Tagore in Czech
Literary Translation:
Interpretation and
Gender Analysis

Blanka Knotková-Čapková,
Metropratick University Prague

Abstract:
This text stems from the perspective of gender methodology and explores the way the two most significant Czech specialists in Bengali and Tagore Studies translated selected concepts in his poems. The first two concepts denote the female in specific contexts; the third one designates the divine. This analysis applies selected feminist theories and focuses on the gendered aspects of language (e.g. the generic masculine) as a discourse of power. One of the key questions is: Is the male gaze reflected in the narration? And how do the translations approach it?

Keywords: Tagore, Lesný, Zbavitel, feminist, gender, woman, image, God
Rabindranath Tagore’s work, especially his poetry, has attracted Czech readers since more than a century ago. Translating and interpreting Tagore became a specific discipline within Indian Studies at Charles University in Prague.1 The founder of this branch was Tagore’s friend Professor Vincenc Lesný (1882–1953). He was the first European Indologist who translated Tagore’s poetry directly from Bengali instead of from English translations by Tagore himself or others. In 1937, Lesný published a literary critical monograph on Tagore in Czech, called Rabindranath Thakur: Personality and Work.2

Lesný’s disciple, Dušan Zbavitel (1925–2012), continued and further developed Tagore Studies not only within Czechoslovakia (since 1993 Czech Republic) but on an international level. Both scholars-translators interpreted Tagore’s poetry on the basis of the literary history and the biography of the poet.3 Zbavitel was awarded several prices – Rabindra Tattvacharya Puroshkhar (1987), Padma Bhushan (2006) and in the same year, the State prize of the Czech Republic for his life work.

Regarding the translations of Tagore’s poetry (which I am going to focus on in this article), both Lesný and Zbavitel were choosing texts on various topics and poetic discourses. Outside India, Tagore was famous especially for his spiritual poetry. Consistent with this, both Lesný and Zbavitel translated poems from Gitanjali, and Zbavitel also translated poems from Sonar Tari, Caitali and The Gardener from English to Czech.4 Zbavitel also translated various socially critical texts by Tagore, such as the poems ‘Saotali meye’ (Bithika), ‘Kala meye’ (Palataka) or ‘Mukti’ (Palataka).5

Both scholar translators interpreted Tagore’s poetry on the basis of the literary history and the biography of the poet. They framed Tagore’s writings within the historical development of Bengali literature and thematised the poet’s biographical context and creative development. Lesný was giving specific attention to the spiritual context of Indian thinking and philosophy. This was also important to Zbavitel, yet after 1948 (when the Soviet-1

---

1 The first branch of Indian studies which developed at Charles University was Sanskrit Studies. In its German part, an outstanding Indologist of Austrian origin, Moriz Winternitz (1863-1937), was appointed to the professorship of Sanskrit in 1902.

---
modelled totality came to power in Czechoslovakia) it became increasingly difficult to write openly about spirituality of any kind, because the regime ideologically subscribed to historical materialism. The focus on spiritual aspects of Tagore’s poetry was therefore discouraged between 1948 and 1989, which increased the focus on publishing and analysing sociocritical texts within the social development of Indian society, e.g. the national or the social-reformist movements. The sociocritical texts also form an important line of Tagore’s work; although this discourse was forced on the readers in Czechoslovakia as a country of the state socialism, the attention paid to it in Tagore’s poetry may have also brought an (unintended) advantage for the future: Tagore has never been understood there as an exclusively spiritual poet and later on, in the democratic period, could be studied perhaps more comprehensively.

Another line of Tagore’s writing, that was politically unproblematic for the regime of the time, were his love poems, which even allowed for spiritual connotations. For example in the 1980s, one of the Czech theatres (called Viola) staged a performance at which Tagore’s love poems from The Gardener, translated by Zbavitel, were recited. The performance was very popular and was sold out for several months. As the themes of love and spirituality often blend together in Tagore’s poetry, it was possible to perform a few of his spiritual texts under the cover of love poems.

