

**INTER-SUBALTERN DIALOGUE OR REWORKED ESSENTIALISMS?  
KABIR'S TRANSLATIONS INTO SPANISH IN LATIN AMERICA  
(ON THE 500<sup>TH</sup> DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF KABIR)**

**SONYA SURABHI GUPTA**  
sgupta@jmi.ac.in

**Abstract**

Kabir, one of the most important poets of the *nirguni* tradition of “Bhakti” poetry of early modern period in North India, was introduced to the West in English translation by Rabindranath Tagore in 1914-15. Since then, Kabir has been translated in the Spanish-speaking world several times, and the editions and re-editions of his songs and poems, as also the context of their reception, merit scholarly attention and a detailed study that has hitherto not been undertaken.

This essay will look at the earliest translations of Kabir’s works by the Argentinians Joaquin V. Gonzalez and Carlos Muzzio Sáenz Peñá dating back to 1915-16 in the specific context of the turn of century Latin American *modernismo*’s interest in Orientalism that informs the translation. This moment is marked by a questioning of European positivism in Latin America and a search for new intellectual horizons beyond the cultural shackles of European enclosure and North American materialist utilitarianism. There is a burgeoning critical literature in recent times on the formation of Hispanic, particularly Latin American constructs of the oriental ‘Other.’ Under discussion are questions as to whether representations of Asia in Latin America - and translations are part of such representations - have anything in common with the kind of discourse Edward Said has critiqued in *Orientalism* or do they represent a dialogic exchange? The essay asks whether Kabir’s Latin American translations can be considered an example of South-South cross-cultural flow, or are they mere reworked essentialisms.

**Keywords:** Kabir, Rabindranath Tagore, cross-cultural translation, Latin American *modernismo*, Orientalism.

Kabir, one of the most important poets of “Bhakti” poetry of early modern period in North India, was introduced to the West in English translation by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) in 1915. Since then, Kabir has been translated in the Spanish-speaking world several times, and the editions and re-editions of his songs and poems, as also the context of their reception, merit scholarly attention and a detailed study that has hitherto not been undertaken. This 15th century rebel poet continues to hold an enormous appeal in northern India cutting across a diverse variety of people, transcending differences of caste, class and community. His iconoclastic devotional poetry is part of folklore and ever present in popular memory, and at the same time it has invited an ever burgeoning scholarship, particularly in

recent times. Though details of his life are difficult to put together, it is widely held by scholars who have extensively researched on him that he died in 1518, thus 2018 marked the commemoration of Kabir's 500<sup>th</sup> death anniversary.<sup>i</sup>

This essay discusses and analyses two of the earliest translations of Kabir's poems into Spanish done over a century ago. These translations were undertaken and published by the Argentinians Joaquin V. Gonzalez (1863-1923) in 1915 and Carlos Muzzio Sáenz Peña (1885-1954) in 1915-16. The questioning of European superiority after the First World War and the search for more pacifist horizons, as well as their own search for an identity and alternative self-definitions attracted several Latin American writers to the Oriental world. There is a vast corpus of early twentieth century Latin American texts engaging with India in diverse genres and from diverse vantage points. Translations of Indian texts like those of Kabir also form part of the Latin American turn of century exploration of alternative literary cartographies in order to create a new poetic idiom. This essay has two objectives: (1) it examines the above mentioned renderings of Kabir's poetry into Spanish by the two Argentinians in this context of the turn of century Latin American *modernismo*, and the specific engagement with India in Argentine Orientalism that informs these translations and (2) asks whether these translations constitute a cross-cultural non-hierarchical dialogue or are they reworked essentialisms. We hope this study will also additionally contribute to the existing studies on Tagore's own reception in the Hispanic world.

