



Bangla Sonnets in Translation: A Digital Project

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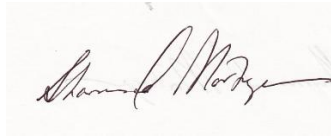
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this report submitted in support of the digital project is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Shamsad Mortuza', is written on a light-colored rectangular background.

Shamsad Mortuza, PhD

Professor, Department of English and Humanities &
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DECLARATION

This report is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort has been made to indicate them clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

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Abstract

Many poets have experimented with the sonnet forms in Bangla since Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Their experiments have played very significant roles in the literary and cultural history of Bangladesh.

Academic discussion on Bangla sonnets, however, is far from adequate and there has not been enough attempts to make these sonnets available to the international readers through translation and wider circulation. The digital archival project attempts to identify and curate some of the key moments of the history of Bangla sonnets. In so doing, the project begins with the definition of Bangla sonnet, and goes on to trace the evolution of the genre in Bengal with an underlying attempt to investigate the significance of the trope in Bangla literature. The selection of the poets, the translation of the works, and the curation of the poems are done to create a discursive platform both for the generation of curiosity in readers and for the engagement of future readers with Bangla sonnets.

Chapter One

Introduction

The introduction of the sonnet in Bangla is one of the most discussed issues in the local literary circuit. It is possible for one to see the import of the western form by an English-educated people of Bengal, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, as an extension of the colonial agenda of creating “a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (Macaulay’s Minutes on Indian Education). But the history of Bangla sonnet shows that the form is received and successfully practiced in the literature as a postcolonial literary apparatus. Since the beginning of Bangla sonnet, it is evident that the form is not being used to express earthly love like the European sonnets, rather the form is being used to express serious cultural and political ideas, and is being used as a tool for cultural resistance against different sorts of colonialism. Of course, the idea and expression of resistance and colonialism vary from poet to poet, but as a common tendency, in the domains of Bangla sonnet, there is resistance. We can find the elements of postcolonial resistance in the selection of the subject-matters of Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s sonnets, the images and the ideas in the Jibanananda Das’s sonnets, the use of language and literary devices in Al Mahmud’s and Syed Shamsul Haque’s sonnets.

In 1865 Michael Madhusudan Dutt published his collection of Bangla sonnets *Chaturdashpadi Kabitabali*. According to Jibendra Shingha Roy, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, had to look for the answers to five questions while appropriating the form in Bangla. In his *Adhunik Bangla Gitikabita: Sonnet (Modern Bengali Lyric-Poetry: Sonnet)* he listed these five questions (73) and if we summarize the answers to the five questions we can come up with the following five points that can be read as the manifesto of Bangla sonnet. The five points are:

01. Bangla sonnets will consist of fourteen lines.
02. Bangla sonnets will be written in *payar-aksharbritta*, a composition of six plus eight metric-units on each line.

03. Bangla sonnets will be rhymed.
04. It is possible to write Bangla sonnets in all sorts of rhyme schemes sonnets have in the European languages.
05. Bangla sonnets will be written in fourteen metric-units per line.

Though Madhusudan Dutt did not write these five points in his own words or discuss them elaborately, we can find the points' implication in his sonnets. Eminent scholar on Indian literature Sisir Kumar Das has also discussed the ways Michael Madhusudan Dutt appropriated the form in Bangla. According to him, Madhusudan Dutt replaced the use of iambic pentameter in English sonnets *payar-aksharbritta*. While discussing the way Michael Madhusudan Dutt appropriated the sonnet form in Bangla, Sisir Kumar Das opined:

Michael had little difficulty in finding a Bengali meter which corresponded to the Italian syllable-timed metrical scheme. He employed the old Bengali *payar*, which had had fourteen syllables in the mediaeval period of Bengali poetry, when no syllable could end in a consonant.

