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CULTURAL monism is, "A stance or viewpoint postulating that multiculturalism functions against social conformity and that minorities should thus be prompted to align with the superior culture".

Seeing the world and its multi-cultural diversity is a good way to averting misplaced monistic thoughts and perceptions in the seamless we are in today. If you are one of those who seeks to see the world from the perspective of a writer, works which are translated meaningfully can give us the myriad of experience of having seen the world.

Over the years, for many of us, English has become our first language, the language we communicate in at home, the workplace and/or at social gatherings.

Naturally then, we will have a tendency to gravitate towards reading material written in English. When I was studying literature, I was exposed to novels, short stories, poems and dramas from around the world and many of them were translated works.

I realised then that translated works provided another gateway to us learning about far-away people, places and their culture. However, the caveat is, just as a bad cook spoils the recipe, good translations are essential to carry the substance through in its originality.

In this context, I would like to share a set of short stories translated by Professor Mohammad A. Quayum. In the book *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories*, Quayum has done justice to not just the contents but also to the literary elements which capture every moment and every overture in the stories without missing a tune or a beat.

Quayum is an acclaimed authority on the works of the great Indian author, thinker, philosopher Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Born in Bangladesh, Quayum got his first degree from his home country and his doctoral degree at Flinders University, Australia, where he is still an adjunct professor. Currently, Quayum is attached to International Islamic University Malaysia's Department of Language and Literature.

In this short story collection, Quayum covers some 19 tales, some of which are much discussed by the connoisseurs of Tagore's brilliance. Incidentally, Tagore and Quayum share the same passion which is the Bengali language.

Quite unlike other regular translated works, this one gives a very brief sketch of Tagore in the form of a biographical essay which comes in handy in understanding the themes and conflicts presented in the short stories. Delving into Tagore is like digging into a bottomless pit but in this section Quayum deftly uses his expert notions and thoughts to synthesise and present a concise yet precise account of Tagore.

The elaborate introduction in which Quayum shares his knowledge and insights on and about Tagore adds further value to this book for cover-to-cover in this translated work you would have covered the essential bits about Tagore and his works.

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In his review, Professor Kirpal Singh of Singapore Management University says thus of Quayum in his review of the book, "... industrious scholar whose energy seems indefatigable and whose love for his subject is obviously passionate." About the introduction he says, "In his longish introduction, Prof Quayum, ever the scrupulous academic, tells us that Tagore's stories encompass the vastness of human nature and the miscellany of vicissitudes and beliefs by which humans being both degraded themselves and triumphed over such degradation."

Tagore wrote most of his short stories satirising life with his chief concern being social reforms and through his works, he had brought forth to the attention of the masses of his time, the plight of the marginalised and the oppressed in society.

Much of his works was devoted to setting women "free" from the shackles of unfair conformity, rituals and denigration, among others.

Coming back to the point I was making about translated works inciting and generating cross cultural understanding and interest, we could perhaps look at *Kabuliwallah*, as an example.

The power of the writer to recreate the saga of the human life and mind is presented in this story in which the street pedlar is seized by an inward vision and presented with total understanding of selfless love. In this story, Tagore explores and exploits two important themes: the first being the poor perception of girls in Indian society, which he challenges through the unusual bond between Mini and her father as well as through the pedlar and Mini. The second is the beautiful Hindu-Muslim relationship between Mini, a Hindu, and the pedlar Rahmat who is a Muslim.

The double discrimination and the manifold sorrow suffered by a mute girl in an impoverished Bengali family is presented in *Subha*. A female child is commonly regarded as a burden where she comes from and her mother arranges to "dispose" of her in the name of marriage. The sombre story captures the innermost feelings of this unfortunate girl with vivid accounts of injustice done to her.

Quayum has given us more than just a glimpse of the life and livelihood of Bengalis through his translated work. Through his footnote/annotations, which can be found on most pages, he gives us the behind-the-scene information and meanings beyond what the English translations can tell.

I have read many translated works but I found this totally absorbing.