Paintings and drawings of Rabindranath Tagore: a bibliometric study

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Using bibliometric techniques, the paper attempts to study 1,573 paintings and drawings by Rabindranath Tagore available at Rabindra-Bhavana, Visva-Bharati. Rabindranath paintings cover 27 themes. The distribution of themes do not follow Bradford law. He has drawn seventy-one types of figures and seven types of human faces. He used various colours and materials for his pictures. Only pen ink was used by him 466 paintings. In others, pen ink was used along with 21 combinations. Plain paper, cards, silk, wood, wooden box, wooden board, varnished paper, glazed paper, exercise book, pasted card, pasted paper were used for painting including the back of a letter. Rabindranath signed 903 paintings in Bengali, 53 in English, and two both in Bengali and English. He did not sign on 615 of his paintings. Of the 1,573 paintings, Rabindranath mentioned places of paintings only in 48 cases, of which 29 places are in India. 1150 paintings do not reveal the dates. From the dated paintings it appears that Rabindranath on some dates created five to six paintings. Rabindranath gave titles to his paintings only in 46 cases. All these titles are in Bengali.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore; Tagoreana; Drawings and paintings; Tagore paintings; Bibliometrics

Introduction

Bibliometric studies conducted so far have covered books, periodicals, theses, etc and their components like authors, words, titles, citations, and so on. Broadly speaking, bibliometric studies pertain to documents. In this study, we undertake a bibliometric study on paintings. Paintings are also documents and are catalogued like any other document.

Rabindranath started sketching the manuscript of his writings at the time of writing *Purabi* in the year 1924 which can be described as the origin of Tagore paintings¹ though according to available sources, the first painting dates back to 15 March 1929. Up to 1940 Rabindranath had created more than 2, 000 paintings and drawings². Victoria Ocampo, while she was nursing the poet back to his health in her villa in Buenos Aires in Argentina in 1924, was impressed by seeing the radical imagination of sketches and lines in his notebook and encouraged Rabindranath to draw and paint. Later, she organized an exhibition of Tagore's paintings at Paris³.

In 1930, a series of exhibition of Tagore's art work were organized in Europe. The exhibitions received positive reviews. Critiques expressed surprise at the unexpected beauty of the works and the imagination of the painter. Not being confident of his paintings, earlier, Rabindranath wrote to William Rothenstein, "My pictures certainly possess psychological interest being products of untutored figures and untrained mind. I am sure they do not reveal a strangeness born of my utter inexperience and individual limitations"⁴.

Rabindranath had no formal training in art besides the cultural ambience of the family. But according to Rabindranath, "the only training which I had from my young days was the training in rhythm in thought, the rhythm in sound. I had come to know that rhythm gives reality to that which is desultory, which is insignificant in itself. And therefore, when the scratches in my manuscript cried, like sinners, for salvation, and assailed my eyes with the ugliness of their irrelevance, I often took more time in rescuing them into a merciless finality of rhythm than in carrying on what was my obvious task"⁵.

This understanding of rhythm is the reason behind success in art, which Rabindranath started enjoying later on. He expressed this feeling in a letter to Rothenstein in 1937, in which he wrote, "I have been havoc in the complacent and stagnant world of Indian art and my people are puzzled for they do not know what judgment to pronounce upon my picture. But I must say I am enjoying hugely my role as a painter"⁶. This was also recognized by European reviewers like Henri Bidou, as they were impressed with Tagore's naïve 'automatic' self-taught quality, especially as they were aware of his high quality formal 'mimetic' literary output. Art critique Coomaraswamy was convinced that Rabindranath had expunged all previous literary experience to produce a truly naïve art, like a child, inventing his own technique⁷. Besides the vision of rhythm and child-like quality, Rabindranath had two other elements, unpredictability and dream imagination. This is expressed by Rabindranath in 1930 with these words, "People often ask me about the meaning of my pictures. I remain silent even as they are. It is for them to express not to explain..."⁸.

Objective of the study

• To identify themes, materials, media and ascertain dates and titles of Tagore's paintings and drawings.