### **Translating Kabir in Latin America**

In his well known study on nations as imagined communities, Benedict Anderson, places the immediate genealogy of the fashioning of the nation in the colonized world of Asia and Africa in the imaginings of the colonial state itself, tracing how institutions such as the census, the map, and the museum, "profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominions – the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its

domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry” (2006:167). Translations too, contributed in the shaping of these imaginings. In the specific case of India, the colonial period saw a range of translations that were deployed in the construction and transmission of knowledge about India, as well as in “the making of colonial Indian consciousness” (Chandra, 2010:47). The very first English translations of Kabir’s songs and poems came out in 1915, but are distinctive in that they were done by none other than Rabindranath Tagore, who, in 1913 had become the first non-European to have been awarded the Nobel prize for literature. One would agree with Thomas de Bruijn that in the early 20th Century, when modern cultural identities were being formed, “of all translations from Indian texts, Rabindranath Tagore’s *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*(1915) has been the most influential on the image of Indian culture and literature both inside and outside the subcontinent.” (2010:77). Kabir, in fact, was the only poet that Tagore translated, apart from himself (Bangha, 2018). Given the special attention Kabir received from various shades of colonial scholarship, Purushottam Agarwal, a leading scholar of Kabir’s poetry, goes further to comment that in Kabir’s case, the early English translations have proven to be much more than mere translations and have, in fact, significantly impacted the indigenous scholarship on Kabir, particularly his reception and appreciation in the modern Hindi public sphere and the academic world (2010a:182).

The canon of Indian literature in translation is mainly composed of literary works from Sanskrit and Indian English and the archive of Spanish translations of Indian texts shows a huge disregard for literary works from regional languages of India (Burger and Pozza, 2010:9; Gupta, 2016:95). A cursory look at the list of works from Indian literature available in translation in Spanish shows the predominance of Sanskrit and more lately, of Indian Writing in English. Clearly, Tagore’s translation of Kabir’s poetry occasioning several further translations into many languages, including Spanish, has been enormously influential in creating an interest in the figure of this weaver poet, who did not write in Sanskrit, the

language of the brahmanical elite, but in vernacular Hindi. Kabir's translations into Spanish, therefore, present an important site for studying Latin America's encounter with alternative modernities, because Kabir is the first poet from vernacular sources, that is, sources other than Sanskrit, to be translated into Spanish. It is interesting to note that while Sanskrit texts considered classics have, in most cases, been translated into Spanish much after their translations into other languages, particularly in Europe, in case of Kabir, the very first translations into Spanish, on the basis of Tagore's rendering of Kabir into English, were published almost immediately after they came out in English, that is, in 1915-16, and that too in Latin America, and not in Spain, where they appeared much later.

Kabir represents the subordinate strand of the *nirguni* tradition<sup>ii</sup> in North Indian devotional poetry that propagated an egalitarian social order and rejected the all-male Brahmanical Vedic Hinduism as well as the dominant *sagun* bhakti tradition that justified the *varnashramdharma* (the doctrine of the four hierarchically structured *varnas*) and the status and privileges of the upper castes. Thus, the *nirguni* tradition of bhakti, or devotion, was adopted mainly by low caste groups and was expressed in the vernacular languages of North India. It is, therefore, not surprising that very few compositions by low caste saint poets of the *nirguni* or *sant* movement of North India have been translated into Spanish, and in that sense, translations of Kabir are certainly an exception.

Most notable among Latin American editions of Kabir translations, other than the early twentieth century translations of Gonzalez and Muzzio Saenz Peña under study, is the one undertaken by the Spanish Republican exile in Mexico, Benjamin Cano Ruiz (1945) with lovely illustrations of V. Foulquier. In Spain, the well-known translator of Tagore's works, Zenobia Camprubí, translated Tagore's *Songs of Kabir* into Spanish (1965).<sup>iii</sup> More recently, there have been translations of Kabir directly from Hindi to Spanish, most notably by the renowned Kabir scholar David Lorenzen and Mariela Alvarez at the Centre for Asian and

African Studies of El Colegio de Mexico (1991). Given the interest in Indian mysticism in Spain, some recent translations of Kabir have been brought out by specialists with interest in Indology such as Jesus Aguado who has published several volumes of devotional poetry of India in translation into Spanish, including one on Kabir from the Palma de Mallorca based publisher Olañeta (2001, based on English versions)) that publishes regularly on Indology , and Enrique GalludJardiel whose volume on Kabir's poems in translation was published by Miraguano (2011). These coexist with other versions including those done from French, mainly published by publishers with interest in oriental mysticism and Indian spirituality.

