

CHAPTER VII

THE POST OFFICE

Rabindranath Tagore's ডাকঘর (*The Post Office*) is the most popular and perhaps the best of all his dramatic works. Mixing simplicity with sophistication, realism with symbolism, this play gives expression to man's passionate longing for the faraway and spiritual freedom. At the heart of the play is a young boy, through whose imaginative mind Tagore, the poet-dramatist, sings a paean to the beauty and romance of life. Even though the boy ultimately dies, the imaginative and the poetic aspects of life triumphs over its materialistic concerns. It is not, however, a tragedy in the conventional literary sense of the word. Realistically viewed, it is 'an agonizing depiction of the human condition'. Symbolically interpreted, it is 'gentle and reassuring of ultimate fulfillment'. It is "the interplay of this dual significance which gives the drama its delicate charm and its unique status between tragedy and comedy" (Ayyub101-102). Even though *The Post Office* contains "elements of a tense human drama, a moving fairy tale and a deeply suggestive spiritual symbol" (SenGupta176), its enormous popularity at home and abroad has made it a world classic of all times. ডাকঘর was originally written towards the end of 1911 and published in January, 1912. Chronologically, the play belongs to the *Gitanjali* period when Tagore seems to have felt the 'migratory impulse' in his creative 'wings' (Lago215). In a letter to Nirjharini Sarkar dated 22 Aswin 1318 (1911) Tagore writes, "The rivers, seas, hills and human habitations of the whole world are beckoning me. My mind is also bent on going out...." (my translation)(Bhattachayrya 215). About the writing of ডাকঘর Tagore is reported to have told Edward Thompson:

I was very restless, just as I am now. That gave me the idea of a child pining for freedom, and the world anxious to keep it in its bounds, for it has its duties there... I was anxious to know the world.... My restlessness became intolerable. I wrote *Dakghar* in three or four days. About the same time I wrote *Gitanjali* .

(Cited in Notes on Drama)(Chakravarty 384).

According to his Bengali biographer Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee, a “passionate feeling of wanting to go somewhere far away” made Tagore emotionally restless during this period and his ডাকঘর is the imaginative expression of this restlessness (Radice 5).

ডাকঘর (or, *The Post Office*) was first translated into English in 1914 by Debabrata Mukherjee who had inexplicably called the play “*The Message Office*”. Even though Edward Thompson had described the play as ‘one of his few works that are truthfully represented in the English text’, the fact remains that Tagore himself was not satisfied with the translation (Thompson 212). Though he had partially revised the translation of ডাকঘর, he remained expressly dissatisfied with it. In a letter to Ajit Kumar Chakraborty dated August 1912 he wrote: “His style was flamboyant and I had to tone it down. Even after that I am not satisfied.”(Lal 90) Despite Tagore’s dissatisfaction with the English rendering even after revising it himself, *The Post Office*, in its first ever English translation, has occupied a distinctive position across the globe as one of Tagore’s masterpieces. Rothenstein also informed Tagore (in a letter dated December 2, 1912) that Yeats considered *The Post Office* as ‘a masterpiece’ (Lago 71). Again, it has perhaps the rare distinction of being the only Tagore play which was successfully performed abroad before it was staged in India (The Irish Theatre staged it in London in 1914). The original Bengali version was performed late in 1917 before an audience which included Annie Besant, Tilak, Lalpat Rai, Malaviya, Mahatma Gandhi and many other dignitaries. Again, it was in 1940, the evening before Paris fell to the Nazis, that *The Post Office* in Andre Gide’s French translation was broadcast in Radio France. It is to be noted here that together with *The Gitanjali*, this play won an unprecedented international acclaim and played a very important role in Tagore’s reception in the West.

William Radice is the first British translator to have translated afresh Tagore’s ডাকঘর (*The Post Office*) in 1993. Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson also made another translation of *The Post Office* in 1996 which is its third translation in English till date. Radice’s translation was commissioned and supported by the Nehru Centre of the High Commission of India in London and the Tagore Centre U.K. It arose from the inspiring work,

as writer, director and teacher, of Jill Parvin, who tragically died in 2002. It is perhaps the first ever attempt to interpret the celebrated play against the inhuman scenario of the holocaust tragedy unleashed by the Nazi authority. Thus, Tagore's play has achieved a new relevance in a different socio-political context testifying to its universal appeal. It is now a historical fact that the Polish doctor Janusz Korczak staged *The Post Office* in 1942 in the Jewish ghetto of Warsaw, four days before the deportation of the Warsaw residents to the Nazi concentration camp. He chose a theatrical play in order to convey the message of 'the right to die with dignity' and to teach the children 'to accept the angel of death with composure'. He used the dramatic framework of the dying Amal of *The Post Office* as an analogy to drive home to the audience the agonized realization that 'the impending death of the children in fact symbolized their own' annihilation (Binwan et al. ~~Doren~~ 74-79). While directing *The Post Office* Jill Parvin seems to have in her mind the Janusz Korczak episode which she incorporates in the performance text as a play- within- the play in order to highlight its contemporary relevance and timeless appeal as a Tagore classic. In this connection Martin Kampchen rightly says, "The play's plot proved its universality by transcending its Bengali context and illuminating another context which was, originally, quite alien to it" (Statesman 3 Dec 2010:6).

It needs to be noted here that William Radice's translations of Tagore's *Card Country* and *The Post Office* were published in a double volume set by Visva-Bharati in 2008. But one needs to make a distinction between the two texts of *The Post Office*, one published by The Tagore Centre UK (1996) and the other, by Visva-Bharati (2008). The former edition contains the translation of the original 'dramatic text' as well as the 'performance text' whereas the latter one represents only the rendering of the 'dramatic text', as it came from Tagore. The Tagore Centre UK text of *The Post Office* is the joint work of William Radice and Jill Parvin. Radice translates the original Bengali text whereas Parvin prepares the theatre text incorporating the Janusz-Korczak episode as a play-within-the-play to demonstrate its relevance in the broader European perspective of Nazi regime. *The Post Office*, is, thus, taken away from its Bengali setting and posited against a broader Eurocentric scenario reinforcing its relevance irrespective of time and place.

