

Publication of Tagore's song offerings, the *Gitanjali* : A Study

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Before establishment of Visva Bharati Grantham Vibhaga (VBGV) in 1923, Rabindranath Tagore's writings were published by his friends and family members and Adi Brahmasamaj Jantra (Press of Brahmasamaj, Calcutta). Rabindranath (1861-1941) received the Nobel Prize for *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings) in 1913 which is a collection of poems from different kavyagrantha (book of poems). Copyright of Rabindranath Tagore's works given to Visva-Bharati expired in December 2001. Private publishers have been free to publish the writings of Rabindranath Tagore since then. The present paper is an attempt to assess the quality of publication of *Gitanjali* published by private publishers before establishment of VBGV and after expiry of copyright. It is observed that a small portion of Bengali publishers are publishing *Gitanjali* at a lower price but with good number of mistakes. Pre-VBGV publications also have mistakes.

Keywords: Gitanjali, Tagore, Copyright

Introduction

Rabindranath composed his first poem at the age of eight and by the end of his life at the age of eighty, he wrote twenty-five volumes of poetry, fifteen plays, ninety-five short stories, eleven novels, thirteen volumes of essays; initiated and edited various journals; prepared Bengali textbooks, penned thousands of letters; and created more than two thousand paintings. Tagore's first poem *Hindu Melar Upahar* (The Gift of Hindu Mela) and his first verse narrative *Banaphul* (The Wild Flower) were published in *Gnanankur* and *Pratibimbo* respectively. The last birth day of Rabindranath (7th May 1941) is marked with the publication of three books, one in verse *Janmadine* (On my Birthday), one comprising short stories, *Galpasalpa* and the English version of *Chhelebela* (Boyhood days).

Rabindranath Tagore's long literary career has been classified by different scholars from different viewpoints of his literary development. Chunkapura classified it as youth and early adulthood writings (1878-1900), *Gitanjali* period (1900-1912), the years of matured reflections (1912-1927) and the final years (1927-1941)¹. Thompson classified development of Tagoreana as early life and poetry (1861-1886), The *Shileida* and *Sadhana* period (1887-1897), unrest and change (1898-1905), *Gitanjali* period (1905-1919) and finally internationalism (1919-1941)². Majumder³, Prabhatkumar⁴, Kripalani⁵ divided the literary life of the poet in different epochs. Regarding

this Tagore rightly observed. "It is discerned in the analysis of those who look at it and study it from outside. But the author is unaware of it. To the author the moments of creation, the seasons of flowering and fruit-gathering are what matters; that is what touches him emotionally"⁶. It is obvious that the growth of Tagoreana (all the intellectual output of Rabindranath Tagore) with the passage of time reflected faithfully the diverse tendencies of his age.

Whatever may the classification, there is no doubt that translation of his 'spiritual' poems in English "*Gitanjali*" in 1912 and Nobel Prize for literature on 13th November 1913 for it has a special impact globally. The recommendation within Swedish Academy came from another winner of the Nobel Prize - Werner von Heidenstam. He wrote that he had read no lyric writing to equal Tagore's in the previous twenty years or more. "They gave me hours of intense enjoyment; it was like drinking the water of a fresh, clear spring... There is nothing in his work that is controversial and offensive, nothing vain, worldly and petty, and if ever a poet may be said to possess the qualities that make him entitled to the Nobel Prize, it is he"⁷. *The Daily Mail* (Nov.14, 1913; p7, Col 13) under the heading Nobel Prize for an Indian Poet quotes W.B.Yeats "I know of no man in my life time who has done anything in the English language equal to Mr. Tagore's lyrics"⁸. It has again rightly been reflected in citation of Oxford D.Litt *honoris causa* on Tagore in 1940 "Here before you is the myriad-minded

poet and writer" ('poeta et scriptor myrianous')⁹. That was an appropriate description of the vast range of Tagore's literary creations in the form of poetry, drama, songs, essays, novels and short stories.