Methodology

In the normal bibliometric studies, growth pattern, author productivity, authorship pattern, collaboration pattern, etc., are analysed. Citation analysis is carried out to generate numerous indicators.

In the case of paintings, drawings, etc., the study of growth pattern is difficult, since the date of painting may not be available always. Like novels, dramas, poems, and so on, the paintings are also solo author productions. Hence, collaboration study is out of question. In the paintings, no bibliography is appended. Neither there is a citation index for painting. Hence, cito-analytical study cannot be undertaken.

Paintings are seen on various surfaces/mediums like wall, ceiling, glass, metal, canvas, paper, cloth, wood and so on. One can study medium preference and also the themes of the paintings.

Colour is also a very important for painters. They use pen ink, waterproof ink, crayon, water colour, pastel colour and pencil to attribute various meanings to the paintings. Painters move from place to place and create paintings of the landscape, people, animals, trees, forests, and so on. Environment greatly affects the creativity of the painter. The painter's environment and theme of his/her painting can also be an interesting field of study.

The study of titles is not uncommon in bibliometrics. Studies can be conducted with titles of paintings as well. Size of paintings can also be another interesting field of study.

The bibliometric study of 1,573 drawings and paintings of Rabindranath in the custody of Tagorean Research Centre at Rabindra Bhavana in Santiniketan is made covering different aspects such as theme, medium used, signature, place and date of drawing, and titles given by him. Many a time opinions of the experts were sought for identifying themes, materials used, etc.

Analysis

The broad categorization of Tagore's paintings made on the basis of descriptive catalogue of Rabindra-Bhavan and experts' opinion reveals that Rabindranath drew on 27 themes (Table 1). Of the many themes, 'figures' rank first followed by 'human face', 'head', 'landscape', 'animal' and so on. The data do not follow Bradford's law as the first two items account for more than 45%.

Colours and materials

Rabindranath used various colours and materials for his pictures. He used pen ink, waterproof ink, crayon, water colour, pastel colour and pencil in different combinations. Tables 2 and 3 lists the materials in different combinations used in his paintings. Rabindranath used to combine different colours in his drawings and paintings instead of using single colour. For example he used exclusively pen ink in 466 (71.145%) paintings out of 655 paintings where pen ink was used. It is observed that he used pen ink with 21 combinations, waterproof ink with 30 combinations, crayon with 5 combinations, water colour with 9 combinations and pastel and pencil with 8 and 4 combinations respectively.

Medium

Rabindranath used plain paper, cards, silk, wood, wooden box, wooden board, varnished paper, glazed

Sl. no.	Theme	No. of paintings	Percentage
1.	Figures	496	31.532
2	Human faces	219	13.922
3.	Heads	206	13.096
4.	Landscapes	173	10.998
5.	Animals	63	4.005
6.	Birds	62	3.941
7.	Designs	58	3.687
8.	Compositions	54	3.433
9.	Illustration for books etc. (30 for the book <i>Khāpchhādā</i>)	49	3.115
10.	Masks	40	2.543
11.	Different forms(such as geometric form, organic form etc as visual tools)	40	2.543
12.	Sketch (only sketch of different themes)	29	1.844
13.	Flowers study(study of different aspects of flower- floriculture)	26	1.653
14.	Nudes (Female 11, Male 4)	15	0.954
15.	Portrait	14	0.890
16.	Flowers	8	0.509
17.	Couples	8	0.509
18.	Fishes 4		
19.	Fish and a cat	1	0.063
20.	Plants	1	0.063
2.	Two pine trees	1	0.063
22.	Tree	1	0.063
23.	Croton leaf	1	0.063
24.	Steam engine	1	0.063
25.	Animal head	1	0.063
26.	Hut	1	0.063
27.	Wild face	1	0.063
	Total	1573	100.00