Lesný and Zbavitel’s analyses were deeply elaborated both horizontally (social, literary and biographical context) and vertically (textual analysis). Regarding their use of language and figurations, a certain ‘generation shift’ may be observed between the approaches of the two translators, as their modes of translation reflect their respective times. Lesný put a greater emphasis on the rhyme schemes – his rhymes were more precise, and he used a ‘highly’ poetic language, which sometimes required a less literal and more interpretative translation. Zbavitel’s translations often reflect Tagore’s later verse models, such as free verses or poems in prose, which tend to be more colloquial. Zbavitel was semantically very precise and only shortened the poems in some cases (e.g. Kalo meye).

Zbavitel and Lesný dedicated a remarkable part of their academic work to Tagore Studies and thematised most aspects and approaches. One of the few areas of research they have not contributed to is gender analysis. In the next part of this article, I will focus on this perspective, through which new aspects can be elaborated.

---

6 Later after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, Zbavitel published a book on Hinduism (Hinduismus a jeho cesty k dokonalosti (Hinduism and Its Ways to Perfection), (Prague: DharmaGaia, 1993)
Translating Tagore from the perspective of gender analysis

I will focus on three selected concepts that have strong gender connotations not only in the Bengali original but also in the Czech translations. The concepts will be: pratima, meye/mahila and debata, as used in the poems ‘Bairagya’, ‘Nari’ and ‘Saotal meye’, respectively.7 8

Meye and mahila are secular concepts denoting a mundane woman. Pratima is semantically broader; it can be interpreted as deity or as a figuration, statue or image of a deity, but also as an image of one’s mind. Debata means deity or God/Goddess; it is a spiritual concept denoting a divine being or divine principle.

The theoretical perspective of gender analysis will be applied through the method of close reading and resistant reading.9 At the end of this essay, I will consider the linguistic tradition of the ‘generic masculine’ and relevant alternatives which would provide other possibilities to the androcentric conception of language, according to which the masculine is a priori understood and universalized as ‘generally human’, while the feminine is understood as the objectified ‘other’, whose signifier is always more specific.10 Another theoretical framework I will be referring to is the archetypal analysis as outlined by the feminists critics of literary discourses, namely Luce Irigaray, Pam Morris and Pratt;11 noting that Pratt critisized C. G. Jung’s concept of gender archetypes.12

7 In this text, I am using the transcription of Bengali names and words in English, not the international transliteration – as would be, pratimā (Nāri), meye/mahilā (Kāla meye, Sātāl meye), debatā (Bairāgya).
8 ‘Nari’ in Caitali (Late Harvest), (Kalikata: Kantik pres, 1896), pp. 39-40; ‘Kala meye’ in Palataka (Kolikata: Bsvabharati granthanbibhag, 1997), pp. 73-74; ‘Saotal meye’ in Bithika (Kolikata: Bsvabharati granthanbibhag, 1990), pp. 115-117.
10 Here I refer to Simone de Beauvoir’s concept of woman as ‘the Other’ within an androcentrically drawn social and symbolical order. This interpretation has been later elaborated by many other feminist theorists – let us especially bring here the French authors Cixous and Irigaray who analyse the position of the feminine within the ‘falogocentric order’ – the term they both use to signify a combination of falocentrism and logocentrism, in which the feminine always plays a subordinate role (Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, transl. by H. M. Parshley (New York: The Penguin Books, 1972 [1949]); Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1985); Hélene Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, transl. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, Signs 1-4 (1976), 875-893.
11 Irigaray; Pam Morris, Literature and Feminism: An Introduction (Oxford (UK), Cambridge (USA): Blackwell, 1993); Pratt, Annis, Barbara White, Andrea Loe-
Through these methods, I will try to answer the following research questions: What are the semantic connotations (and/or reductions) of the various possible expressions, which were chosen for translations? Which of the chosen expressions can connote gender stereotypes (and/or archetypes)? Do the chosen translations somehow reflect gendered power discourses?