Objectives of the study

- To trace the origin and growth pattern of the poems of *Gitanjali* scattered in different *Kavyagrantha* (books of poems);
- To understand the publishing scenario of Tagoreana in general and *Gitanjali* in particular before and after the expiry of copyright in 2001;
- To assess the quality of publication of *Gitanjali* before establishment of VBGV and also post copyright expiry publication by private publishers' with that of Visva-Bharati.

Methodology

For assessing publication of *Gitanjali* before establishment of VBGV, its first publication by India Society of London on 1st November 1912 and subsequent publication by Macmillan and Company in March 1913, London were compared with manuscript and original Bengali poems scattered in different *kavyagrantha*.

For post copyright textual comparison of *Gitanjali*, its bilingual edition published by Tagore research centre Rabindra-Bhavana was consulted as the source document as Bengali poems of this edition has been taken from the last publication (1941) of *Gitanjali* published during Tagore's life time and as it is bilingual, so a comparative study is possible¹⁰. Last edition of Tagoreana published during Tagore's lifetime is considered as standard publication because Rabindranath Tagore himself used to correct his manuscripts. The evidence of such kind of corrections can be observed from the first edition of many titles of Tagoreana like *Europe-Pravasir Patra*, *Sesh Raksha*, *Sahaj Path 1*, *Gitabitan*, *Chandalika* etc., preserved in Rabindra Bhavana, Santiniketan. Research on such kind of corrections had been conducted based on comparative textual study of different editions of Tagoreana published during Tagore's lifetime. Examples of such studies are *Pathantar Chayan: Rabindranather Upanya*¹¹ (selections from different edition: Rabindranath Tagore's fiction) *Sonar Tari: Bishoy Pathantar*¹² (Sonar Tari: Subject: Selection from different editions) etc. The editions of India Society and Macmillan were also consulted to assess pre-Visva-Bharati publication of *Gitanjali*.

Books in Print from West Bengal and Book Fair Directory 2002-2010 was consulted to know the publishers publishing Tagoreana after expiry of copyright¹³. Tagoreana published by different publishers after expiry of copyright also comes under purview of source material for this study. The catalogue of Visva-Bharati Grantham Vibhaga (VBGV) and also catalogue of twenty five publishers who published Tagoreana after the expiry of copyright were also considered as source material for this study as it helped to know the total number of publications by individual publishers.

One hundred and ninety five titles of twenty six publishers were consulted for this study. Out of them, four titles namely *Gitanjali*, *Sanchayita*, *Gitabitan*, *Galpaguchchha* have been published by maximum number of nine publishers namely, Kamini Prakashalaya (45), Juthika Book Stall (18), Patraj Publication (15), Punascha (11), Ashok Book Agency (10), Sahityam (7), Tuli-Kalam (6), Asia Publishing Company (5), Narayan Pustakalaya (4) and Parul (9).

To evaluate the quality of the literary text, comparison was made in respect of change or deletion of punctuation marks, use of additional punctuation marks, mistakes in spelling, omission/addition of words/sentence, clubbing of paragraph/lines, etc in *Gitanjali* published by Visva-Bharati and post-copyright publications by private publishers at the first page and at the interval of every ten pages.

Pre Visva-Bharati publication

Gitanjali in Bengali was published in September 1910 with 157 songs and poems. Out of these songs 20 were previously published by Indian Press, Allahabad, in *Shārodutsav*¹⁴ in 1908 and *Gān*¹⁵ in 1909. The remaining 137 poems and songs were written in 90 days in between August 1909 to August 1910 (10th Bhadra 1316 to 29th Shraavan 1317(B.S.))¹⁶. Rabindranath Tagore himself took the task of the translation of *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)* when he sailed for England on 27th May 1912. There he handed over the poems to William Rothenstein whom he met earlier in Calcutta in the year 1911. Moved by the poems, Rothenstein in turn gave the poems to W.B.Yeats to read. The literary and artistic circle of Yeats decided to publish the poems after Yeats made a selection of them and wished to write an introduction to it. That is how *Gitanjali* was first published by India Society of London on 1st November 1912. It was written in the half title page of the publication that "seven hundred and fifty copies of

this edition have been printed for the Indian Society of which two hundred and fifty copies only are for sale”¹⁷. Regarding this Rabindranath wrote to Kshitimohan Sen “... I feel he must be happy with my writing and wants others to share that happiness. It is something like our taking delight in the lotus we offer him because he delights in it. I feel he has brought me from East to West...”¹⁸.