### **An alternative social imaginary**

In our view, the fact that Tagore chose to translate Kabir, a low caste unlettered poet of the *sant* tradition is significant in that it construes a move towards carving out an alternative tradition of the emerging nation to the one that had been forged by the Orientalists. Purushottam Agrawal has pointed out, that “[I]n Indian history the vernacularisation of intellectual life, the secularisation of the Dharmashastra and the evolution of the public sphere of Bhakti are closely interrelated” (2010b). Agrawal's argument demolishes the colonial historical category of “stagnant medieval times” that reads Kabir as an oddity rather than as a historical agent in times that saw the emergence of modernity in Indian history bolstered by a mercantile capital. Given Kabir's audacious attacks on ritual and organized religion, he is seen as constitutive of a “modern” predating colonial modernity. MilindWakankar argues that Kabir has a central place in the intent for finding the bases for the Indian modern and “has today become synonymous with a typically postcolonial question in India: can there be an indigenous modernity, indebted to but at the same time different from the idea of Europe?” (2010:39). Tagore's motivation for translating Kabir is clear then. For him, the basis of civilizational unity in a country with such heterogeneity as India had “come through our saints, like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others, preaching one

God to all races of India” (1917). At VisvaBharati, the University founded by Tagore in Santiniketan as a counterfoil to colonial education, serious effort was undertaken to study the Bhakti poets, particularly Kabir.

Tagore’s modernist position for the nation coming into being finds a parallel in the conception of America in the turn of the century Latin American *modernistas* and their decolonializing impulse. For example, José Martí’s famous essay “Our America” (1891) too “was a concrete ideological interpellation connoting a decolonized and self-determined “birth of a nation”... it cross cut class in an effort to combine heterogenous identities and selves into an organic unity” (Zavala, 1992:37). *Modernistas* like Martí and Ruben Dario earlier, and the Mexican Gutierrez Najera, the Cuban Julian del Casal, the Argentinean Lugones, and many others advocated an openness of aesthetic discourse against the entrenched condition of subjection to the metropolis on one hand, and the debasement of human life, on the other, under the North American technological imaginary linked as it was to an expanding capitalism and imperialism. Seen in this way, turn of century Latin American *modernismo* was a part of the search for a Latin American identity, and the struggle to replace the language of the empire with a new poetic idiom. Thus, Latin American *Modernismo*’s interest in the Orient or its cosmopolitanism is not just a stylistic device, but linked to significant questions of identity formation, and should therefore be seen as moves that open possibilities “for new social relations away from the asphyxiating local” and as an attempt to “connect alterities outside the colonial (and local) systems of relation” (Zavala, 49).

The two Argentinean translators of Tagore’s *One Hundred Poems of Kabir* - Joaquin V. Gonzalez and Carlos MuzzioSaenzPeña - are both well-known turn of century Argentineans intellectuals and assiduous readers of oriental literatures and philosophies. They were important men of their times: Joaquin V. Gonzalez belonged to the reformist oligarchy and

is considered one of the last exponents of the so called Generation of 1880. He was one of the founders and the first Vice-Chancellor of the Universidad de La Plata. Carlos Muzzio Saenz Peña was a foreign languages and Argentine literature teacher, subsequently editor of *El Mundo* (newspaper of the Mafalda fame in the 60s), poet, writer and translator. Both of them are also translators of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. Both also translated other works of Tagore. Muzzio Saenz Peña is author of books such as *El misticismo de los poetas persas*; a book of poems titled *Samsara*; a book of prose fiction *Las veladas de Ramadan*, titles that clearly show the Orientalist vector in his intellectual formation.

In Argentina, the publication of the *Arabian Nights*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagvad Gita*, *Rubaiyats* of Omar Khayyam at the turn of the century and the discovery of the works of Rabindranath Tagore prepared the readers for the cultural reception of a hitherto unimagined universality, prompting a search for new intellectual horizons beyond the cultural shackles of European enclosure and North American materialist utilitarianism to inhabit wider geographies. Cultured non-conformists like Carlos Muzzio Saénz-Peña, responded to this imperative that Axel Gasquet has called “el llamado del Oriente” [the call of the Orient] (2015), with the aspiration of deciphering a new type of civilization that would replace European positivism. Joaquin Gonzalez finds in Bhakti the Christian like devotion to a personal God, and in his prologue to the translation of Kabir, compares the mystic and human love in Kabir’s poems to the mystic fervour in the poems of San Juan de la Cruz, Santa Teresa de Avila and Santa Catalina de Siena. Carlos Muzzio Saénz-Peña, on the other hand, underlines in the introduction to his own translations of Kabir, in November 1915, a syncretism and a highly moral humanism that he discerns in the poet’s works :

Un soplo de santa religión, de emoliente misticismo cubre a la exánime Europa,  
como blanco sudario que envolviera los muertos ideales de la humanidad...