The translation of meye in the poem ‘Saotal meye’

The epico-lyrical poem ‘Saotal meye’ draws a picture of a young Santali woman who has been employed by the narrator of the story to work on the construction of his house. The story has a sociocritical aspect, or rather, an intersectional aspect: the main character is a poor tribal woman who may be described as marginalized from the perspective of class, race and gender. In the poem, she does not speak at all – she is just observed by the narrator. The textual setting could be interpreted as representing a typical ‘male gaze’, as analysed by feminist theorists like Elaine Showalter, Pam Morris, Hélène Cixous and others. Their criticism mostly blames the ‘male gaze’ for an unreflected positionality and location of the observer and for objectifying the observed person, looking at her as an object. But this is not quite the case regarding the poem ‘Saotal meye’. The narrator (in the first person narrative) does reflect on his position of a well-off male of the main-

---


13 I am using here the term ‘intersectional’ as introduced by the Afro American postcolonial feminist theorists Crenshaw or hooks, who emphasized the methodological approach to study discriminations not only from one of the possible perspectives (e.g. gender, age, class, race) but as an intersection of all/several of them. Both Crenshaw and hooks pointed to the intersections of gender and race discrimination on the example of African American women; hooks also included the aspect of class/social discrimination. The result of blending various discriminatory practices usually leads to double/triple/multiple discriminations of a person as, e.g., woman of socially weak community and of an ethnic minority. From the Indian context, Mahasweta Debi’s short stories can be taken as typical examples of stories of that kind where the protagonists face the above described, combined discrimination and marginalization. See Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color’, in *Stanford Law Review*, 43-6 (1991), 1241–1299; bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000).

stream community and even self-critically realizes that he, in a way, participates in the discrimination of the Santali woman, as he ‘tore her away’ from her home and family and stole her strength (shakti in Bengali – which may also connote the female cosmic power and Goddess Shakti):

...E kishori meye
pallikone ye gharer tare
kariyaache prasphutita dehe o antare
naariir sahaj shakti aatmanibedanparaar
shushrushaar snigdhasudhaabharaa
aami taare laagijechi kena karje karite majuri, -
muulye yaar asamaan sei shakti kari curi
payasaar diye si’dhakaathait...^15

Thus, the narrator participates in her exploitation but also reflects on it and, in a way, regrets it. In this poem, the ‘male gaze’ therefore represents the reflection of the narrator who, on the one hand, criticizes the status quo and sees himself as part of the exploitative system, but who, on the other hand, does not actively change this.

**Meye or mahila?**

The poem ‘Saotali meye’ was translated into Czech by Zbavitel and published in his selection of Tagore’s poetry and drama in verse.\(^16\) In the Bengali original, the female is called meye. Zbavitel, however, translates the title of the poem as ‘Santálská žena’ which means Saotali mahila (woman). How can we interpret this choice of the translator?

In Bengali, the notion of meye is semantically broader than any of the possible Czech translations. Czech here correlates with English: meye could be translated as girl (in Czech dívka), or as daughter (in Czech dcerá), or generally as young woman (in Czech mladá žena). In Czech/English, three different expressions could be used for the translation of meye. Zbavitel’s choice to translate it as mahila, not meye, is, in my opinion, very appropriate. Let us go through the possible options. ‘Daughter’ clearly does not fit here. But why woman, and not girl?

By choosing the above given translation, Zbavitel successfully avoids simplifying the meaning in Czech as far as gender stereotyping is concerned. If he had used the expression ‘girl’, it would connote a child, i.e. a creature that is weak and should be protected, as the age hierarchy is associated with weakness, perhaps helplessness – typical gender stereo-

---

[^16]: Zbavitel, *Básně a veršovaná dramata*, pp. 165-166.
typed qualities traditionally attributed to women. Also, the Santali woman is probably a mother (see Footnote 8); she could then hardly be a girl in the sense of a child.