Michael introduced certain innovations. The old *payar* was primarily syllabic and never ran beyond the fourteen-syllable boundary. Michael experimented with the possibilities of run-on lines. He realized how the absence of rhymed couplets at the end of the Petrarchan sonnet gave a rigidity and compactness to the entire structure, and he also appreciated the way in which a Shakespeare or a Wordsworth could use a rhymed couplet to give the structure a new significance and a dramatic turn. Michael accepted both the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean sonnet forms. He learned from Petrarch the technique of the epigrammatic last line and the device of word- or phrase-repetition.

(103)

Sisir Kumar Das's analysis provides us with a comprehensive understanding of the process of appropriation of the sonnet form by Michael Madhusudan Dutt. The sonnet form created by Michael

Madhusudan Dutt was a mixture of the European sonnet forms and the forms that can be found at home, in Bangla literature from the ancient period.

Many of the upcoming generations of poets who became or wanted to become the parts of world literature have followed the footprints of Michael Madhusudan Dutt but did not forget to develop their own unique style. The list of these poets is very long, but in the list, we find the names of the greatest poets whoever wrote in Bangla like Rabindranath Tagore, Jibanananda Das and Al Mahmud. Some of the sonnets these poets wrote have become a part of popular culture, and many of the sonnets made their way in the reading lists of Bengali poetry lovers.

From the beginning of Bangla sonnet, the genre has postcolonial significance. Even the publication of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's sonnets is an event in the history of literary resistance in Bengal against the cultural dominance of the English. Jibanananda Das's sonnets played a very important role in developing the cultural discourse of Bengali nationalism (Afroz & Islam) and according to Mohammad Azam, Al Mahmud's sonnets are the "most significant literary manifesto of Bangladesh" (200).

Therefore, studying the origin and development of Bangla sonnets has enormous importance. It is important to understand how the genre was appropriated in the first place and then modified by different poets over time. Due to the relatively novelty of Bangla sonnets compared to the sonnets in European languages, the definition of Bangla sonnet is yet to be concise. Therefore, coming up with a concise definition of Bangla sonnet is also important to understand and research about the poems from different perspectives. But to do these, first we need all the Bangla sonnets, or at least all the significant sonnets written in Bangla at one place, electronically or in print. Sadly, though no such compilation is yet available, it is possible to easily find many of the significant sonnets written in Bangla online. But finding the Bangla sonnets in translation online is impossible, as many of the sonnets are yet to be translated, and many of the translations are not digitized. Therefore, to attract the international readership and scholarship to engage with the world of Bangla sonnets, translating and presenting them through an easily accessible

website is necessary. To respond to this necessity, the initiative of this digital humanities project, titled *Bangla Sonnets in Translation Project*, is taken.

The research questions the project is dealing with are:

01. What is Bangla sonnet?
02. How did Bangla sonnet originate and how did the genre develop over time?
03. Why are the sonnets written in Bangla significant for understanding the literary, cultural, and political history of Bangladesh?

These three questions are actually interlinked. In fact, the first two questions actually aid the third question to get an answer. And to answer the first question it is necessary to initiate a discussion on the second question. It is because, the form of Bangla sonnet is not homogenous, In its one hundred and fifty years of history, the sonnet form in Bangla has gone through many experimentations and different poets came up with different styles in writing sonnets. Initially, poets usually wrote in fourteen metric-units consisting *payar-aksharbritta*, to harmonize with the fourteen line structure of sonnet. But later poets generally felt the necessity of more metric-units in order to express the ideas they want in a sonnet. Therefore, in the later period of the history of Bangla sonnet, most poets wrote in eighteen metric-units consisting *payar-aksharbritta* (Das, U. 304). So to define the sonnet form in Bangla, which originally meant “a little sound or song”, we can say, a Bangla sonnet is a fourteen-line poem written in ideally fourteen to eighteen metric-units consisting *payar-akhsharbritta*. But the definition is only a working definition and there is a lot of room to improve it in the process of studying Bangla sonnets.