The next edition of *Gitanjali* was published in the next year (March 1913) by Macmillan and Company, London. The number of poems in Bengali and English *Gitanjali* are not the same. In Bengali there were 157 poems, but in English it was 103. The poems were first published in different *Kavyagrantha*. At the end of the Indian edition of India Society or Macmillan there was a statement: “These translations are of poems contained in three books- *Naivedya*, *Kheya* and *Gitanjali* – to be had at the Indian Publishing House, 22 Cornwallis Street, Calcutta; and of a few poems which have appeared in periodicals”¹⁹. But this information is not complete as the poems were collected from ten other ‘books of poems’ (Table 1).

In fact, a comparison of *Gitanjali* published by India Society, London and Macmillan edition shows that besides punctuations, change can be noticed in the Indian Society edition such as in poem number 52 reads “...no more coyness and sweetness of demeanor.”(Page 47)

But the same line in Macmillan edition is translated as, “...no more shy and soft demeanour”.

Some other mistakes in the first line of the content of India Society publication are:

Prisoner, tell me, who it was (31);(Prisoner, tell me, who was it);

Let only that little remain of me (34);(Let only that little be left of me);

Table1—Poems of *Gitanjali* from different *Kavyagrantha*

Sl. No.	Book	Year of publication	No of poems
1	<i>Chaitali</i>	1912	1
2.	<i>Kalpana</i>	1900	1
3.	<i>Naivedya</i>	1901	15
4.	<i>Smaran</i>	1903	1
5.	<i>Shishu</i>	1903	3
6.	<i>Utsarga</i>	1903	1
7.	<i>Kh0065ya</i>	1906	11
8.	<i>Gitanjali</i>	1910	53
9.	<i>Achalayatan</i>	1912	1
10.	<i>Giti-malya</i> ^[20] (collected from the manuscript for <i>Gitanjali</i> , before publication as book in 1914)	1914	16
	Total		103

Hast thou not heard his silent steps? (45); (Have you not heard his silent steps?);

When first they came out, the warriors (85); (When the warriors came out first);

When I give up the helm, then the time has come (99);(When I give up the helm, I know that the time has come).

Even by scientific comparison of original Bengali poems and English translation one can find,

i) In the English translation number 61 of *Khoka* from *Shishu* the last two stanzas were deleted.

ii) In the second line of translation number 71 “amar” has been translated as “thy” but actually it is “tomar”.

iii) The translated poem number 95 comprises two poems; complete poem number 89 of *Naivedya* and last stanza of 90th poem in Bengali,

iv) Only the first part of the poem “*Utsarga*” has been translated in the English translation number 102.

Visva-Bharati publication

In the year 1923, Rabindranath Tagore established Visva-Bharati Granthan Vibhaga (VBGV), the publishing department of the University with the publication of his dance drama *Basanta*. Before that the publication right of Tagoreana was given to Chintamani Ghosh, owner of Indian Press/Indian Publishing House of Allahabad. In his letter dated 18th September 1922 Rabindranath Tagore wrote, “I have given the right of all my Bengali books to Visva-Bharati in a deed and relieved now”²¹. *Vichitra Prabandha* (Miscellaneous Essays) was published with the declaration, “the copyright of these works rest with Bolpur Brahmacharyashram”²². According to Tagore’s biographer Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyaya “Chintamani Kar took the responsibility of publishing the poet’s publication in 1908. The stock value of 100 books published up to 1923 was Rs.78,000. Chintamanibabu gave his entire stock to Visva-Bharati at the cost of Rs. 26,000 only...”²³.

Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis as the first director of VBGV introduced “*Path-parichaya*” later on renamed as *Granthaparichaya* on Tagoreana providing detailed information about the book and included it at the beginning or end of the books. *Granthaparichaya* provided detailed information about a particular book in respect of its first publication, later editions, criticism, changes or corrections in manuscripts, and Rabindranath Tagore’s comment on his own writings. For maintaining spelling and pronouncing standard

uniformly for all publications of Tagoreana, Prasanta Chandra took special care in consultation with Rabindranath Tagore. Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay and Kalidas Nag also helped him in this respect²⁴. Thus VBGV established itself as one of the best publishing houses as well as centre for Rabindra culture with its printing and editorial quality throughout all the publications.

Bengali *Gitanjali* containing 157 poems (161 pages) first published in Bhadra, 1317 (1910) by VBGV. In the introduction, Rabindranath admits that some songs given in the beginning of this book was published in other books. This edition of *Gitanjali* reprinted 40th times up to Jaistha 1413(2007). In the index of the first line of the songs reference regarding the availability of notations in the volume of *Swarabitan* (book of Rabindrasangit notation) also provided. Forty two poems of *Gitanjali* are songs (Rabindra Sangit), source of notations of different volumes of *Swarabitan* of these songs are given in content. After publication of *Gitanjali* English edition, references of English translations were also provided at the end. Rabindra Bhavana, Tagorean research and cultural centre published bilingual edition of *Gitanjali* in December 1999 which provides W.B. Yeats introduction at the beginning, *Granthaparichaya* and alphabetical first line index of both Bengali and English poems provided at the end. Another bilingual edition of *Gitanjali* with facsimile reproduction of Bengali manuscripts was published by VBGV in collaboration with UBS Publishers' Distributors in 2003 after expiry of Tagore's copyright. This edition is made on map litho glossy paper 304 pages. On the background of English poems, murals and pictures of Santiniketan provided. At the end along with Yeats introduction, Nobel prize acceptance speech, introduction of some other renounced translations of *Gitanjali* into foreign languages such as Andre' Gide's introduction to his French translation Storniolo's prologue of Portuguese translation of *Gitanjali* are provided but with no index.

Publication of *Gitanjali* after expiry of copyright

The extended copyright period of Rabindranath Tagore's work given to Visva-Bharati expired in December 2001. Private publishers have been free to publish the writings of Rabindranath Tagore since then. But from Table 2, it can be seen that a small number of publishers are publishing Tagoreana after December 2001. Many publishers like Ranar, Nandita, Saroj, etc. are listed the *Books in Print* but

the books by these publishers are not available in the market. Several publishers have published only one or two books like *Sahaj Path*.

A comparative study of the catalogues of all the twenty six private publishers with Visva-Bharati publications reveals that only 39 titles are published by private publishers after the expiry of 334 copyrighted titles available with VBGV. After exclusion of English language publications, translations into other languages and textbooks of Visva-Bharati, the ratio is found to be 282:39. The number of publications of private publishers excludes selective publications from short stories which are part of *Galpaguchchha* (Collection of short stories) published by VBGV. Most of the publishers have published books with the titles of one or two short stories like *Khoka Babur Partyabartan*, *Kabuliwala*, *Postmater*, etc., which are selected from *Galpaguchchha*. Another feature observed was that most of the publishers published *Gitanjali*, *Sanchayita*, *Gitabitan* and *Galpaguchchha*. The remaining books are mostly novels, one or two dramas and autobiography of Rabindranath Tagore. But books on songs, dramas, essays, religious writings, travel, education, rural development are not yet published by private publishers. Publishers getting their books printed from many printers indicate that most of them have no in-house printing press. It is observed from a study that 81 percent (151 out of 186) books were published in the year 2002 immediately after the expiry of copyright. Nearly 13 percent (22 out of 186) books were published in the year 2003 and the remaining 6 percent books were published in the last three years (2004-06). Moreover, most of the books published in 2002 were in between January to May 2002²⁵.