It is true that the protagonist of the poem may be interpreted as a victim of the social/caste order: she is without voice. This reminds us of the concept of subalternity as used by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her famous essay, Can the Subaltern Speak.\footnote{Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in \textit{Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture}, ed. by Cary Nelson, and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).} Although the young Santali woman is silenced, she is not weak. Physically, she has strong (nitol) hands – as a worker, carrying a basket full of clay on her head; as far as her inner characteristics are concerned, she is metaphorically associated with nature symbolism which, however, does not represent just gentleness or powerlessness: the metaphors used in the poem associate her with birds with hidden wings, stormy clouds or lightning. These symbols could imply the potential for freedom (birds with hidden wings) and demonstrations of her unrestrained, unchained nature. The figuration in the original Bengali poem thus very successfully avoids the trap of picturing the exploited woman within the discourse of victimization that has been criticized especially by postcolonial feminist theorists.\footnote{Chandra Talpade Mohanty. ‘Under Western Eyes. Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses’, in \textit{Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism}, ed. by Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 51–80.} This Santali woman is not only a passive victim. She is without voice, but she has a hidden strength which can, in the Indian cultural context, associate her with the archetype of shakti. The argument for such an interpretation can also be supported by the homology between the feminine and nature, which we find in many other poems by Tagore, e.g. ‘Kalo meye’, ‘Krisnakali’, and ‘Hariye jaoya’.\footnote{Tagore, Palataka, \textit{Palataka} (Kolkata: Bisvabharati granthanbibhag, 1997, 73-74.} However, associating Woman to Nature (as well as Man to Culture) also represents typical gender stereotypes, as Sherry Ortner points out in her famous essay, Is Female to Male as Nature is To Culture?\footnote{Sherry Ortner, ‘Is Female to Male as Nature is To Culture?’, in \textit{Feminist Studies}, 1-2 (1972), 5–31.}

\textbf{The Translation of \textit{pratima} in the poem ‘Nari’}

Unlike ‘Saotal meye’, the Poem ‘Nari’ (Caitali, 1896) is purely lyrical. If \textit{meye} was characterized (above) as a kind of a polysemic concept, this is even more relevant regarding \textit{pratima}. In the Czech language, a fully synonymic parallel cannot be found for \textit{pratima}. In English, \textit{image} could perhaps be
semantically comparable. In Czech, it can be translated differently in different contexts but neither of the options can cover all of the meanings. Pratima can mean Goddess, idol, statue of a Goddess, symbolic figure, visualization, imaginary being or dream. Each of the translations has strong gender-constructing implications if used in connection with the feminine. Pratima as goddess may be interpreted as symbolism of the eternal, creative female principle (shakti) but also as adoration of the ‘universal’ feminine as Goddess. The translation as idol could also signify these meanings, this concept would also enrich them with the reference to materialized symbolization of the feminine as statue (see the next given option). Such an interpretation of pratima may, however, also lead to the reverse side of the concept of the feminine as divine: the one referring to patriarchal idolatry where the feminine is imprisoned as a materialized symbol; the feminine has to accept the prescribed model and has to act according to it (e.g., the female protagonist in Satyajit Ray’s film Debi). In both of these examples, idolization does not give the particular woman more power (not speaking about freedom) but makes her a just a passive object of adoration.21

The translations of pratima as a visualized image, imaginary being or a dream draw another line of interpretation, but not less androcentric. In such cases, the female is described as a creation of the mind of a (male) poet and is constructed through the lens of the typical ‘male gaze’. Unlike in ‘Saotali meye’, in ‘Nari’ we cannot trace a self-reflection of the male gaze. But perhaps we should remember that ‘Saotali meye’ was written much later than ‘Nari’, which may lead us to think of the development and advance of Tagore’s poetic (and ideological) discourse.

The poem ‘Nari’ was translated into Czech by Vincenc Lesný (here quoted as published in Zbavitel’s selection22). Lesný chose the translation of pratima that connotes the meaning of ‘visualized image’ or ‘dream’ (the Czech translation vidina means something unreal, imaginary, which one sees in his/her mind or dreams about). By choosing this term, Lesný emphasizes the gendered meanings of the male gaze, which are not as strong in the Bengali original; e.g., one of the stanzas of his translation says, ‘the beauty is endowed to you, Woman, by men’, and ‘You are half an image, half a woman’. This narrows the interpretation of image to one semantic line. Still, there is another possible nuanced interpretation: vidina in Czech can also mean illusion, which correlates with maya in Indian terminology. The figuring of the female would thus point to an ethereal picture which is unreal, elusive and perhaps mysterious — possibly a source of inspiration. Such ascribed qualities are, of course, very typical of the archetypal figurations of the feminine, who is characterized by her beauty and attractive-