In *Bangla Sonnets in Translation Project*, we curated twenty four poems of six different poets. The poets are Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Pramatha Chaudhuri, Jibanananda Das, Al Mahmud, and Syed Shamsul Haque. Selection of Michael Madhusudan Dutt is obvious in a project like this as he is the father of Bangla sonnet. Rabindranath Tagore is important for the experimentations he done with the sonnet form and the diversity of his sonnet’s themes. Pramatha Chaudhuri is important

in the history of Bangla sonnets for his puritanism regarding the form. Jibanananda Das's sonnets are important for their enormous cultural influence and at the same time to understand the shift from a formalistic puritanism to a thematic richness with diverse formalistic experiments with the sonnets. Al Mahmud's sonnets are important for the adaptation of modern ideas in them and Syed Shamsul Haque's sonnets are important, primarily for the use of language. Other poets like Shakti Chattapadhyaya and Shamsur Rahman could also be considered important in the history of Bangla sonnets, but we could not incorporate their sonnets in this project, mainly, because of the limitations we have.

Before the digital curation of the poems, we needed to translate them, as one of the objectives of the project is engage the international readership with the world of Bangla sonnets. While translating the poems, we mainly focused on the ideas and the themes the poets intended to render in them, and to do that we compromised the form and the linguistic quality they have in the original language. But we do not consider these translations as the ultimate translations of the poems and therefore we will continuously edit the translations to make them better.

The final outcome of the project is a website and guiding principle of the project is to keep the website clean, organized and easily navigable. So, the basic structure of the website is kept simple and all the contents are organized in a manner so that the viewers can easily access and find everything they want from the website. The in-built search bar is particularly useful in this regard, as someone can search the poems by the names of the poets or by the name of the poem. And the website is segmented into pages and the pages are organized under different menus that made the navigation easy and organized. Currently, the website has three distinct menus, namely, 'Home', 'Poems', and 'Discussions'. The title of the Home menu is linked to the landing page. An 'About' page and an 'Acknowledgement' page also fall under this menu.

The landing page of the website comprises a slideshow where the project, the poets and their poems are briefly introduced. This page provides the viewers with a brief idea of what to expect in the website. Sheikh Muhammad Sultan's painting *Peasants at Work* is used as the header image of the website. A brief note about the header image and its relevance in the website is given on the sidebar. The sidebar also comprises the search button and the landing page's slideshow. The sidebar is visible from every page of the website.

The core of the website is the Poem menu which makes the website "The Home of Bangla Sonnets". This menu comprises the pages about the poets and their sonnets. All the sonnets written by a certain poet are listed and hyperlinked in the poet's short biography page and at the same time they are presented as the submenus of the poet's short biography so that the viewers can access the poems' pages easily in an organized manner.

Under the Discussion menu there comes the critical writings on the sonnets in general. Currently, one article is presented there that deals with the definition of Bangla sonnet, one of the three primary research questions of the project. The plan is to add more articles by more writers about Bangla sonnets and present them in this section.

The pages that comprise the sonnets are made by following a template. In the template, first comes the original text in Bangla along with some pictures that are related to the poem. Usually the pictures are the images that directly refer to the references used in the poems or to the themes of the poems. After the original text in Bangla there comes an embedded YouTube link to a recitation of the poem. Then comes the translation of the poem in English. A list of annotations, usually of the words and expressions that are not translatable or require descriptions, comes after the English translation. After the translation and the annotation there comes a brief analysis of the poem. The analyses contain the formalistic features and some discussion about the content of the poems.

The current look of the website is a result of a series of experimentations with the free Wordpress themes and a series of experimentations with the template of the poems' pages. Certainly there are still lots of scopes of experimentations in these regards, but the role of initial experimentations to develop a clean look of the website is undeniable. Many other digital humanities projects done in the domains of poetry, literature, and sonnet have guided the course of the experimentations. The projects we followed are done in the domains of English literature, and therefore no translation was required for them to get accessible to the world readership. But this project is unique because it required translations of the poems. Therefore, a great deal of time and energy was spent on translating the poems and editing them.