Before we proceed to evaluate Radice's translation of 'ডাকঘর' (*The Post Office*), let us take a look at the theoretical aspects of translating dramatic texts in order to evaluate Radice's performance. André Lefevere regrets the dearth of theoretical literature on the translation of drama as acted and produced, and Patrice Pavis shows how questions of translation and performance have 'hardly been taken into consideration' (France 96). This dearth of theory has pre-occupied the drama theorists for a long time, just as the problem of the relationship between written text and performance has pre-occupied performance analysts. Susan Bassnett took up this most-neglected issue for discussion for the first time in her pioneering book *Translation Studies* (1980) and followed it up with several articles included in different books on translating dramatic texts. According to her, the translation of the dramatic texts poses a serious problem for the translator:

the dramatic text cannot be translated in the same way as the prose text. To begin with, a theatre text is read differently. It is read as something *incomplete*, rather than as a fully rounded unit, since it is only in performance that the full potential of the text is realized. And this presents the translator with a central problem: whether to translate the text as a purely literary text, or to try to translate it in its *function* as one element in another, more complex system.... Anne Ubersfeld, for example, points out how it is impossible to separate *text* from *performance*, since theatre consists of the dialectical relationship with both, and she also shows how an artificially created distinction between the two has led to the literary text acquiring a higher status.

(Bassnett120)

Pavis also warns that any discussion of the translation of a play text needs to take the performance dimension into consideration, since the play is not simply a literary text, written to be read, but a text that 'reaches the audience by way of the actors' bodies' (France *Ibid* 96). In other words, unlike a novel or a poem, the play text, far from being complete in itself, like a novel or a poem, forms part of the total equation that is the play in performance. The play as literature is distinctly different from the play in performance, though both are intimately connected (France 96). In "Strategies and Methods for Translating Theatre Texts" (1985) Susan Bassnett [formerly McGuire] also reminds us that "a theatre text exists in a dialectical relationship with the performance of that text. The two texts—written and performed—are coexistent and inseparable, and it is in this relationship that the paradox for the translator

lies” (Hermans87). What Bassnett here seems to suggest is that the play is written only to be spoken on the stage and is a kind of blueprint that actors use as the basis of their performance. Hence the translator needs to be more conscious of its inherent ‘performability’. The ultimate purpose of theatre translation seems to ensure that the translated play perform well on stage in the target language before a live audience. Bassnett, then, quotes approvingly from Jiri Veltrusky in her *Translation Studies* to show how dialogue unfolds both in time and space and is always integrated in the extralinguistic situation illuminating and often modifying it :

The relationship between the dialogue and the extralinguistic situation is intense and reciprocal. The situation often provides the dialogue with its subject matter. moreover, whatever the subject matter may be, the situation variously interferes in the dialogue, affects the way it unfolds, brings about shifts or reversals, and sometimes interrupts it altogether. In its turn, the dialogue progressively illuminates the situation and often modifies or even transforms it. The actual sense of the individual units of meaning depends as much on the extra-linguistic situation as on the linguistic context.

(Veltrusky cited in Bassnett 121)

Bassnett, then, quotes the following passage for our discussion from Robert Corrigan’s much-talked- about article on “Translating for Actors”:

The first law in translating for the theater is that every thing must be speakable. It is necessary at all times for the translator to hear the actor speaking in his mind’s ear. He must be conscious of the gestures of the voice that speaks – the rhythm, the cadence, the interval. He must also be conscious of the look, the feel, and the movement of the actor while he is speaking. He must, in short, render what might be called the whole gesture of the scene....Only in this way can the translator hear the words in such a way that they play upon each other in harmony, in conflict, and in pattern --- and hence as dramatic. (Arrowsmith and Shattuck 101)

According to Corrigan, the translator of the theatre text is required to hear the voice that speaks, visualize the ‘gesture of the language’ and capture the ‘cadence’, ‘rhythm’ and ‘pauses’ when the written text is spoken. Again, the theatre translator is also expected to

combine in himself the imaginative qualities so that he might be able 'to direct the play, act the play, and see the play while translating it'. (Ibid) Thus, the theatre text, written with a view to its performance, contains distinguishable structural features that make it 'performable', beyond the stage directions themselves. Consequently the task of the translator is to identify those structures and to translate them into the TL, even though this may lead to major shifts on the linguistic and stylistic planes (Bassnett122).

The problem of performability in translation is, again, complicated by changing concepts of performance of the time. As for example, a contemporary production of a Shakespearean play is bound to be influenced by the various developments in acting style, playing space, the role of the audience and the altered concepts of tragedy and comedy since Shakespeare's time. With the passage of time new interpretations of a play emerge which are obviously different from those of the Elizabethan period. Moreover, acting style and concepts of theatre also undergo change in different social and national contexts and the theatre translator is required to take them into consideration for translating theatre texts. A perusal of the English translations of Racine, the French classical dramatist, reveals one significant point-----texts may have been translated singly (e.g. John Masefield's versions of *Esther* and *Berenice*) or as part of a volume of complete works (e.g. R.G.Boswell, the first translator of Racine's *oeuvre*). Single texts of Racine may have been translated with performance in mind whereas 'complete plays' have been rendered primarily for a reading public where literalness and linguistic fidelity remain the principal criteria(Bassnett 122-23).