21 For criticism of the idolatrization and mythologization of the feminine within an androcentric order, see de Beauvoir.
22 Zbavitel, Dušan, Básně a veršovaná dramata.
ness.\textsuperscript{23} In Lesný's translation, he omits the mythological symbolism of Woman as Goddess, although the 'etheral beauty created by the male mind' may also be read as a kind of myth. But as far as the poetic language is concerned, Lesný does justice to the richness of Tagore's verse and brought the Czech version to a real mastery of translation.

\textbf{Debata in ‘Bairagya’ and the issue of the generic masculine}

I have elaborated on a more detailed gender analysis of the poem ‘Bairagya’ elsewhere\textsuperscript{24}. Here, I will briefly describe the plot and mention not only the interpretative lines of translating the word \textit{debata} but put it in the context of discussions about the so-called generic masculine (in languages which have the grammatical category of gender). While Tagore uses the gender-neutral expression \textit{debata} (i.e. neither Deb nor Debi) in the Bengali original, he uses the masculinized form \textit{God} in his own English translation.\textsuperscript{25} As I suggest in my article, ‘One of the interpretations thus might suggest that a genderly neutral notion in Bengali was chosen intentionally to create an image of the divine principle which is comprehensive and not gendered. However, another could also be offered: the three-syllable word \textit{debatā} was chosen because of the rhythm of the poem’ (p. 220). In the Czech translation by Zbavitel,\textsuperscript{26} the English version is fully mirrored, i.e. God (in Czech \textit{Bůh}) is also a grammatical masculine and is generally used as signifier for ultimate spiritual entity, which, in the Christian tradition and its discourses, has been associated much more strongly with the masculine.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{23} That figuring was also substantially criticized by feminist theorists, see footnote 10.

\textsuperscript{24} In the article ‘Studying Rabindranath Thakur within the Czech Bengali Studies’, I have analysed the spiritual concept of \textit{debata} from the feminist perspective and categorized several possible concepts of the ultimate spiritual principle: as genderly neutral, genderly fluid, genderly dichotomous (male/female divinities as binary opposites), dominantly/exclusively male or dominantly/exclusively female. See, Knotkova-Capkova, ‘Studying Rabindranath Thakur within the Czech Bengali Studies’, in \textit{Tagore – At Home in the World}, ed. by Dasgupta, Sanjukta and Chinmoy Guha (New Delhi: SAGE, 2013), pp. 219–220.


\textsuperscript{27} Arguments for that claim may be supported by the attributes being traditionally ascribed to God (Father, King), or by the archetypes he personifies – although a remarkable shift between the Old and New Testaments can be traced in that respect (a shift to the focus on mercy, forgiving, self-sacrifice, unconditioned love which are typical traditional feminine archetypal qualities). For
But why did Tagore use *God* for *debata* in English? A simplified, traditionally philological explanation would probably maintain that there was no other option: English, unlike Bengali, virtually does not have a gender-neutral expression for the divine principle, and the word *God* may also play a role of the generic masculine. In my article, I have focused on a semantic and archetypal analysis of *debata* in the poem. Here, I would like to approach it from a discursive perspective.

The Bengali *debata* signifies a Godly, divine, supra-natural being. It is crucial to speak here about ‘being’ and not just a de-personified principle like ‘brahma’, because the *debata* in the poem speaks, addresses the human male who searches for him (although in the wrong direction, preferring asceticism to sharing a loving family life) and expresses a strong critical opinion of what the man plans – to leave his family and search for God. And ‘God sighed and complained, ‘Why does my servant wander to seek me, forsaking me?’