Currently, the website is made with the free version of Wordpress which made the process of creating the website both easy and difficult. The theme that has been used to make the website is titled *Twenty Sixteen* provided free by the Wordpress Team. Though as a free theme *Twenty Sixteen* is quite rich, it also have certain limitations. For instance, the slideshow on the landing page has to be made by Microsoft Power Point and uploaded to the website by converting the slides into images. But initially the plan was to put a timeline of Bangla sonnets on the landing page created with Northwestern University's digital humanities tools repository Knightlab's Timeline tool. But in the free version of the Wordpress, option to install plugins is disabled and therefore anything that is made by Knightlab becomes impossible to embed in Wordpress. Other than this there are numerous other modifications were impossible to make like defining the margins or experimenting with the composition of the elements presented in a page that would make the website more accessible and pleasant. However, a premium Wordpress account is likely to solve many of the problems that are faced in the free Wordpress theme.

Other than the technical limitations, the website has some other limitations as well. The accompanying images of the poems could be original paintings or illustrations that would represent the poem more holistically. In that case the images that are being presented as a slideshow in the beginning of each poem can be moved by the side of the annotation section as visual aids to the annotations. The analyses of the poems are hasty and do not successfully cover all the aspects the poems have, and

therefore they have huge scopes to be improved. It is also possible to present the analysis of the poems in different manner by not using the classical essay format. A segment of analysis can present the formalistic aspects of the poem, and another section can solely deal with the themes and tropes of the poem.

The project is conducted as a pilot project so that a guideline can be prepared to conduct a more elaborate project to archive Bangla sonnets, analyze them, critically engage readers with them, and present them to the world. In this stage, the project is conducted by only one person who worked simultaneously as a translator, web designer, reciter, critic, graphic designer and what not in the process of making the website. But in the later stage, the project requires a dynamic team of translators, IT experts, critics, graphic designers, illustrators, sonnet experts, and experts in digital humanities. The project needs more than one team member in every field as the team will be dealing with thousands of sonnets written in Bangla language. To conduct the project only with twenty four sonnets, we needed three months. Therefore, in order to make the project time efficient and successful, a dynamic team with expert members is highly necessary. And to overcome the technical difficulties, the project also requires funding to get access to superior digital tools.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

In the domain of Bangla literature, the use of digital tools to explore the research questions is not yet that much widespread. Digitization and archiving of Bangla literary texts are not adequate, and the translations of Bangla literary texts in English or any other language on the internet is not that much available. For the sonnets written in Bangla literature, the statements made above are particularly true, as we do not find any organized database of Bangla sonnets on the internet. Interestingly, no comprehensive anthology of Bangla sonnets in print is also available which is important to study the genre, and to explore the genre's origin and development.

As a form, sonnet has several mesmerizing qualities. The form presents a condensed expression of a particular idea or feeling within its limited and well-proportioned boundary. For its shorter length, a sonnet takes less time to read, and for its condensed and symmetric presentation, a sonnet is capable of making great impression on the minds of the readers. But writing a successful sonnet is never considered as something easy.

Therefore, the poets who have written successful sonnets are often considered as the poets possessing control over their mind and the language. But in literature, as we know that the time is a very problematic phenomenon, and a poet might not get recognition in his time and can get the honor as a great poet after one or two hundred years, we cannot certainly claim about any poet that they are not successful. We can just only try to read them carefully and figure out the aesthetic qualities they render.

Therefore in this first phase of the project, selection of the six significant sonneteers of Bangla language is more related to our limitations to incorporate more poets than the limitations of other sonneteers. In this chapter, we will review some studies related to the history of Bangla sonnets and look into some discussions on the poets and poems we selected. It is worth clearing that the intention behind reviewing the literature related to the six poets we selected is not to justify our selection, but to create the

scope for developing further understandings on the works of the poets we selected. Though these reviews are not presented on the website, as regarding the limitations we have we could not find digital-friendly ways to do so, but we need to find ways to present this kind of reviews on the website so that the researchers and anyone who is interested in Bangla sonnets can get involved in critical and intellectual discussions related to the topic.