According to Bassnett, the difficulty of translating theatre texts has given rise to two types of criticism, one of which attacks translation as 'too literal and unperformable' and the other as 'too free and deviant from the original'. Many renderings of Racine in English bear testimony to 'excessive literalness', but 'freedom' in theatre translation is really too elusive a concept to define properly. In "Translating Spatial Poetry: An Examination of Theatre Texts in Performance" (1978) Bassnett-McGuire suggested that there might be a 'gestural language' distinguishable within the written text. This view was based on work in theatre practice, where directors and actors distinguish physical signs to follow from off the printed page. She also suggested that this 'gestural language' might exist in a manner similar to the Stanislavskian sub-text that is decoded by the actor and encoded into gestural form. The

performance text, on the other hand, involves a range of sign systems that harmonize with the written text, extending it into space. So the written text is one code, one system in a complex set of codes that interact together in performance. The theatre translator is compelled to work on a text that is, as Anne Ubersfeld tells us, *troué*, not complete in itself (Hermans 94). His task is to complete and transform the written text visualizing and exploring its extralinguistic potentialities in performance in the TL. Consequently, the theatre text turns out to be the virtual extension and sort of intersemiotic transformation of the literary text. Discussing the nature of the theatre text Susan Bassnett comments pertinently in this connection:

[...] since the play text is written for voices, the literary text contains also a set of *paralinguistic* systems, where pitch, intonation, speed of delivery, accent, etc. are all signifiers. In addition, the play text contains within it the *undertext* or what we have called the *gestural text* that determines the movements an actor speaking that text can make. So it is not only the context but also the coded gestural patterning within the language itself that contributes to the actor's work, and the translator who ignores all systems outside the purely literary is running serious risks. ...One of the functions of the theatre is to operate on other levels than the strictly linguistic, and the role of the audience assumes a public dimension not shared by the individual reader whose contact with the text is essentially a private affair. A central consideration of the theatre translator must therefore be the performance aspect of the text and its relationship with an audience, and ... the translator must take into account the function of the text as an element for and of performance. (Bassnett132)

Since the theatre text is composed of *dialogue* and *stage directions*, the question of form merging with that of speech rhythms poses a tough problem for the translator. He is required to be aware of the naturalistic speech rhythms in the TL which belongs inevitably to a particular time. Brigitte Schultze asserts rightly that "the dual context of dramatic language -- oral communication with its markers of spontaneity and situation, and literature with its time-bound aesthetic codes --- is a permanent challenge for translators" (Muller-Vollmer and Irmcher177-196). Two critical challenges, therefore, face theatre translators. On the one hand, they are asked to be faithful to the original structure and dialogue of the play, leaving the dialogue as intact as possible, on the other, they are asked to be more concerned with communicability as well as "performability" for the sake of live audience and actors(Ibid).

But the term “performability”, so frequently used by theatre translators, is too vague a concept to define. According to Susan Bassnett, it is “ an attempt in the TL to create fluent speech rhythms and so (sic) produce a text that TL actors can speak without too much difficulty” (Hermans 90-91). Instead of accepting ‘performability’ as a criterion for translating she wants the translators to concentrate more closely on the linguistic structures of the text itself. For, it is only within the written text that the performance potentiality can be encoded and there can be infinite performance decodings from the playtext. That is why the theatre translator ought to be concerned only with the written text rather than with any ‘hypothetical performance’ (Hermans102). Philip Vellacott seems to have echoed Ms. Bassnett in the introduction to Aeschylus’s *The Oresteian Trilogy*, “ I have tried rather to concentrate on *fullness of meaning, interpretation, and suitability for performance* ; not attempting to represent either the peculiarities of Greek poetic diction or the highly individual style of Aeschylus, but hoping for *a direct, unconditional impact*” (emphasis added) (Watling17). Mr.Vellacott here makes a frank confession of the objectives he seeks to achieve in translating the plays of Aeschylus --- objectives that constitute the “performability” of a translated text. In the Translator’s Preface to *Aristophanes Plays I* Patric Dickinson seems to have suggested that the translator of a play should have an acquaintance with the basic knowledge of the theatre, “In translating plays I think the translator has to be *theatre-not study-minded*. He has to think in terms of an actor performing bodily in front of an audience and of the words each actor has naturally to say in accord with who he is (emphasis added) (Dickinson I).

Since *The Post Office* (1993) has been commissioned by The Tagore Centre UK for production, Radice’s principal objective ostensibly is to prepare a readable and actable dramatic text, and not a line-for-line, word-for-word transcription of the original. Instead of translating ডাকঘর literally Radice interprets it in a contemporary language that can possibly be spoken as living English. He takes pains to render clichéd utterances or proverbial sayings by using appropriate contemporary equivalents. Thus, he has created a fluent ‘speech rhythm’ in the target language that the actors could speak on the stage without any difficulty. Commenting on the language of Tagore’s ডাকঘর Edward Thompson says, “The language is

of an unsurpassable naturalness, the speech of the streets purged of all its grossness yet robbed of not one drop of raciness. The dialogue flows in even unhurried stream” (Thompson214). According to Buddhadeva Bose, in *The Post Office* “Tagore achieves miraculous effects by purifying and elevating the merely natural” language (Bose 523). Radice has succeeded in capturing this ‘naturalness’ and ‘raciness’ of the original in translating the dialogue of *The Post Office*. A comparative study of the dialogues of the play translated by Debabrata Mukherjee and William Radice will be helpful for the purpose of our discussion. Extracts from the translations done by Mukherjee and Radice are given below:

- Dairyman. (lowering his yoke-pole). Whatever are you doing here, my child?
- Amal. The doctor says I’m not to be out, so I sit here all day long.
- Dairyman. My poor child, whatever has happened to you?
- Amal. I can’t tell. You see, I am not learned, so I don’t know what’s the matter with me. Say, Dairyman, where do you come from?
- Dairyman. From our village.
- Amal. Your village? Is it very far?
- Dairyman. Our village lies on the river Shamali at the foot of the Panch-mura hills.
- Amal. Panch-mura hills! Shamli river! I wonder. I may have seen your village. I can’t think when, though!
- Dairyman. Have you seen it? Been to the foot of those hills?
- Amal. Never. But I seem to remember having seen it. Your village is under some very old big trees, just by the side of the red road --- isn’t that so?
- Dairyman. That’s right, child.
- Amal. And on the slope of the hill cattle grazing.
- Dairyman. How wonderful! Cattle grazing in our village! Indeed there are!
- Amal. And your women with red sarees fill their pitchers from the river and carry them on their heads.
- Dairyman. Good, that’s right! Women from our dairy village do come and draw their water from the river; but then it isn’t every one who has a red saree to put on. But, my dear child, surely you must have been there for a walk some time.
- Amal. Really, Dairyman, never been there at all. But the first day doctor lets me go out, you are going to take me to your village.
- Dairyman. I will, my child, with pleasure.