Sl. no.	Ink and combination	No. of paintings	Percentage
1.	Pen ink	466	71.145
2.	Pen ink with reed pen and brush	44	6.718
3.	Pen ink and water colour	31	4.733
4.	Pen ink and poster colour	29	4.427
5.	Pen ink and crayon	21	3.206
6.	Pen ink, water colour and waterproof ink	11	1.679
7.	Pen ink and brush work	11	1.679
8.	Pen ink with pencil underlining	9	1.374
9.	Pen ink with reed pen	7	1.069
10.	Pen ink and pastel colour	6	0.916
11.	Pen ink, crayon and pastel colour	5	0.763
12.	Pen ink, water colour and poster colour	4	0.611
13.	Pen ink, poster colour and pastel colour	2	0.305
14.	Pen ink, poster colour and crayon	2	0.305
15.	Pen ink and gold ink	1	0.153
16.	Pen ink, poster colour white with brush	1	0.153
17.	Pen ink, water colour, poster colour and pastel	1	0.153
18.	Pen ink, poster colour and water colour	1	0.153
19.	Pen ink, waterproof ink with brush	1	0.153
20.	Pen ink, water colour and golden colour	1	0.153
21.	Pen ink and vegetable colour	1	0.153
	Total	655	100.00

	Table 3—Use of waterproof ink paintings					
Sl. no.	Waterproof ink	No. of paintings	Percentage			
1.	Waterproof ink	218	30.748			
2.	Waterproof ink and pen ink	216	30.465			
3.	Waterproof ink and poster colour	102	14.386			
4.	Waterproof ink, pen ink and poster colour	63	8.886			
5.	Waterproof ink, pen ink, brush and pen work	24	3.385			
6.	Waterproof ink and water colour	20	2.820			
7.	Waterproof ink and crayon	9	1.269			
8.	Waterproof ink and pastel colour	8	1.128			
9.	Waterproof ink, poster colour and pastel colour	4	0.564			
10.	Waterproof ink, poster colour and crayon	4	0.564			
11.	Waterproof ink, poster colour and water colour	4	0.564			
12.	Waterproof ink and gauche	4	0.564			
13.	Waterproof ink, brush and reed handling	3	0.423			
14.	Waterproof ink and brush work	3	0.423			
15.	Waterproof ink, pen ink and crayon	3	0.423			
16.	Waterproof ink and pen ink with reed pen	3	0.423			
17.	Waterproof ink with link and wash handling	2	0.282			
18.	Waterproof ink, pen ink, poster and pastel colours	2	0.282			
19.	Waterproof ink, pen ink and pastel colour	2	0.282			
20.	Waterproof ink, pen ink with gold dust and glue	2	0.282			
21.	Waterproof ink and pencil	2	0.282			
22.	Waterproof ink, poster colour, crayon and pen ink	2	0.282			
23.	Waterproof ink with varnish	2	0.282			
24.	Waterproof ink with pen and brush	1	0.141			
25.	Waterproof ink, poster colour, pen ink with brush and pen	1	0.141			
26.	Waterproof ink, pen ink, water colour and pastel colour	1	0.141			
27.	Waterproof ink, water colour and pastel colour	1	0.141			
28.	Waterproof ink, water colour, pen ink and poster colour	1	0.141			
29.	Waterproof ink over charcoal drawing	1	0.141			
30.	Waterproof ink, water colour with crayon	1	0.141			
	Total	709	100.00			

paper, exercise book, pasted card, pasted paper, even the backside of a letter as mediums for painting and drawing. It is observed that Rabindranath used paper as a medium in 1,524 paintings out of 1,573 paintings but for remaining 49 paintings he used 12 other different mediums. Details are given in Table 4. The paintings on mediums other than paper include human figure, bird, composition of themes, tree, flower, landscape, etc.

Signatures in paintings

To authenticate the drawings and paintings, an artist usually puts his signature. Rabindranath also put his signature on his creations either in Bengali or English, or both. Rabindranath signed 903 paintings in Bengali, 53 in English, and two both in Bengali and English. Surprisingly enough Rabindranath did not put his signature in as many as 615 paintings. The signatures have a good deal of variations (Table 5). He signed "Rabindra" in Bengali in 571 paintings and "Sri Rabindra" in 299 (33.11%) paintings. According to Prabhatkumar, Tagore's biographer, Rabindranath stopped writing "Sri" in August 1932 in his literary works. But he continued to write "Sri Rabindra" in his paintings. Later on Rabindranath stopped writing "Sri" in his paintings also¹⁰. There was a great variation in his signatures. Of course, as many as 571 paintings bear his signature as Rabindra. In the remaining 332 paintings 10 variations of his signatures are seen.