Before discussing the aspects related to the poems of the six poets we selected, we will first discuss two books that deal with the history of Bangla sonnet. These two books are *Bangla Shahitye Sonnet* by Uttamkumar Das and *Adhunik Bangla Gitikabita: Sonnet* by Jibendra Shingha Roy. In his book *Bangla Shahitye Sonnet*, Uttamkumar Das showed very systematically how the sonnet form has originated in Europe and appropriated in Bangla by Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Such account can also be found in Jibendra Shingha Roy's book. One interesting information they both give us that Michael Madhusudan Dutt, who wanted to be rebellious by writing sonnets in English without any rhyme, did follow strict measures while he was writing sonnets in Bangla. According to Uttamkumar Das "As an able successor of the rebellious Young Bengals, Madhusudan declared himself an enemy of rules and by being inclined to new experiments he attempted to write Miltonic sonnets. But when he became matured and started writing sonnets in Bangla, we see with astonishment that he voluntarily submitted himself to the rules" (71). The change of Madhusudan hints at the nature of Bangla renaissance, as a genre of period which is attributed the credits for creating the space for breaking the old rules and creating a surge of knowledge in every possible directions. It hints that the so-called Bengal renaissance is different from the European ones because it was a conscious renaissance, it was like curving out a canal in a dry land and then naming the canal as a river.

Uttamkumar Das has shown the diversity of forms and contents in Michael Madhusudan Dutt. He carefully analyzes his language and discusses the kind of language Madhusudan used in relation to his critics like Rabindranath who opined "[Madhusudan] had great power over words. But his style has not been repeated. It is not Bengali" (90). Uttamkumar Das poses counter arguments to this and other

comment by other critics like Buddhadeb Basu by discussing how the images and elements of Madhusudan are derived from the very core of Bengal's history, culture and custom, from the very core of Bengalis' hearts (90-95).

In his book, Uttamkumar Das cautiously listed all the prominent sonneteers of the first one hundred year of the form in Bangla and segmented them in six categories. The number of poets he has given the privilege to get discussed in an isolated chapter are only two: Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Rabindranath Tagore. The other categories are: Followers of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Poets of New Romantic Era, Poets in the Time of Rabindranath, and Modern Poets. In these six segments, he has discussed the sonnets of forty poets and some other poets under the title of "other poets of this era" within the four generalized era.

In his book, Jibendra Shingha Roy discussed the origin of Bangla sonnet in relation to the history of sonnets written in English in the then Bengal. That is why before discussing the sonnets in Bangla, he discussed the sonnets written in English in Bengal, and even before that he discussed the origin and development of the sonnet form in the global context. Jibendra Shingha Roy did not discuss the poets after Rabindranath with the kind of significance Uttamkumar Das attributed them in his study.

In any discussion of Bangla sonnet, mention of Michael Madhusudan Dutt is quite frequent, as he is the father of sonnet in Bangla language. Jibendra Shingha Roy and Uttamkumar Das has discussed the sonnets of Michael Madhusudan Dutt elaborately and showed how the poet successfully appropriated the form in the language. Sisir Kumar Das wrote about him, "Michael is the greatest Bengali poet of the mid nineteenth century. He not only introduced into Bengali a masculinity of expression, but he was the first Bengali poet, and consequently the first Indian to respond to the spirit of European poetry" (102). Though critics have different points of views on sonnets of Madhusudan Dutt, as some would say them "wooden and lifeless" other would mark them as "his most satisfying work" (Das, S. 105). According to Sisir Kumar Das, "Truth probably lies somewhere between" (105). No matter wherever the truth lies regarding

the notion of “satisfaction”, when someone is discussing the development of Bangla sonnet, that person is obliged to go back to Michael Madhusudan Dutt.