(CPPRT Mukherjee 231-232)

CURD-SELLER (putting down his yoke) What are you doing sitting here, baba?

AMAL The Kabiraj has forbidden me to go out, so I sit here all day long.

CURD-SELLER That's a pity. What's the matter with you, baba?

AMAL I don't know. I haven't read anything, so I don't know what's the matter. Where have you come from, curd-seller?

CURD-SELLER I've come from our village.

AMAL Your village? From your village far, far away

CURD-SELLER Our village is at the foot of the Panchmura hills. By the Shamli river.

AMAL Panchmura hills—Shamli river-- who knows—maybe I've seen your village – but I don't remember when.

CURD-SELLER You've seen it ? Have you ever been to the foot of the hills?

AMAL No, I've never been there. But I feel as if I have : a village under huge ancient trees – by a red-coloured road. Right ?

CURD-SELLER Quite right, baba.

AMAL Where the cattle all graze on the sides of the hills.

CURD-SELLER Amazing ! You're quite right. Cattle graze in our village, they do indeed.

AMAL All the women carry water from the river in pots on their heads – and they wear red saris.

CURD-SELLER Well done ! You're right – in the milkman's quarter all our women certainly carry water from the river. They don't all wear red saris though –but really, baba, you must have been there sometime.

AMAL No, honestly, I've never been there. When the Kabiraj says I can go out, will you take me to your village ?

CURD-SELLER Of course, baba, of course I'll take you there.

(Radice 31-33)

Debabrata Mukherjee's dialogue does not have the fluidity and 'naturalness' of colloquial English. It is so 'flamboyant' and artificial that Tagore himself was not satisfied with the language, even after revising the translated text. By contrast, the dialogue in Radice's text has the dynamism and vibrancy of a living language. Since Radice translated *The Post Office* for the Parallel Existence 1993 production, he always seemed to have in view the performance potentiality of the dialogue. This made him adapt the dialogue to the requirements of the stage production which is why the dialogue in his play is so lively,

dynamic and theatre-oriented. Radice seems to have adopted here the principle that Dryden followed while translating Virgil into English. In the Preface to his translations from Virgil, issued in 1697, Dryden famously declares, “Yet I may presume to say... that, taking all the materials of this divine author, I have endeavoured to make Virgil speak such English as he would himself have spoken, if he had been born in England, and in this present age.” (Steiner 256). Similarly, Radice contemporarized Tagore making him speak the way he would have done had he been born in England and written *The Post Office* in English in the twenty-first century. Debabrata Mukherjee probably seemed to have failed to make Tagore a writer of the twentieth century, for he made him speak a language of a bygone era. Ananda Lal has listed some of the awkward and archaic words (such as “ humming bird”, “ tabor”, “ Gaffer”, “ By Jove” etc.) that Mr. Mukherjee used in an attempt to overcome the ‘regional and cultural differences’ and to ‘domesticate’ the Bengali play in the English language (Lal 90-91).

Fidelity to the original is an indispensable part of translation, *traduttori traditori* [“the translator is a traitor”] notwithstanding. While introducing his version of Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Eric Bentley seems to have this question of ‘fidelity’ at the back of his mind when he dwells on the business of translation: “Perhaps all good foreign plays should be published first in a very literal translation and subsequently in various attempts at a true equivalent, even, if necessary, in adaptations” (Bentley11). Since Tagore calls his renderings ‘rewriting’ rather than literal reproduction of the original, fidelity seems to be the main casualty in his own translation. As a Tagore translator, Radice’s main objective is to maintain fidelity to the original and to make Tagore ‘internationally credible as a *writer*, not just as a sage’ (Radice770). Accordingly, his primary task is to make as faithful a rendering of Tagore’s ডাকঘর (*The Post Office*) as possible in the English language, without making him look quaint and archaic.

The word ‘fidelity’ or ‘faithful’ has, of course, a wider implication in translation poetics. It implies rendering not only the matter but also the manner of the play – style as well as content. It also implies rendering not only the words but their emotive content or what Jackson Knight calls the ‘associative penumbra’ of the original(Arrowsmith and Shattuck 85). In *The Post Office* Radice generally tries to maintain a close correspondence between

Bengali and English. But when he fails to preserve the correspondence at the semantic level, he tries to maintain it at the interpretative level. Let us examine a few examples to drive home the point under discussion:

1. (A) অমল । না না , পিসেমশায় , তোমার দুটি পায়ে পড়ি, আমি পণ্ডিত হব না --
পিসেমশায় আমি পণ্ডিত হব না।
- (B) Amal. No, no, Uncle; I beg of you, by your dear feet – I don't want to be learned; I won't. [Mukherjee]
- (C) AMAL No, no, Uncle, I beg of you, I don't want to be a scholar – I don't want to be a scholar,Uncle. [Radice]

Radice does not maintain a word-for-word fidelity between Bengali original and its English counterpart, but Mukherjee retains this fidelity at the risk of being odd and ludicrous. Radice's translation of the above line is interpretative whereas Mukherjee's simply literal.