Entre tanta desolación, en medio de tal tristeza, ha venido del lejano Oriente,

una doctrina mística que evoca en su fondo religioso todo el brillo y lozanía de un tropical jardín, Une en su fondoteológico a dos religiones completamente opuestas en ideas, como son el islamismo y el brahmanismo; y es, entre todas las doctrinas místicas, la que mayor consuelo prodiga al hombre. (Saéñz-Peña, 1915)

[A breath of holy religion, of emollient mysticism covers the lifeless Europe, like a white shroud enveloping the dead ideals of humanity ... Amid so much desolation, in the midst of such sadness, from the Far East has arrived, a mystical doctrine that evokes in its religious background all the brightness and freshness of a tropical garden, unites in its theological background two religions completely opposed in ideas, such as Islamism and Brahmanism; and it is, among all the mystical doctrines, one that lavishes the greatest consolation on man.]

### **The Text and the Translations**

The two Argentinean translations are exclusively based on Tagore's translations. In that sense they did not encounter the problems of selection from the large body of poems attributed to Kabir, most of which circulated in the subcontinent as songs sung by wandering minstrels, sadhus, and continue to be sung as part of popular culture, a challenge that scholars and translators of Kabir have had to face. The source for Kabir's written texts is the *Bijak*, a compilation of his songs, and couplets or aphorisms, which is considered the sacred book of the KabirPanth composed sometime in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as also the *Guru Granth*, the sacred text of the Sikhs dating 1603, and the *KabirGranthavali*, compilations of devotional poetry of the DaduPanth from the North West India. Tagore's close associate Kshiti Mohan Sen, professor of Sanskrit and a pioneering scholar of Bhakti poetry at VisvaBharati, had brought out a four volume edition of Kabir's works in 1910. Tagore based his translation on Kshitimohan Sen's Hindi texts and Bengali translations, and on unpublished English translations by A K Chakravarty, and it is this selection that was published as *One Hundred Poems of Kabir* (1915).

Many scholars have criticised Tagore's translation of Kabir's poems, as well as the introduction to the volume by Evelyn Underhill. Thomas de Bruijn focuses on "the tension between the emphatic monologic image of India presented in Tagore's translations ... and the polyphony of Kabir's original..." (2010, 77). He maintains that it is not the skill of the translator that limits the semantic amplitude of the translation (92), which he attributes to the fact that early translations of Hindi literature forced upon Hindi writing an address to a non-Indian audience that it could only achieve by flattening its polyphony (94). David Lorenzen, who has also translated a selection of songs of Kabir into Spanish (1991), finds Tagore's Kabir translations dated, and holds that there aren't many translations of *nirguni* poetry that really work well as poetry in English, because the words of songs are meant to be sung and separated from their original language and from musical performance, they cannot be expected to survive intact (1996:xi). For his own translations, he has chosen songs of Kabir, popularly sung by bards and singers of contemporary popular culture. Vijay C Mishra has criticised Tagore's translations for endorsing a monotheistic spirituality in Kabir and has argued that Tagore's translations of Kabir manifest a "sense of alaukik (other-worldliness) that is not the poet's but Tagore's own" (1987:178). Such critiques coincide with that of Mahasweta Sengupta who has examined Tagore's auto-translations, which she argues do not have the richness and heterogeneity of the originals, subjected as they were by Tagore to the "tyranny of representation" that "succumbed to the power of the image of the 'Orient' as it had been produced by the English" (1995:171). Purushottam Agrawal, however, considers Tagore's translation a significant departure in the context of Kabir's use by the indologists and the missionaries in that even though Kabir is compared in the preface with many Christian mystics with the idea of making him sound familiar to the target audiences, but this translation, rejecting Kabir's reduction to only a 'reformer' or sect founder, underlined his poetic self (2010a).