Without discussing Rabindranath, it is impossible for anyone to pass the history of Bangla literature in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Other than epic, he had his footprints on all the literary genres he encountered. According to Shaherul Islam Shah, Rabindranath Tagore wrote 288 fourteen-line poems among which 77 have the attributes of sonnets. He even tuned some of his sonnets, which brought the genre closer to its origin, as original sonnets were written as songs with dictation of how to sing (Shah). Jibendra Shingha Roy opined that the sonnets of Rabindranath Tagore do not follow the conventions of sonnet and are not successful as sonnets. This is in fact a dominant view about Rabindranath Tagore’s sonnet, and this should be analyzed carefully, as the sonnets written by the poet are very rich both by form and content. They might not seem good sonnets to the puritan critics, but if they are seen from other perspective they can prove their merit.

Between Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Rabindranath Tagore there were many other poets who wrote sonnets. Both Jibendra Shingha Roy and Uttamkumar Das discussed about them. Seemingly these poets could not manage to attract that much attention from these or any other critics as sonneteers. But their sonnets are important in a detailed account of the history of Bangla sonnets, for it was because of their experimentations and endeavors, later the form could get settled in the language.

Though Pramatha Chaudhuri is a contemporary junior poet of Rabindranath Tagore, he did not emerge as someone surpassing Rabindranath, rather in terms of sonnet he is one of the last followers of Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Pramatha Chaudhuri is not primarily remembered for his poetic endeavors, but he is important for introducing Bangla prose written in colloquial language, by which he even influenced Rabindranath. And even Pramatha Chaudhuri himself admitted that his short-stories and sonnets do not have much impact over Bangla literature (qtd. in Asaduzzaman). Nevertheless, we selected Pramatha Chaudhuri as a sample of sonnets that developed from the formalistic lineage of Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Jibendra Shingha Roy, in his *Adhunik Bangla Gitikabita: Sonnet* mentioned and

discussed some poets who followed Michael Madhusudan Dutt, but he did not mention Pramatha Chaudhuri in this category, rather he discussed him as a minor sonneteer than Madhusudan or Rabindranath, but a significant one in terms of experimentations with the form. In our consideration, though like Madhusudan Dutt, Pramatha Chaudhuri wrote sonnets with fourteen metric units per line, he is mainly a representative of Madhusudan Dutt's style for his topic selections of the sonnets. When we read the sonnets of his *Sonnet Panchashot* it feels that Pramatha Chaudhuri is just mimicking Madhusudan Dutt in terms of the subject matter of his poems. Uttamkumar Das also regarded Pramatha Chaudhuri as an important sonneteer, but he did not agree with the earlier critics who opined that Pramatha Chaudhuri was the first person to write Bangla sonnets in French convention. Both the sonnet historians, while discussing the sonnets of Pramatha Chaudhuri, mentioned that Rabindranath Tagore highly praised his sonnets compiled in *Sonnet Panchashot*, and Rabindranath's comments on Pramatha Chaudhuri's sonnets might influence the critics to ponder upon the sonnets of Pramatha Chaudhuri.

After Rabindranath Tagore, Jibanananda Das is the most influential poets in Bangla literature till date. With Jibanananda Das Bangla poetry went through a paradigm shift. According to Ahmed Rafiq, "Jibanananda Das is the major poet in the post-Rabindranath modern era" (qtd. in Mondol). His sonnets compiled in the book *Ruposhi Bangla*, which was published three years after his death are considered some of the most beautiful and influential poems ever written in Bangla language. According to Afroz and Islam, the account of nature which we can find from the sonnets of *Ruposhi Bangla*, have greatly impacted the formation of Bengali nationalism before and after 1971. Joe Winter, one of the translators of *Ruposhi Bangla*, commented, "The [book] became a totemic symbol of freedom in the 1971 war in which Bangladesh gained its independence from Pakistan" (7). While commenting on the language and style of Jibanananda Das in *Ruposhi Bangla*, Joe Winter said, "His vocabulary is wide-ranging but his style far from simple: he is idiosyncratic to a degree, his sentences reflecting the byways of the thinking process, it may be, as much as its finished product. A sentence in *Ruposhi Bangla*...can stretch out like a tree's branches; yet each poem finds its own simplicity" (8). Many of the later poets were and are still

mesmerized by the creations of Jibanananda Das, and therefore, no new paradigms are yet created to initiate a novel shift in Bangla poetry.