2. (A) সুধা -- বোলো যে , 'সুধা তোমাকে ভোলেনি ।
- (B) Sudha. Tell him Sudha has not forgotten him. [Mukherjee]
- (C) SUDHA Say, "Sudha has not forgotten you". [Radice]

Here Radice's translation is true to the original whereas Mukherjee's is not, for he has diluted the dramatic effect using indirect speech without any solid reason. Radice, on the other hand, has directly established "instant communicability" with the audience, by retaining the direct speech proposition and through this intensified the dramatic effect.

One of the problems the translators face is that of finding corresponding equivalents in the target language. In the introduction to *Sophocles: The Theban Plays* . the translator E. F. Watling says, " In fact, ... no translation is free of this difficulty --- the difficulty of non-corresponding terms"(Watling 17). What the translator needs to do in such a situation is to adopt a 'substitution', or to use a word from the target language 'analogous' to the original word, or to transfer the source language word intact to the receptor language especially when 'substitution' or 'analogy' is likely to put the semantic equivalence in danger. It is therefore not for nothing that Radice has retained a few Bengali words of the SLT in his translation of

Tagore's ডাকঘর (*The Post Office*) --- ঠাকুরদা (Mukherjee, Gaffer), ডাল (Mukherjee, lentil), মুড়ি-মুরকি (Mukherjee –'puffed rice'), বাবা (Mukherjee – 'my dear', 'my darling', 'dear'), 'ঢং ঢং ঢং' etc.). But what surprises one is Radice's use of the expression 'Holy Man' to describe the Bengali word 'ফকির'. While translating the Bengali word 'ফকির' into English he might have in his mind the Christian concept of 'Holy Ghost'. This explains why he interprets 'ফকির' as 'Holy Man'. Incidentally, Mukherjee retained the word 'ফকির' which has gained currency in the English language since Winston Churchill famously described Mahatma Gandhi as the 'naked fakir'. Instead of using 'curds, curds' for 'দই' Radice would have done better to retain the Bengali word 'দই' to produce instant dramatic effect. Given that Radice's stage direction before the curdseller's entry reads thus – 'Enter curd-seller with the traditional cry, 'দই- দই- দই!' (Bhattacharya 220-221), the Curd-seller's 'Curds, Curds' may produce an asymmetrical impression in the audience-cum-readers of the play.

Sometimes Radice's strategy of translation involves the interpretation of certain words on the basis of his subjective ideas or feelings of the original. His translation of the word 'ক্ৰৌঞ্চদীপ' provides an excellent example here. Radice's rendering of 'ক্ৰৌঞ্চদীপ' as the 'Curlew Island' seems closer to the original than Mukherjee's 'the Parrots' Isle'. According to Haricharan Bandhyapadhyaya, 'crownchya' is a species of herons, the 'কৌচবক', and 'ক্ৰৌঞ্চদীপ' is 'a particular island' (Bandhyapadhyay 699), perhaps inhabited by this species of herons. And this island has nothing to do with parrots. It is not therefore clear how Mr. Mukherjee renders 'ক্ৰৌঞ্চদীপ' as 'the Parrots' Isle'. Radice translates 'ক্ৰৌঞ্চদীপ' as 'The Curlew Island' in keeping with the dramatic context of the play. According to the *COD*, the word 'curlew' means "any wading bird of the genus Numenius, esp. N. arquatus, possessing a usu. long slender down-curved bill", and 'curlew island' is an island supposedly inhabited by this species of birds. It cannot be called 'Parrots' Isle' simply because this island, as its name indicates, is the favourite haunts of the 'কৌচবক', a species of a particular herons. If one takes ঠাকুরদার description of the island into consideration, The Curlew Island seems to be an imaginary land of heart's desire, somewhat akin to Yeats's *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, having

no geographical location of its own. Radice's 'Curlew Island' is, therefore, closer to Tagore's 'কৌৰুদীপ' than Mr. Mukherjee's 'Parrots' Isle'. Radice, however, does not remain solid-footed as he stumbles on the word 'মালিনী'. Sudha introduces herself in the play as the daughter of a local মালিনী. Mukherjee translates the word as 'the flower-seller' whereas Radice renders it as 'the garland-woman'. But the word 'garland woman' does not convey any sense in Bengali and Bengali dictionary does not approve the existence of its counterpart. সংসদ বাঙ্গালা অভিধান defines the word 'মালিনী' as a 'garlanded woman' ('মাল্যভূষিত', 'a woman who supplies garlands, flowers etc.'). Mukherjee seems to be more faithful to the original than Radice in the interpretation of the word. The fairy tale of "Seven Champa Brothers" comes up in the course of Amal's conversation with Sudha. This fairy tale is so much popular in Bengal that the word *Seven- Champa- Brothers* has become almost a household word here. Mukherjee betrays an unpardonable ignorance of this story which is why he translates it as 'চাঁপা of the fairy tale and his six brothers'. But even a cursory glance at Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder's ঠাকুরমার ঝুলি will leave no one in doubt that the title of the story is "সাত ভাই চাঁপা" and Radice has rightly translated it as 'the seven Champa brothers'. Apparently the rendering of 'বোন পারুল' as 'flower-sister' is rather puzzling. As the story has it, *sister* পারুল is transformed into a flower plant that stands beside the seven Champa trees. We get 'Parul' flower as and when this flower plant is in bloom (Mitra & Ghosh 79-84) . Keeping the story in mind Radice rightly translates 'বোন পারুল' as 'sister-flower'. He tries to be faithful to the spirit of the story whereas Mukherjee is faithful to the story in its literal sense. Again, Radice's interpretation of the word ঢেলা as 'pupil' may be appropriate to the Western readers, but it fails to convey the subtle pejorative sense of the original word. Radice would have done better to retain the word ঢেলা in his translation, for the COD has long since recognized it as a loan word from Hindi. Mukherjee's rendering of the word ঢেলা as a 'follower' seems to be closer to the original than Radice's 'pupil'. The translation of the word স্তম্ভ also deserves mention here. Mukherjee's rendering of the word as 'travellers' secrets' or 'magic' is definitely a departure from the meaning of the original word. Instead of

retaining the Bengali word মন্ত্র Radice attempts to interpret it as ‘magic spells’ or simply as ‘spells’ to enlighten the target readers on its significance in the source language.