Within the context of Hindu philosophy and religion, *debata* may signify any of the figurations of the ultimate spiritual principle. In terms of gender, *debata* refers neither to exclusively masculine or feminine divine principles, nor to a concept of that principle, understood as masculine/feminine binary opposites (Deb/Debi – God/Goddess).

The signifier of the Spiritual Being in English and Czech (both are languages of the Christian cultural context), however, semantically reduces the meaning of the signified as grammatical masculine. It may be a matter of discussion if Tagore, in his English translation (or poetic reformulation) of his own poem, was influenced by the Christian discourse or by the traditional linguistic usage of the generic masculine, or maybe by an (un)conscious combination of both. Zbavitel’s Czech translation might have been supported by similar arguments, or it might have simply followed the English version of the poet.


The generic masculine and its alternatives in Czech as the target language of translation

The usage of the generic masculine in various languages has been criticized by feminist theorists because it leads to the false universalization of the masculine as generally human, and signifying the feminine as ‘The Other’ – i.e. secondary, derived, specific and because it makes women in the text invisible. The counter-argument often relies on the so-called ‘natural development of language’, which, however, in praxis often empowers the status quo, as codified by the institutions which hold the position and have the power to do so (in the Czech republic it is the Institute of Czech Language, affiliated to the Czech Academy of Sciences). From the constructivist point of view, the argument of ‘nature’ and ‘natural’ always seems to be doubtfull; constructivist interpretations, on the other hand, point to the political dimension of language and the text, which always reflects the power discourses of the socio-cultural contexts. The generic masculine can thus be characterized as a constructed norm, not as a ‘natural’ phenomenon.

To sum up, the alternatives in Czech for the usage of substantives may be drawn as follows:

1) Using a slash to use both masculine and feminine endings of the words; this is not typical in English where the substantives signify both genders (e.g. ‘student’) but it is present in other languages – not only Slavic, also e.g. in German (Student/Studentin, or Student/in), Italian (student/studentessa, or student/essa) or Spanish

---

31 The parallels of the usage of generic masculine in various languages are not, of course, linear. As a comparative example with Bengali, words like chatra or bandhu can be brought – they may signify both male and female students and friends, while chatri and bandhobi signify only females.
32 In 2011, there was a big discussion on that issue in the Czech media, provoked by a study material which was written per order of the Ministry of Education, ‘The Culture of Genderly Ballanced Communication’. Many of the polemical articles and comments, critical to the idea of genderly correct communication, used very aggressive language, full of personal invectives, offences, bagatelizations of the problem and strongly antifeminist discourse. (See, Valdrová, Jana, Blanka Knotková-Čapková and Pavla Paclíková, Kultura genderově vyváženého vyjádřování. Praha: MŠMT, 2010 <http://data.idnes.cz/soubory/studium/A100125_BAR_GENDER_PRIRUCKA.PDF> [accessed 20 September 2016]
diante/estudiantanta, or estudiante/a). In Czech, we would thus use the form of student/studentka, or student/ka. The difficulty of such a solution lies in its practical application – so far, the Czech publishers have mostly been reluctant to accept it, arguing that it complicates and corrupts the graphic layout of the text.

2) Using both masculine and feminine signifiers, like ‘student a studentka’, meaning both male and female students. That is stylistically correct – except in long enumerations (e.g. sentences like, ‘that view is shared by sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, etc.’); in the case of long lists, using both male and female signifiers can make the text confusing and extend the text distinctly.

3) Using verbal adjectives, which, in Czech, signify both male and female genders, e.g. ‘studující’, meaning ‘studying’. It is applicable to quite a broad range of cases but not to all (e.g., the non-verbal substantives).

4) Using collective, aggregate substantives: this option is not always possible (in English, there is usually no direct parallel to this; exceptions are humankind, instead of humans).

5) Using a combination of all the above mentioned means; using it not dogmatically but symptomatically to draw attention to the problem.

What is the aim of deconstructing the generic masculine? It is not the formalization or even the ‘totalization’ or violent infringing of the language, but erosion of the power discourse and pointing to the problem of normative gender hierarchy inscribed into it.