Carlos Muzzio Saénz-Peña seems to be aware of the limitations of translating from a translated version, and says the following about Tagore's translation in his preface:

El autor parece haber dedicado especial atención a realizar una versión literal, cuidando muy poco la forma y concretándose a reproducir en idioma extranjero las imágenes e ideas del místico indio. No conociendo los textos originales nos hallamos incapacitados para criticar la excesiva austeridad del lenguaje usado por Tagore en su versión inglesa de los cantos de Kabir. (7-8)

[The author seems to have devoted special attention to making a literal version, taking little care of the form and limiting himself to reproducing the images and ideas of the Indian mystic in a foreign language. Not knowing the original texts we are unable to criticize the excessive austerity of the language used by Tagore in his English version of the songs of Kabir.]

The Argentine translator seems to have an intuitive feeling of the loss of lyricism in Tagore's translation and therefore decides to undertake the translation using verse, but his reason for this is clear: it is to adapt the translations better to what he calls "the exotic spirit of the original":

Esos y otros obstáculos ha tenido que vencer el traductor para verter al castellano parte de las estrofas que componen la extensa colección de los cantos de Kabir. Ha creído, también, para mejor adaptarlos al espíritu exótico del original, hacer la traducción en verso usando, a tal efecto, el ritmo que aquí presenta. (8)

[These and other obstacles are what the translator has had to overcome to pour into Castilian part of the stanzas that make up the extensive collection of the songs of Kabir. He has also believed, to better adapt them to the exotic spirit of the original, to make the translation in verse using, for this purpose, the rhythm presented here.]

The translations by Saenz- Peña appearing in the journal *Nosotros* in 1916 were forty nine poems in translation into Spanish out of the one hundred poems of the Tagore collection, with a detailed introduction (dated November 1915) and explanatory notes. Joaquin V. Gonzalez's book contained all the hundred poems in translation. As an example of the two translators work, one can take the first poem of Tagore's collection, which is also one of the most popular Kabir songs: "Mokokahandhunde re bande":

**Mokokahandhundherebande  
Kabir**

मोकोकहांढूढेंतूबंदेमैंतोतेरेपासमे।  
नामैदेवलनामैमसजिदनाकाबेकैलाशमे।  
नातोकोनीक्रिया-कर्ममेनहीजोग-बैरागमे॥  
खोजीहोयतुरंतैमिलिहौंपलभरकीतलासमे  
मैतोरहौंसहरकेबाहरमेरीपुरीमवासमे  
कहैकबीरसुनोभाईसाधोसबसांसोकीसांसमे॥

**RabindranathTagore, 1915**

O SERVANT, where dost thou seek  
Me?  
Lo! I am beside thee.  
I am neither in temple nor in mosque:  
I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash:  
Neither am I in rites and ceremonies,  
nor in Yoga and renunciation.  
If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at  
once see Me: thou shalt meet Me in a  
moment of time.  
Kabir says, "O Sadhu! God is the  
breath of all breath."

## Translations into Spanish

### Joaquin V. Gonzalez, 1915

¿Dónde me buscas, oh, servidor mío?  
¡Mírame! Estoy junto a ti.  
No estoy en el templo ni en la  
mezquita,  
ni en el santuario de La Meca, ni en la  
morada de las divinidades hindúes.  
No estoy en los ritos y las ceremonias;  
ni en el ascetismo y sus renunciaciones.  
Si me buscas de veras me verás  
enseguida; y llegará el momento en que  
me encuentres.  
Kabir dice:  
*Dios, ¡oh, Santo!, es el aliento de todo  
lo que respira.*

### Carlos MuzzioSaenz Peña, 1915

¡ Oh mi siervo ! ¿ Por qué me buscas  
fuera  
si estoy dentro de tí ?  
Ni en la blanca «zauía» venerada  
por los viejos derviches  
ni en el templo vetusto, frecuentado  
por silenciosos monjes, me hallarás.  
Nunca he morado en la Caaba santa  
ni en el Kailashviví, ni de los yoguis  
aprendí a despreciar el bien terreno,  
ni vanas ceremonias, ni rituales  
hicieron de mi espíritu un esclavo.  
Búscame con amor, ten esperanza,  
pronto me encontrarás.  
Dice Kabir: «¡Oh Sadhu! Dios el justo  
es aliento de todos los alientos».

