is hardly any literary form that he did not touch upon and turn into gold. His creative genius found expression in poems, plays, novels, essays, short stories, satirical pieces, textbooks for children, and songs of all kinds. The only literary form that he did not try is epic. But in his long, eventful and creative eighty years of life he virtually lived an epic. It is largely due to his mighty stature as a Bengali poet that nobody really bothered about his English writings and his own translations of his own writings.

Secondly, it is owing to the supposedly poor quality of his translations subsequent to the translation of *Gitanjali*. It was only after Tagore received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913 that there was a growing demand for his writings in the West, and as Tagore was not apparently satisfied by the translations that others mainly his admirers made, he began to translate his writings himself. But the tremendous haste with which he had to translate, possibly affected the quality of translations. Come what may, the point is whether Tagore's English translations are good or bad, whether the translation furthered his reputation or damaged it, is immaterial. The fact of the matter is that they are his, and his own translation of whatever quality it may be is more valuable to a Tagore lover than the best translation made by somebody else, as Van Gogh's one original single scratch is more valuable than the best possible copy by some other artist.

The value of Tagore's English writings lies here : they constitute an important part of his total oeuvre, add a new magnificent dimension to it and offer us a glimpse into the mystique of the creative anxiety that could have haunted even the greatest writer of the twentieth century, about his possible reception in an alien culture.

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