

COMMENT

Centenary of "Gitanjali"

RABINDRANATH TAGORE (1861-1941) was primarily a lyricist. His "Gitanjali" in Bengali containing 157 poems was published on August 14th, 1910 by the Indian Publishing House of 22 Cornwallis Street, Calcutta. It may be mentioned here that one famous 'Tantric' Shibchandra Vidyarnab by name of Kumar Khali Village, Shilaidaha (now in Bangladesh) wrote a book -'Gitanjali' in 1888. Some are of opinion that Rabindranath took that name for his book of poems.

The English "Gitanjali—Song Offerings" was published in London by the Indian Society in 1912—a limited edition (750 copies) containing an English translation of 103 poems by the poet himself. It was a selection of poems, principally from four of his Bengali works—'Gitanjali', 'Gitimalya', 'Naivedya' and 'Kheya' with an introduction by the Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), Nobel Laureate in Literature, 1923 and pencil sketch of Rabindranath by the British Artist William Rothenstein on the front piece. 53 poems of the Bengali 'Gitanjali' and 50 poems from his drama 'Achalayatan' and eight other books of poem were included in the English—'Gitanjali' [Total 103—poems actually 104—this is because one English Verse (Verse 103) is a combined translation of two Bengali Poems].

Rabindranath was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913 (First Asian) for his English 'Gitanjali' and not as a poet of Bengali Literature.

The centenary of English 'Gitanjali' falls in 2011 and the same of Bengali Gitanjali in 2010.

In his "Introduction" to the English Gitanjali (September, 1912 P. vii - xxii, Macmillan and Co Ltd., London, 1959), W B Yeats said: "...This prose translations from Rabindranath Tagore have stirred my blood as nothing has for years...."

Harald Hjarne, Chairman of the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy, in his Nobel Prize Presentation Speech on December 10th, 1913, said:

"In awarding the Nobel prize in Literature to the Anglo-Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore, the academy has found itself in the happy position of being able to accord this recognition to an author who in conformity with the express wording of Alfred Nobel's last will and testament, had during the current year, written the finest poems "of an idealistic tendency."

The chairman concluded his Nobel Award Speech with the poem no. 82 of 'Gitanjali':

"Time is endless in thy hands, my lord.

There is none to count thy minutes.

.....
At the end of the day I hasten in fear lest my gate is shut; but I find that yet there is time."
[contributed]