As one can see, Gonzalez follows the Tagore translations quite literally and “faithfully.” Saenz Peña’s translation attempts to capture the poetic rhythm as well as the aspect of social criticism that he had put emphasis on in his introduction. The extra elements in Saenz Peña’s translation, such as “viejosderviches”, “silenciososmonjes”, and the series of negatives, “nunca”, ‘ni...ni” repeated several times add to the force of denial of otherworldliness that characterises Kabir’s poetry, firmly rooted in the quotidian. Following is the translation of Maria Alvarez and the Kabir expert David Lorenzen from 1991.

#### **Alvarez & Lorenzen, 1991**

¡Hombre! ¿dónde me estás buscando?  
estoy junto a ti  
ni en los vados sagrados, ni en los ídolos  
ni en los lugares secretos  
ni en los templos, ni en las mezquitas  
ni en Kashi, ni en la montaña Kailash  
no estoy ni en las plegarias ni en las penitencias  
no estoy ni en votos ni en ayunos  
no permanezco en ritos y ceremonias  
ni en el yoga ni en la renunciación  
si me buscas, de inmediato me encontrarás  
con solo un instante de búsqueda  
Kabir dice: escucha, hermano sadhu  
yo resido en la fe

Lorenzen and Alvarez have attempted the translation with a conversational tone that characterises much of Kabir’s songs, and have thus tried to foreground the orality of the composition. This, however, has happened at the cost of loss of rhythm that can be found in Saenz Peña’s translation. In another song, “Man narangaye, rangayejogikapara,” Alvarez and Lorenzen are able to achieve the required popular register as well as the musicality of the song. For a comparison, one can see the

flatness of the Robert Bly version, who on the basis of Tagore's translation, had "translated" Kabir as he puts it, into American English (1977).

### **Man narangaye, rangayejogikapara**

#### **Kabir**

मननरंगायेरंगायेजोगीकपरा  
आसनमारि मंदिरमेंबैठेब्रह्मछाडि पूजनलागेपथरा  
कनवाफडाएजोगीजटवाबढोलेदाढीबढायेजोगीहोईगैलेबकरा  
जंगलजायेजोगीधुनियारमौलेकामजराएजोगीहोयगैलेहिजरा  
मथवामुडाएजोगीकपडारंगोलेगीताबांचकेहोयगइलेलबरा  
कहहिंकबीरसुनोभाईसाधोजमदरवजवाबाँधलजैबेपकरा

#### **RabindranathTagore, 1915**

The yogi dyes his garments, instead of dyeing his mind in the colours of love:  
He sits within the temple of the Lord, leaving Brahma to worship a stone.  
He pierces holes in his ears, he has a great beard and matted locks, he looks like a goat:  
He goes forth into the wilderness, killing all his desires, and turns himself into an eunuch:  
He shaves his dead and dyes his garments; he reads the Gita and becomes a mighty talker.  
Kabir says: 'You are going to the doors of death, bound hand and foot.'

#### **Robert Bly, 1977**

The spiritual athlete often changes the colour of his clothes,  
and his mind remains grey and loveless.

He sits inside a shrine room all day,  
so that the Guest has to go outdoors and praise the rocks.

Or he drills holes in his ears, his beard grows enormous and matted –  
people mistake him for a goat...  
He goes out into wilderness areas, strangles his impulses,  
and makes himself neither male nor female...

He shaves his skull, puts his robe in an orange vat,  
reads the Bhagavad-Gita –  
and becomes a terrific talker.

Kabir says:

Actually, you are going in a hearse to the country of death –  
bound hand and foot!

**Joaquin V. Gonzalez, 1915**

El asceta tiñe sus vestiduras, en lugar de teñirse el alma,  
con los colores del amor.

Permanece sentado en el templo, abandonando a Brahma, para adorar una piedra;  
se agujerea las orejas;

lleva una larga barba y sórdidos andrajos; parece un chivo.

Anda por el desierto yugulándose el deseo, y acaba pareciéndose al eunuco.

Se rapa la cabeza y tiñe sus vestidos; lee el Gita y se convierte en un charlatán.