Radice is also aware of the limitations of interpretative translations that can often distort the sense or focus of some words / sentences. In such cases, he opts for literal rather than interpretative translation to drive home to the target readers the focus of particular words / sentences. While describing ‘The Curlew Island’ Thakurda refers to a stream that trickles down like molten diamonds from the mountain and flows on unimpeded down to the sea. According to him, this stream is unstoppable; no one, ‘not even the *father* of a Kabiraj can stop it for a second’ (Radice) -- ‘কোনো কবিরাজের বাবার সাধ্য নেই তাকে এক দণ্ড কোথাও আটকে রাখা। Here Mukherjee is interpretative -- ‘ No devil of a doctor can stop them for a moment’ -- whereas Radice literal. Mukherjee seems to have deviated from the intended sense or focus of the original line but Radice remains faithful to the *signified* without any distortion of the *signifier*. The injunction of a কবিরাজের বাবা [i.e.,however omnipotent(!) he might be] cannot stop the free and spontaneous flow of a stream cascading from the bosom of Nature. Nor can it kill the fervent longing of a *schmsucht-struck* child cribbed, cabined and confined in a room. Tagore seems to affirm his firm belief that the claims of Nature, whether human or physical, always prevail over man-imposed inhibitions or injunctions, however stringent they might be. What Radice here seems to convey through the literal translation is the futility of man-made injunctions visa-vi human or physical nature -- ‘কোনো কবিরাজের বাবার সাধ্য নেই. Secondly, a literal rendering of this line by Radice seems to confirm the failure of interpretative translations to capture successfully the nuances of culture-specific colloquial expression. It is through the literal translation of this line that Radice seems to have agreed with Nobokov’s view that sometimes ‘... literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase’ (Radice and Reynolds 89) or interpretative rendering.

According to the principle universally followed by the translators, any quotation from the source text is almost always kept intact in order to give the target readers a true ‘feel’ or ‘echo’ of the original text. In the exposition section of the play the Kabiraj is found quoting

from the Ayrvedashastra *ad nauseum*. Mukherjee gives the audience literal translation of the Kabiraj's quotations from the Ayurvedashastra :

Physician. "In wheezing, swooning, or in nervous fret,
In jaundice or leaden eyes ----- (Mukherjee).

But true to the principle of the translation poetics Radice retains the quotations in Sanskrit intact avoiding both the literal and free translations of the original.

Kabiraj [...] *apasmare jvare kase kamalayam halimake* – (Radice).

Thus, he successfully brings about the immediacy of the dramatic effect of the quotations that is so vital in drama translation.

When Radice finds no correspondence between English and Bengali words, he has no other alternative but to interpret. Naturally his interpretation gives the target readers an 'echo' or an approximate idea about the original, for no translation can be 'identical' with the source text. According to Walter Benzamin, there is something 'unfathomable, mysterious and poetic' in every creative writing (Schulte and Biguenet 71) that defies translation. Faced with the 'incommunicable' words or ideas of a creative work, the task of a translator becomes extremely difficult. Consequently, the only option left for him is to interpret rather than translate word-for-word from one language to another. In *The Post Office* Radice also chooses to interpret some Bengali words as and when he faces 'the difficulty of non-corresponding terms'. In the course of his interaction with the Curd-Seller Amal tells him, "Hearing your call approaching from afar *makes me feel so strange*" (emphasis added).

Since there is no appropriate word in English equivalent to the Bengali expression মন কেমন করছে, Radice tries to interpret it [to 'make one feel strange'] according to its implied sense. As a result, he succeeds in giving the target language readers some idea about Amal's sullen state of mind. Again, like a poet Amal describes how the call of the Curd-Seller makes him

forget the immediate surroundings around him and wander into a world of imagination or make-believe:

অমল। না, না, ও আমার শুনতে খুব ভালো লাগে। আকাশের খুব শেখ থেকে যেমন পাখির ডাক শুনলে মন উদাস হয়ে যায় -- তেমনি ঐ রাস্তার মোড় থেকে ঐ গাছের সারির মধ্য দিয়ে যখন তোমার ডাক আসছিল, আমার মনে হচ্ছিল -- কী জানি কী মনে হচ্ছিল !

It is with the sensitivity and insight of a poet that Radice captures Amal's feelings in his translation and his language finds a lyrical cadence:

AMAL But I love listening to it. It's like when I hear a bird calling from the far edge of the sky and *I feel so distant*: and when I heard your call approaching through the trees from that bend in the road, I felt – I can't explain how I felt !

(emphasis added).

Radice seems to have found the Bengali word 'উদাস' untranslatable in English and that is why he interprets it as 'I feel so distant'. Mukherjee also interprets the same word as 'I can't tell you *how queer I feel* when I hear your cry'. (Italics added) Here Radice's interpretation of the word 'উদাস' appears to be closer in spirit to the original than Mukherjee's.

In his *Three Plays of Rabindranath Tagore* Ananda Lal observes that Tagore creates an enchanting ambience in his plays by the use of magical words, or through "the aura created by the words"(Lal111). That is why critics have accused Tagore of what Lal terms an 'apparent incommunicability' because of their inability to address this 'ineffable element in the plays'. According to some other critics, his plays are so poetic and imaginative that they cannot be successfully staged. Among the critics who have delved deeper into the issue, Lal quotes Dhurrjati Prosad Mukherjee's views in support of his contention: "In his dramas, there are two levels; one, that of the people, where the language is simple, responses the stock ones and the technique of presentation fairly firm, and the other, that of ideas of which the language is poetry, the interactions subtle, and the presentation sophisticated" (

Mukherjee¹²²). It is very often found that the two levels are so intimately intertwined that they cannot be separated in his plays. Regarding Tagore's handling of language in his plays Lal refers to the views held by Marjorie Sykes: "he has united in the closest harmony the homeliest and most familiar language of daily life with that of the most exalted mystical experience, so that the very words which on one man's lips are prosaic, on the lips of another are instinct with poetry"(Sykes. p.V). From the point of view of language let us examine first Tagore's handling of dialogues in *The Post Office*, and then evaluate how much success Radice has achieved in capturing and conveying them in English.

Thematically, *The Post Office* dramatizes the conflict of the finite and the infinite that remains the perpetual concern of Tagore's poetic career. And his life-long quest is to unite and harmonize the finite and the infinite in his creative works. His language, too, moves at these two levels ---the level of the ordinary and the homeliest and that of the imaginative and the poetic. In an interview given to a Calcuttan English daily Wolfram Mehring who directed the play (translated by Martin Kampchen) in Europe and India, rightly characterized *The Post Office* as "a play over 'Sehnsucht' or 'Yearning'" (*Statesman* 26 Jan 1992:15). According to this view, Amal, the protagonist of the play, is *Schmsucht* incarnate, a living embodiment of the 'yearning' for the unknown or infinite world. Ajit Kumar Chakravarty also thinks that this 'yearning' for the unseen and the farway constitutes the basic theme of the play. He quotes the following two lines of a well-known Tagore song to sum up the keynote of the play:

I am restless,
I am athirst for the faraway.
(Tr. Rabindranath Tagore) (Chakravarty¹²⁴)

Both Madhav Dutta and the Kabiraj who are ever anxious about Amal's physical well-being represent the unimaginative and materialistic world that always conspires to imprison human soul, imposing senseless restrictions on his movements. Madhav Dutta and the Kabiraj, with all their materialistic concerns, are not aware of the boundless imaginative horizons of life that go on beckoning Amal all the time. Thakurda goes on igniting his longing for the unknown by describing his imaginary visit to the Curlew Island; or by

unfolding before him an enchanting vision of the unknown or the faraway. But he is not allowed to go outside lest the onslaught of autumnal weather aggravates his illness. Both Madhav Dutta and the Kabiraj are so materialistic in their outlook that they do not have the imaginative vision to pierce through the ‘film of familiarity’ enveloping the world around us. And so they cannot see eye to eye with Amal and ‘the poetry of the earth’ that underlies the humdrum activities of life remains ever unattainable to them. Amal, with his imaginative vision, invests the panorama of life around him with a poetic beauty that is never on the land or the sea. That is why he wants to see the unseen and know the unknown that casts a hypnotic spell upon him. He wishes to go to the distant mountain that can be seen from his window. But Madhav Dutta, who is totally devoid of imaginative sensibility, dismisses his desire as ‘crazy talk’; for him the distant mountain stands only as a barrier to forbid men to go beyond it. In an almost epiphanic mood Amal declares, “I’ve a strong feeling that because the earth cannot talk, it cries out by raising its hands up into the blue sky like that. Those who sit far away alone by their windows at noon—they can hear that cry” (Radice 27). In this connection Dr. S.C. SenGupta rightly comments: “One of the most original and beautiful things in this drama is the way in which the poet discovers through Amal the inner romance in the humdrum activities of life” (SenGupta 176). The moment Amal’s mind flies to the faraway or the infinite, his language, too, begins to transcend the homely level and soar upward. The prosaic and the homely dialogues of the expository scene of the play gradually give way to the poetic and the imaginative. When Amal speaks, in a mood of *schnsucht*, or ‘yearning’, his language also becomes passionate, imaginative and poetic. Let us quote some of the impassioned utterances of Amal from the original along with their translations (by Radice) in English :

- (1) অমল । আমি, যা আছে সব দেখবো -- কেবলই দেখে বেড়াব!

I just want to see everything – I want to travel and see everything.

- (2) অমল । কত বাঁকা বাঁকা ঝরনার জলে আমি পা ডুবিয়ে ডুবিয়ে পার হতে হতে চলে যাব--
দুপুরবেলায় সবাই যখন ঘরে দরজা বন্ধ করে শুয়ে আছে, তখন আমি কোথায় কত দূরে কেবল
কাজ খুঁজে খুঁজে বেড়াতে বেড়াতে চলে যাব ।

I shall wade across stream after curving stream and go – when everyone
is resting indoors at noon, I shall just wander, wander off far in search of work.

- (3) অমল । না , না , আমি কক্ষনো পন্ডিত হব না । আমি তোমাদের রাঙা রাস্তার ধারে তোমাদের বুড়ো বটের তলায় গোয়ালপাড়া থেকে দই নিয়ে এসে দূরে দূরে গ্রামে গ্রামে বেচে বেরাব । কী রকম করে তুমি বল , দই দই-- ভালো দই । আমাকে সুরটা শিখিয়ে দাও ।

No, no, I shall never be a scholar. I shall fetch curds from your milkman's quarter under your old banyan tree next to your red road, and wander far from village to village selling them.

This is the very language of poetry, coming out spontaneously from the depth of a poetic mind. Being a poet, Radice projects himself into this poetic experience and captures this 'language of poetry' in the target language. Amal, as represented by Radice, is a reincarnation of the poetic character that Tagore conceived of in the original ডাকঘর.

Thus *The Post Office* begins with the simple, down-to-earth language, and the action of the play remains confined to the prosaic, homely level. But the language attains a poetic height when Amal, in a spirit of *schmsucht*, or an uncontrollable longing for the unknown, talks to the people at his window, bringing to him the message of the world beyond or the infinite. The language of his conversation with them, especially with the Curd-Seller coming from the distant Panchmura hills takes on a poetic character and this is evident in Radice's translation too. The Curd-Seller uses simple and elegant prose when he speaks to Amal. But the same language is tinged with poetry when Amal utters them:

অমল । পাঁচমুড়া পাহাড় -- শ্যমলী নদী -- কী জানি হয়তো তোমাদের গ্রাম দেখেছি -- কবে সে আমার মনে পড়ে না ।

AMAL Panchmura hills – Shamli river – who knows – maybe I've seen your village – but I don't remember when.

Amal seems to have uttered the above words in a dreamy state of mind and his impassioned longing for the unknown makes his language equally passionate and imaginative. It is also with the imagination of a poet that Radice re-creates the imaginative and dreamy qualities of dialogues given to Amal in the original. Interestingly, the language of the people Amal meets remains at the ordinary and homely level. It is through the dialectic of the poetic and the prosaic languages that Tagore seems to have expressed the dialectic of the finite and the infinite that lies at the heart of his creative world. And Radice has successfully captured,

through the dialogues of the play, the basic 'dialectic' that characterizes Tagore's creative works as a whole.

According to Plato, a drama, like any other literary work, is an imitation of an imitation. How much success, Philip Vellacott asks in his essay "Translating Greek Drama"⁽¹⁹⁸⁷⁾ can a translator hope to achieve whose work is basically an imitation of an imitation of an imitation? Recounting his experience of translating Greek tragedy he has tried to answer this question. To begin with he reminds us that "...drama, unlike other forms of writing, carries within itself something more than words. Its traffic is not only with our minds but with our eyes; its material is not only the voice but a group of mutually opposed voices, a pattern of bodies, costumes, objects, with music and scene, and with the mind of a director at work in his own interpretative art of composing all into a living organism" (Radice and Reynolds 200). According to Vellacott, the translator of a drama requires the twofold experience of 'close contact with the mind of the author and the free range of the English language' for successful translation of Greek tragedy into English (Ibid 202). To be precise, he seems to emphasize fidelity to the original (author) and a free and vibrant language for the rendering of a dramatic work into a foreign tongue. But what he fails to mention here is the creative imagination of the translator that is indispensable for a successful translation of literary works. In his essay "Euripides and Professor Murray"⁽¹⁹¹⁷⁾ T.S. Eliot takes up this vital issue for discussion and comes down heavily on Professor Murray for failing to bring Euripides alive in his translation; for he does not have the requisite 'creative instinct' to infuse life into the translation. This, in Eliot's view, is the reason why Professor Murray fails to transform his plays into a living organism and ends up leaving Euripides quite dead (Eliot77). Murray's failure to make Euripides re-live in English brings into focus the question of "equivalence" in translation. According to Eugene Nida, a translation can attain a fresh lease of life only when it achieves a "dynamic equivalence" in the target language. In other words, a translation needs to adapt itself to the linguistic demands and cultural expectations of the target readers failing which it cannot succeed as an independent work in the target language. Interestingly, Tagore's concept of 'reincarnation' or 're-birth' is essentially akin to Nida's "dynamic equivalence". Like Nida, Tagore lays stress on 'reincarnation' or 're-birth' of the original as a *sine qua non* for a successful translation in his much-quoted letter (dated 13 March 1913)

to Ajit Kumar Chakravarty (Sarkar 163-64). In other words, if the original is not reincarnated or re-born in the target language, a translation cannot conform to the demands and expectations of the readers of the receptor language. Now let us see how Radice succeeds in reincarnating Tagore's ডাকঘর as an independent play in the English language.

In the Preface to *The Post Office* (1914) W. B. Yeats lays stress on "deliverance" as the theme of the play. This theme of 'deliverance' finds an imaginative and poetic 'reincarnation' in Radice's translation of Tagore's ডাকঘর. Although the play ends with the death of Amal and the arrival of royal Physician brings the message of deliverance at the spiritual level, yet a good deal of the drama, as S.C. SenGupta points out, is about the earth also, about the stream of joy flowing around which Amal would drink to his heart's content once he is freed from the stringent restrictions imposed on him (SenGupta177). Radice's poetic imagination helps him to project himself imaginatively into Amal's poetic mind and all that he embodies and longs for. "Amal represents the man", Tagore writes about the play in a letter to C.F. Andrews, "whose soul has received the call of the open road --- he seeks freedom from the comfortable enclosure of habits sanctioned by the prudent and from walls of rigid opinion built for him by the respectable". But Madhab, the symbol of the worldly wise men, considers his restlessness to be a sign of a fatal malady; and his adviser, the physician, the custodian of conventional platitudes --- with his quotations from prescribed text-books full of maxims --- gravely nods his head and says that freedom is unsafe and every care should be taken to keep the sick man within walls (Tagore 2006:310)". Radice's translation of *The Post Office* conforms to the above interpretation of the play given by Tagore. He has re-created Amal and his world so convincingly in his translation that the play turns out to be an indictment of the narrow material existence and an apotheosis of the imaginative quest of life. Jill Parvin, the director of 1993 production, rightly sums up the play as upbraiding those who live 'a blinkered existence' and urging mankind to 'nurture' and cultivate an "imaginative life" in this material world (Parvin12). While making this comment on *The Post Office*, she seems to have in her mind Radice's translation of the play, not the original Bengali ডাকঘর. Herein lies the success and excellence of *The Post Office* translated by Radice.

Notes:

- I. All Bengali citations used in this chapter are from Rabindranath Tagore's ডাকঘর .
- II. All English citations from Rabindranath Tagore's *The Post Office* translated by William Radice are from The Tagore Centre UK (1996) edition.
- III. All English citations from Rabindranath Tagore's *The Post Office* (1915) translated by Devabrata Mukherjee are from *Collected Poems and Plays of Rabindranath Tagore* (1967) Macmillan edition.