**Conclusion**

In the translation of the poem ‘Saotali’ meye (Zbavitel), the chosen option of mahila (woman), instead of meye (girl or daughter), has successfully helped avoiding gender stereotypes of the female associated with infantility and qualities like weakness or helplessness, traditionally attributed a priori to the feminine. However, the translation of pratima in ‘Nari’ (Lesný), on the other hand, reinforces the gender stereotyping of the ‘male gaze’ as the dominant perspective of observation, as it draws the concept of pratima upon male visualization of the feminine. The concept of pratima denotes here an imaginary woman, perhaps also real, perhaps just an idea corresponding to the traditional picturing of womanhood, perhaps an image of a spiritual muse. In the third of the analysed cases (Zbavitel), the concept of debata (in Bengali genderly neutral – both from the linguistic/grammatical and philosophical points of view) has been masculinized as God (in Czech also a masculine substantive); here, the translation reflects the poet’s own English version and also follows the traditional usage of the generic masculine in Czech. As far as the generic masculine (per se) is concerned, I am inclined to the last of the suggested alternatives (5) – the combination of the
above given options with respect to a specific context. In the case of *debata* in the poem *Bairagya*, I would perhaps choose a linguistically looser but semantically more appropriate translation, namely to translating *debata* as *divine voice*. This would also correspond with the abstraction of the concept of divinity in the poem. The spiritual being, in this poem, is represented as commenting on human actions, rather than commanding what to do; observing rather than interfering; sad and inactive rather than authoritative. It is identified with the voice, yet while the spoken word in many sacred texts has creative power, it is here a mere ‘whispering’.

**References**

Archiv Orientální [The Archive Oriental], *Quarterly Journal of African and Asian Studies* (Prague: The Oriental Institute, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic)


Daly, Mary, *Beyond God the Father. Toward a philosophy of women’s liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985 [1973])


Heyward, Carter, *Saving Jesus From Those Who Are Right* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999)

Hněvkovský, Jaroslav, *Maliřovy listy z Indie* [Painter’s Letters from India], (Praha: Sfnix, 1927)


Lesný, Vincenc, *Rabindranáth Thákur: Osobnost a dílo* [Rabindranath Thakur: Personality and Work], (Kladno: J. Šnajdr, 1937)


Nejedlý, Otakar, Dojmy a vzpomínky malířovy z Cejlonu a Indie [Painter’s Impressions and Reminders from Ceylon and India], (Praha: Fr. Borový, 1956)

Ortner, Sherry, ‘Is Female to Male as Nature is To Culture?’, in Feminist Studies, 1-2 (1972), 5–31


Pospíšilová, Dagmar, and Zdenka Klimentová, Otokar Feistmantel (1848-1891) and the Indian Collection of the Náprstek Museum, Prague (with contributions by Jiří Kváček and Pavel Bosák), (Prague: National Museum, 2011)

Pratt, Annis, Barbara White, Andrea Loewenstein, and Mary Wyer, Archetypal Patterns of Women’s Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981)


———, Bengálská literatura: Od tantrických písní k Ranídranáthu Thákurovi. [Bengali Literature. From the Tantric Songs to Rabindranath Thakur] (Praha: ExOriente, 2008)
About the author

Dr Blanka Knotková-Čapková, Ph.D., Associate Professor, is the Guarantor of the study programme and the Head of the Department of Asian Studies, Metropolitan University Prague. She lectures at the Department of Gender Studies (which she co-founded), Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague.

Her research focuses on gender analysis of modern Bengali literature and culture, currently especially on women’s writing. She published and edited or co-edited books and studies on topics of Gender, Cultural and Indian Studies in the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, India, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Poland and USA.

She was invited as guest-lecturer several times to India (Universities: Visva Bharati, Calcutta, Jadavpur, Rabindra Bharati, Bardhaman and Silchar), Poland (Pedagogical University and Jagellonian University, Cracow) and Slovakia (Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa, Nitra).

She translates into Czech from Bengali (Selected 20th Century Bengali Poets, 1997) and English (e.g. Giddens’s Sociology, 2013). She occasionally comments on and popularizes Indian culture in the Czech media.