Kabir dice:

Tú, que obras como él, marchas hacia las puertas de la muerte atado de pies y manos.

**Carlos MuzzioSaenz Peña, 1915**

Tiñe el yogui su túnica y no piensa  
en colorear su mente con los bellos  
matices del amor.

Del señor en el templo ha penetrado  
y abandonando a Brahma le dedica  
a una piedra sus preces.

De sus orejas penden dos anillos;  
su trenzado cabello y luenga barba  
de una cabra le dieron la apariencia.

Retírase al desierto, donde mata  
sus humanos deseos y en eunuco  
decide transformarse.

Afeita su cabeza y un ropaje  
de rojizo color ha revestido ;  
elBaga veda Gita lee atento.

y a conversar aprende.

Dice Kabir: «Atados pies y manos  
marchas por el camino de la muerte».

**Alvarez &Lorenzen**

No tiñes tu mente, yogui, sino tu vestimenta  
en posición de yoga te sientas en el templo  
abandonaste a Ram y te dedicas a adorar una piedra  
te perforas la oreja, yogui, y tienes el pelo enmarañado  
con la barba larga, yogui, pareces un macho cabrío  
vas a la jungla, yogui, y haces penitencia ante una hoguera  
quemaste el deseo, yogui, y te volviste un eunuco  
con la cabeza rasurada, yogui, tiñes tu vestimenta  
lees la Gita y te vuelves un embaucador

Kabir dice: escucha, hermano sadhu  
atado estarás ante el umbral de la Muerte

Though the two early translators did not have access to the original due to linguistic constraints, these early translations into Spanish of Kabir's songs established a non-hierarchical inter-subaltern horizontal dialogue that prepared the ground for the important work undertaken later in Argentina by the Sur Group headed by Victoria Ocampo, with whom Tagore would have an enduring friendship. There is a burgeoning critical literature in recent times on the formation of Hispanic, particularly Latin American constructs of the oriental 'Other.' Under discussion are questions as to whether representations of Asia in Latin America - and translations are part of such representations - have anything in common with the kind of discourse Edward Said has critiqued in *Orientalism* or do they represent a dialogic exchange? Can they be considered an example of South-South cross-cultural flow, or are they mere reworked essentialisms? It is in these early twentieth century exchanges such as the one we have studied above, that Latin American intellectuals engaged with non-Western cultures through a gaze that was not mediated by Europe. Kabir's translations are a part of the silenced knowledges that need to be recovered to consolidate the imaginary of the Global South, and elaborate a southern epistemology that will enable a truly pluriversal world.

---

## End Notes

<sup>i</sup> Kabir is likely to have been born around 1440 and died in 1518. Despite his immense popularity, official commemorations of his 500<sup>th</sup> death anniversary have been rather muted in India. An Academy bearing his name was inaugurated by the Prime Minister in June 28 near his *mazaar* (mausoleum) in Maghar, with a view to sponsoring international level research on the 15<sup>th</sup> century saint poet revered across India.

ii This tradition invokes a nameless, formless god and is inspired by the Nathyogi tradition, an ascetic Saiva order (sampradaya) dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>iii</sup> *Entrevisiones de Bengala: Poemas de Kabir*, trad. Z. Camprubí, Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1965. According to Soledad Gonzalez Ródenas (1999), these translations may have also used the French versions, in addition to the

---

English renderings of Tagore as the Juan Ramón Jiménez library at Moguer has the following French version: *Poèmes de Kabir*. Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1922, trans. of Henriette Mirabaud-Thorens.

---

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

González, Joaquín V. (trans) (1915) *Cien poemas de Kabir*, from English version of Rabindranath Tagore, Buenos Aires: Ed San Martín; Edition of "Atenea", Asociación de ex-alumnos del Colegio Nacional La Plata, 1918, separata of the journal *Atenea*, No. 4 y 5; 2nd ed., Buenos Aires: Juan A. Roldán, 1923.

Saenz Peña, Carlos M. (trans) (1916) Los poemas de Kabir. *Nosotros*. No. 81, Year X.

Tagore, R. (trans) (1915) *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*. London: Macmillan.