One of the reasons behind the limitations of the two sonnet historians in terms of understanding the significance of Jibanananda Das is that the poet was not that much influential till then and his distinct language did not get well-received by their contemporary readers, critics, and other poets. Though Uttamkumar Das has given six pages in his 400 plus page long book to Jibanananda Das, he did not feel this seemingly quiet poet has composed many of the most wonderful sentences in Bangla literature. Uttamkumar Das listed Jibanananda under the chapter devoted to modern poets and just provided a mere formalistic analysis of his sonnets by completely overlooking the magical images Jibanananda Das has drawn in them.

We find the continuation of the trend of incorporating local words and expressions in sonnets in the later poets like Al Mahmud and Syed Shamsul Haque. Both the poets are highly praised for their mastery in successfully using the local words, expressions, and elements in their poems. Al Mahmud used the words of Bharmanbaria, his home district. Syed Shamsul Haque not only used the words and expressions, but also used the sentence structure of the dialect from his home district Kurigram, yet not compromising the aesthetic quality that is required to attract the urban eyes.

But the ultimate significance of Al Mahmud and Syed Shamsul Haque lies in their distinct voices. As the poets were writing on the verge of the liberation war of Bangladesh, Al Mahmud and Syed Shamsul Haque consciously created an aura where the distinctiveness of Bangladeshi literature within the Bangla language can be found. To do that they have taken words and elements from the East Bengalis Bangla dialects and culture. In his essay “Sonnets of *Sonali Kabin* and Al Mahmud’s Poetic Project”, Mohammad Azam elaborately discussed the sonnets of Al Mahmud where he showed how Al Mahmud proposed a world where individuals are simple, rooted in their indigenous history, and not submitted to the discourses of any ideology that would limit the potential of an individual (179). Therefore Mohammad Azam comments, “*Sonali Kabin* is the most significant literary manifesto of Bangladesh” (200). Sonnets

compiled in both *Sonali Kabin* and *Paraner Gahin Bhitari* by Al Mahmud and Syed Shamsul Haque celebrates love that does not go in compliance with the boundaries of the society, yet not interested in getting uprooted from the tradition. To define this tradition Mohammad Azam borrows from Talal Asad, according to whom “traditions are those elements that are being practiced in the contemporary culture of a community” (200). The mastery of Al Mahmud and Syed Shamsul Haque lies in becoming traditional in this way, as they did not become theological in their incorporation of elements, yet at the same time they became traditional.

Now, in this project, we are using digital tools to archive Bangla sonnets and nowadays, digital tools, i.e., computer software and internet, are inseparable from our everyday life. In the humanities disciplines, and in the study of literature we use the digital tools for diverse reasons. For example, to understand a poem, we may use digital tools to know both the denotation and the connotations of the words, learn about the references used in the poem, context, and the historical background of the poem, and we can easily access different analyses of the poem in order to engage with the poem more critically from different perspectives. If we want to study a literary genre, or want to find out the history of a genre, digital tools can enormously help us by providing a concise database, and the means of analyzing the elements of that genre.

The Digital Humanities Institute of The University of Sheffield defines a digital humanities project as a project that “uses digital methods and computational techniques as part of its research methodology, dissemination plan, and/or public engagement” (What Is a Digital Humanities Project?). In a digital humanities project, researchers use digital tools for various reasons and they do not use the digital just for the sake of using them. According to the institute, “Digital methods enable scholars to ask questions that are difficult to answer using non-digital methods, due to the size or complexity of the source material. They also enable the public to engage with research in an accessible way” (What Is a Digital Humanities Project?).