Table 2—Publishers and Tagoreana

Sl. No.	Year	No. of publishers publishing Bengali books	No. of publishers publishing Tagoreana	Percent
1.	2002	688	12	1.74
2.	2003	688	12	1.74
3.	2004	755	32	4.24
4.	2005	755	38	5.03
5.	2006	658	38	5.76
6.	2007	656	37	5.62
7.	2008	653	36	5.51
8.	2009	652	36	5.52
9.	2010	629	49	7.79

* Source: Books in Print from West Bengal and Fair Directory 2002-2010

Comparison of price of *Gitanjali* published by Visva-Bharati and private publishers

Table 3 shows that the price of *Gitanjali* published by VBGV is higher than private publishers. Books published by private publishers are hardbound (except *Gitanjali* published by Sahityam) but the binding quality is poor.

Comparison of page and size of *Gitanjali* by Visva-Bharati and private publishers

Price is related to number of pages, size of the book, paper and printing quality, illustrations, etc. So, a comparative statement of pages along with size of the book may throw some light on the above aspect of comparative price statement.

Table 4 shows that the number of pages of the books published by VBGV is higher as compared to the number of pages of books published by private publishers (except *Gitanjali* published by Asia which is bi-lingual edition with higher price) though the size remains more or less the same. To keep price low, the private publishers have compromised on paper, binding and print quality. Further, it was observed

that the font size, space between lines and also top and bottom margins in many cases have compromised aesthetics.

Textual comparison of *Gitanjali* published by Visva-Bharati and private publishers

In the first literary comparison (Table 5), punctuation marks used in the books published by private publishers and punctuation marks used in Visva-Bharati edition have been compared. Similarly the second Table (5a) shows additional punctuation marks used in the text. In the third Table (5b) spelling mistakes, omission or addition of words(s) or line(s), paragraph/line clubbed/ separated is considered. For poems, a line is considered as a paragraph.

Mistakes in publication of *Gitanjali* in different categories can be observed from the above tables (5, 5a, 5b). Clubbing of lines on five occasions in 12 pages by Patraj or in 39 occasions in 21 pages compared by Asia Publishing House obviously affects spirit, rhythm, even changes the meaning of poems in *Gitanjali*. Change of punctuation marks 40 times (21pages compared) and 41times (26 pages compared)

Table 3—Comparative statement of price: Visva-Bharati Granthan Vibhaga and private publishers (in Rs.)

Title	VBGB	Kamini	Juthika	Patraj	Punascha	Ashok	Sahityam	Tuli-Kalam	Asia Pub	Narayan	Parul
<i>Gitanjali</i>	100 125 (bilingual edition)	40	30	40	35	25	16	30	60	45	75 (HB) 60(PB)

Table 4—Comparative statement of page and size (in cm): Visva-Bharati Granthan Vibhaga and private publishers

Title	VBGB	Kamini	Juthika	Patraj	Punascha	Ashok	Sahityan	Tuli-Kalam	Asia Pub.	Narayan	Parul
<i>Gitanjali</i>	194 18x12	152 21.7x13.7	104 22x13.5	128 22x14	176 21.8x14	128 21.7x13.6	151 17.5x12.2	192 21.5x13.5	239 19x10.5	176 21.7x14	303 17.5X111.5 311 17.5X12

Note: First figure in each row against the book title represents number of pages and the second figure in each row represent dimension in centimeters

Table 5—Punctuation marks changed or omitted

Publisher	Page no. compared	.	,	:	;	?	!	“”	,	—	-	Total
<i>Kamini Prakashalaya</i>	15											0
<i>Juthika Book Stall</i>	10		6				1	2	1	6	3	19
<i>Patraj Publications</i>	12		1									1
<i>Punascha</i>	17											0
<i>Ashok Book Agency</i>	12			1								1
<i>Sahityam</i>	14											0
<i>Tulu-Kalam</i>	18										1	1
<i>Asia Publishing Company</i>	21	3	14			1	4	2	9		7	40
<i>Narayan Pustakalaya</i>	15											0
<i>Parul (HB Ed.)</i>	26	2	9		2	2	4	10		12		41
<i>Parul (PB Ed)</i>	25	2	11			2			5	19		39