### Secondary Sources

Agrawal, P. (2009) *AkathKahaniPremki: KabirkiKavitaAurUnkaSamay* [The Untellable Tale of Love: Kabir's Poetry and His Times]. New Delhi: RajkamalPrakashan.

Agrawal, P. (2010a) Something will Ring: Translating Kabir and his Life, in M. Burger and N. Pozza, (eds). *India in Translation Through Hindi Literature: A Plurality of Voices*, Berlin, New York: Peter Lang, 181-194

Agrawal, P. (2010b) KashikaKabir: Reinterpreting a poet's life and his times. *Communalism Combat*, Year 16, No. 147. <https://www.sabrang.com/cc/archive/2010/jan10/cover.html>

Agrawal, P. (2012) Modernity and Public Sphere in Vernacular. *The Journal of Contemporary Thought*, Summer Issue. 70-78

Aguado, J. (2001) *Kabir. Poemas breves*. Palma de Mallorca: Olañeta-Índica.

Alvarez, M. and Lorenzen, D. (1991) Las canciones populares de Kabir. *Estudios de Asia y Africa*. XXVI:1, 139-157

Anderson, B. (2006) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso (Originally published in 1983).

Bangha, I. (2018) A faint resonance: on commemorating poet Kabir's 500th death anniversary. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-faint-resonance/article24323837.ece>

Bly, Robert. (2007) *Kabir: Ecstatic Poems*. Boston: Beacon Press. (Originally published in 1976).

Burger, M. and Pozza, N. (eds) (2010) *India in Translation Through Hindi Literature: A Plurality of Voices*. Berlin, New York: Peter Lang.

Camprubí, Z. (trans) (1965) Tagore, R. *Entrevisiones de Bengala: Poemas de Kabir*. Barcelona: Plaza y Janés.

Cano Ruiz, B. (trans) (1945) Tagore, R. *Cien poemas de Kabir*. Mexico City: Costa Amic

Chandra, S. (2010) Translations and the Making of Colonial Indian Consciousness, in M. Burger and Pozza (Eds), *India in Translation Through Hindi Literature: A Plurality of Voices*, Berlin, New York: Peter Lang, 47-64.

- 
- De Bruijn, T. (2010) Lost Voices: The Creation of Images of India through Translation. In *India in Translation Through Hindi Literature: A Plurality of Voices*, Maya Burger and Nicola Pozza (eds). Berlin, New York: Peter Lang. 77-102.
- GalludJardiel, E. (2011) *Poemas de Kabir: Mistica de la India medieval*. Madrid: Miraguano
- GascóContell, E. (Trans, prologue and notes) (1956) Tagore, R. *Sadhana o la vía espiritual y Poemas de Kabir*. Madrid: Afrodisio Aguado Escelicer.
- Gasquet, A. (2015) *El llamado del Oriente. Historia cultural del orientalismo argentino (1900-1950)*. Buenos Aires: Eudeba
- Gonzalez Ródenas, S. (1999) *Juan Ramon Jimenez y su biblioteca de Moguer: lecturas y traducciones de poesía en lengua francesa e inglesa*. PhD Thesis. Universidad Pompeu Fabra.
- Gupta, S. S. (2016) Beyond Orientalism: Premchand in Spanish Translations. In Md. Asaddudin (Ed), *Premchand in World languages: Translation, Reception and Cinematic Representations*, London and New York: Routledge. 94-108
- Hess, L. (2015) *Bodies of Song: Kabir Oral Traditions and Performative Worlds in North India*. Oxford: OUP.
- Lorenzen, David N. (1996) *Praises to a Formless God: Nirguni Texts from North India*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Mishra, Vijay C. (1986) Two truths are told: Tagore's Kabir. In Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod (eds). *Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers. 167-180 (Originally published in 1978 in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 1:2, 80-90)
- Sengupta, M. (1995) Translation as Manipulation: The Power of Images and the Images of Power. In *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts*. A. Dingwaney and C. Maier (eds). Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press. 159-174.
- Tagore, R. (1917) Nationalism in India. <http://tagoreweb.in>
- Wakankar, M. (2010) *Subalternity and Religion: The Prehistory of Dalit Empowerment in South Asia*. New York: Routledge.
- Zavala, I. (1992) *Colonialism and Culture: Hispanic Modernisms and the Social Imaginary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

\*\*\*\*\*