The University of Chicago's Digital Humanities website provides us with some more ideas about the concepts of digital humanities projects. It states, "Like all humanities research, digital projects begin with a question. The project may aim to answer the question, or simply to explore." This statement is particularly important because it provides us with a very important perspective of the digital humanities projects, that a project might not answer the question it deals with, rather it may simply explore it.

Another useful website is devdh.org, which is created by two eminent scholars in the field of digital humanities, Simon Appleford and Jennifer Guiliano. From this website we can get a detailed guideline to initiate and execute a digital humanities project. On the About page of the website it states, "No matter how digital humanities is defined, the development of research agendas encompasses the planning, organizing, motivating, and use of finite resources to achieve a greater understanding of the humanities and the human condition." Sonnets written in Bangla are important cultural elements to be analyzed and discussed, as they have a continuous role in shaping the nation's popular imagination. So, planning a digital humanities project on Bangla sonnets is not a waste of time, as it would certainly help us to "achieve a greater understanding of the humanities and the human condition" in Bangladeshi context.

The *Bangla Sonnets in Translation Project* corresponds with the concepts of digital humanities project as it deals with specific research questions, uses digital tools to address the questions, and most importantly, creates an archive that would be used by the future researchers to get involved with the questions. The project might not necessarily provide the elaborate answers to the research questions it deals with, but provides significant tools to the international scholarship to engage with them, as the project is done in English, the lingua franca of the academia. And the project not only provides the international scholarship with the tools they need to deal with the questions, but also it provides the native and international readership with the easy access to the world of Bangla sonnets.

Chapter Three

Recommendations and Conclusion

In the process of archiving Bangla sonnets, digital tools have multidimensional potential use. We could not make the maximum use of the digital tools in this project as we had monetary and time limitations. Assuming that there is funding in an elaborate project, first we recommend a paid subscription of Wordpress so that the researchers can enjoy the liberty in designing the website. Professional web designers can also be hired. A domain name should be bought so that we can get rid of the ads.

A team, consisting of enthusiastic students advised by the subject matter experts should also be formed. The team might assign different tasks to its different members. Some of the team members should be assigned to collect the original sonnets. They can collaborate with the archives, libraries, museums, and individuals who have the earlier editions of the books, and scan those books by taking permissions if necessary so that the facsimiles can be presented alongside the digital version of the poems. Some other team members, who are experienced in translating Bangla poems to English, can be assigned with the task of translating the poems. They can collaborate with the subject-matter experts, and translation experts in order to produce the superior translations of the poems. The whole team should collaborate in the process of annotating the poems and analyzing them. The team should restrict itself from providing any point of view while analyzing the poems. Only the key formalistic features should be presented in the analyses. A forum can be created to exchange the points of views, where readers and researchers can discuss and initiate debates.

If we were planning a print anthology of the sonnets, we would not have this option to create such a forum. We can regularly feature the poets and poems on the website based on the activities of the readers on the discussion forums. By using the digital analytics tools we can also feature the poems that are most visited, most searched, and most shared in a given time. A landing page consisting of such

featured poets and poems would make a viewer feel welcomed to the website. This would also help the researcher who will be trying to get an idea about the level of popularity of the poems and the poets. To help them the website can publish a monthly digital analytics report of the website.

Therefore, in brief, we have three recommendations that are:

1. Seek funding.
2. Subscribe to digital tools.
3. Form a group of experts.

An elaborate digital project to curate all the Bangla sonnets will enable the researchers to easily engage with the world of Bangla sonnets and explore many new research questions in the field. It will eliminate the current difficulties in communication among the researchers and the readers, and help them to easily engage in meaningful discussions on the topics related to Bangla sonnets. It will create a scope of cultural exchange between the Bangla language & literature and the world. This pilot project is successful in creating the guideline for an elaborate project to archive all the Bangla sonnets in translation. We are looking forward to the initiation of the elaborate project soon.

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Appendix

Project Website Link: <https://banglasonnet.wordpress.com/>

QR Code to the Project Website:

