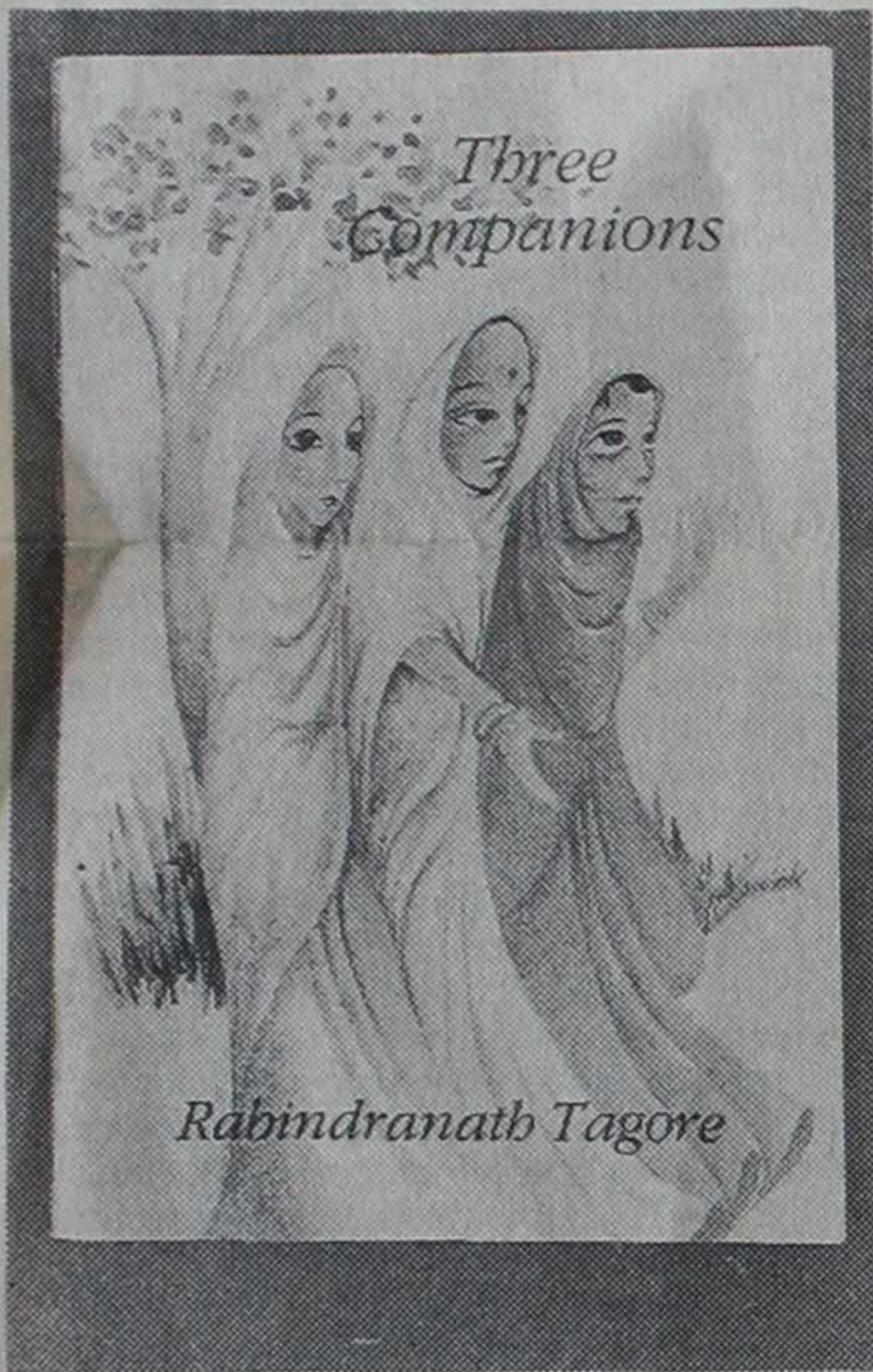


Among the last from Tagore

TAGORE's genius was characterised by his mastery over several areas of creativity: poetry, play, short story, essay and the novel. His contributions in all these fields are more or less well-known through translations, but among the least known of his works are his few novelettes.

Three of his works in this genre, titled *Tin Sangi*, first published in 1940 were written during the last phase of Tagore's life and (Incidentally, since this reviewer has a copy of this rare edition before him, he feels tempted to inform readers that it was priced one rupee and eight annas!) the work



under review is a translation of this anthology, its title a literal, as well as appropriate, rendering of the original Bengali title.

Women dominate all three novelettes. As the worthy translator informs us,

They merit places of honour in the large and fairly full gallery of women characters Rabindranath has drawn in his poetry, plays, novels and stories. Vibha and Achira and Sohini — they are the three companions, nearly the last

three companions, we find on the long road of Rabindranath's fiction

In 'Sunday' and 'Last Words,' the young heroines are torn asunder by their social commitments on the one hand and their free will on the other, but if they adhere to the first, that again, as Tagore portrays the situations, is because of their conscious decision to do so. But in this lies the strength and the liveliness of the characters, paradoxical though it may sound.

Sohini, the dominant woman in the third novelette, is of course remarkable for her independent will and her capacity for burrowing her way through odds and impossibilities. Before her determined march in life, the others appear like creatures of straw — mercifully, barring her husband, but who owes the impression we get of him more to her devotion to his memory than to his own conduct during his brief life in the story.

By the way, the first two women are Bengalis, whereas Sohini is Punjabi married to a Bengali.

The elan vital to all the three stories is the dialogue. Between Abhik, the Bohemian hero and Bibha in 'Sunday,' between Dr. Sen Gupta and Achira in 'Last Word,' between Prof. Chowdhury and Sohini in 'Laboratory,' the conversations are

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witty and irresistibly interesting. But they are employed as a powerful means to bring out the subtleties of the thoughts, desires and dreams of the characters, projecting, apart from some of the all-time problems of human nature, taboos and significant social conditions prevailing in the early decades of this century in Bengal.

To this reviewer's knowledge, only one of these novelettes, 'Last Words,' had been earlier translated into English, that too in a slightly abridged form (by the late Ashit Gupta in 'The Heritage,' July 1986). It is a matter of joy that all the three are now available in English, in a translation made with commendable skill and restraint, totally faithful to the text, yet highly readable for its natural flow. The production of the anthology is also soothing to the eye. ■

MANOJ DAS

Three Companions by Rabindranath Tagore.
Translated by Sujit Mukherjee. (Disha), pp. 108.
Rs.40.