Table 5a— Additional punctuation marks used

Titles	Page no. compared	.	,	;	:	?	!	“” “”	,	—	-	Total
<i>Kamini Prakashalaya</i>	15											0
<i>Juthika Book Stall</i>	10		3						2		4	9
<i>Patraj Publications</i>	12		1									1
<i>Punascha</i>	17											0
<i>Ashok Book Agency</i>	12		1									1
<i>Sahityam</i>	14											0
<i>Tuli-Kalam</i>	18		1									1
<i>Asia Publishing Company</i>	21		8				2				9	19
<i>Narayan Pustakalaya</i>	15											0
<i>Parul (HB Ed)</i>	26		4	1						5		10
<i>Parul (PB Ed)</i>	25	6		1			1		7	6		21

Table 5b—Other mistakes

Title	Page no. compared	Spelling mistake	Sentence omitted	Word omitted	Sentence added	Word added	Para clubbed	Para separated
<i>Kamini Prakashalaya</i>	15							
<i>Juthika Book Stall</i>	10	1						
<i>Patraj Publications</i>	12						5	
<i>Punascha</i>	17							
<i>Ashok Book Agency</i>	12			1			1	
<i>Sahityam</i>	14							1
<i>Tuli-Kalam</i>	18							
<i>Asia Publishing Company</i>	21	8					39	
<i>Narayan Pustakalaya</i>	15							
<i>Parul</i>	26	8					4	
<i>Parul (PB Ed)</i>	25	6					3	12

by Asia Publishing House and Parul is really injustice to a poet like Rabindranath. It is also evident that care has been taken for publication of *Gitanjali* by some publishers like Punascha and Narayan as no mistakes are to be found.

Discussion

Most of the books published by the private publishers are hardbound but the binding as well as paper and printing quality in general is poor. Regarding design of cover page, Visva-Bharati books have a saffron cover (with such exceptions as *Raktakarabi*, *Chhinnapatra*, *Natir puja*, *Khapchhada*, *Chandalika* and *Sey*), with signature of Rabindranath Tagore on the front cover in brown or red and Visva-Bharati logo, price and ISBN on the back cover. But title cover page of *Gitanjali* published by private publishers had photograph of Rabindranath Tagore and/or replica of his paintings and drawings.

Bilingual edition of *Gitanjali* published by Visva-Bharati provides *granthaparichaya* which has tremendous research value as it provides information regarding first publication, change in manuscript by Rabindranath Tagore etc and first line index of both English and Bengali poems. W.B. Yeats introduction to

Gitaanjali is also provided. Bengali edition of *Gitanjali* published by Visva-Bharati also provides *granthaparichay*, first line index of the songs along with reference of notation in *Swarabitan* (book of notation) Bengali *Gitanjali* along with *granthaparichaya*, first line index of songs with the name of *Kavyagrantha* and volume of *Sarabitan* (book of notation) also provided. But private publishers did not include this kind of information. Only *Gitanjali* published by Kamini *granthaparichaya* has been added as publishers own contribution, but a large portion of it is copied from Visva-Bharati Granthan Vibhaga. Bilingual hardbound edition of Parul published in 2010 translated Yeats English introduction into Bengali and index of first line of both English and Bengali songs are provided at the end. But the first line is not complete and as a result sometimes it becomes meaningless. In paperback edition instead of Yeats introduction in *Gitanjali*, Tagore's Nobel prize acceptance speech in English and its Bengali translation are provided.

Conclusion

Regarding corrections of manuscripts, its publications in journals or book Rabindranath was very careful²⁶. Mistakes in one kind or other can be

observed since the publication of *Gitanjali* in 1912. But post copyright period, publications of Tagoreana by private publisher, besides having poor quality paper, binding and printing contain a lot of mistakes. Mistakes in other titles of Tagoreana published by private publishers are much higher than *Gitanjali*²⁷. Mistakes in any kind of punctuation mark either addition, omission or exchange affects the meaning, meter, mora and rhythm of writings. This is especially true in case of literature. Change of words, sentences, mistakes in spelling are obviously an indication of injustice to the authors. Publishers publishing Tagoreana in general and *Gitanjali* in particular should be very careful.

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