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Places of painting

Rabindranath traveled throughout the world. He used to write the name of the place and the date in his writings. But in the case of paintings and drawings, in most cases he did not mention the date and the place. During the study it was observed that Rabindranath mentioned places of paintings only in 48 cases out of 1573 paintings, of which 29 (Table 6) places are in India.

Dates on paintings

Absence of dates in as many as 1150 paintings has hindered the possibility of generating a chronological table. Tagore's paintings lack dates in 1150 cases. It may be noted from the available dates that the first painting was drawn on 15th March 1929 and last one on 3rd November 1939. From this it cannot be concluded with certainty the dates of Rabindranath's first painting and the last painting. One interesting feature that emerges from the available dates on Tagore paintings is that sometimes Rabindranath created more than one painting in a day. On 25 October 1934, and 7 November 1935 he created five paintings on each day; and on 28 June 1938 he created six paintings.

Table 4—Works on different Mediums other than paper			
Sl. no.	Medium	No. of paintings	Percentage
1	Visva-Bharati News ⁹	12	24.490
2.	Card	9	18.367
3.	Silk	6	12.245
4.	Wood	5	10.204
5.	Wooden box	5	10.204
6.	Wooden board	4	8.163
7.	Varnished paper	2	4.082
8.	Pasted card	2	4.082
9.	Glazed paper	1	2.041
10.	Exercise book	1	2.041
11.	Backside of a letter	1	2.041
12.	Pasted paper	1	2.041
	Total	49	100.00

Table 5-Variations of Bengali and English signatures of Rabindranath

Sl. no.	Bengali signatures	No. of paintings	Percentage
1.	"Rabindra"	571	63.234
2.	"Sri Rabindra"	299	33.112
3.	"Rabindranath"	13	1.440
4.	" Sri Rabindranath Thakur"	9	0.997
5.	"Rabindranath Thakur"	5	0.554
6.	"Rabindra" and also "Ra Tha"	1	0.111
7.	"Sri Rabindra" and "Rabindra"	1	0.111
8.	"Ra Tha"	1	0.111
9.	"Rabi Dada"	1	0.111
10.	"Ra Tha" and "Sri Rabindranath Tagore"	1	0.111
11.	"Sri Rabindra" and "Rabindranath Tagore"	1	0.111
	Total	903	100.00
	Variations of English Signature	s of Rabindranath	
1.	"Rabindranath"	24	45.283
2.	"Rabindra"	18	33.962
3.	"Rabindranath Tagore"	09	16.981
4.	"Sri Rabindra"	02	3.774
	Total	53	100.00

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Table 6—Indian places in paintings				
	Sl. no.	Place	No. of paintings	Percentage
	1.	Adihar	11	37.932
	2.	Santiniketan	7	24.138
	3.	Hyderabad	5	17.242
	4.	Mongpu	1	3.448
	5.	Darjeeling	1	3.448
	6.	Chandannagar	1	3.448
	7.	Jorasanko	1	3.448
	8.	Kalingpong	1	3.448
	9.	Delhi	1	3.448
		Total	29	100.00

Titles of paintings

Rabindranath gave titles to his paintings only in 46 cases as indicated in Table 7. All these titles are in Bengali. The table also provides the themes and sizes of the paintings. Rabindranath used various sizes of canvas for his paintings. The largest painting is of 70.5 x 78 cm and the smallest size painting is of 8 x 3 cm. The maximum number of paintings is of the size of 25.5 x 35.5 cm.

Discussion

It is clear from the study that Rabindranath created a good number of drawings and paintings in a short span of 12 years (15 March 1929 to 3 November 1940) on different themes, with various colour combinations. Tagorean pictures include figures of different shapes and forms, human faces, head study, landscapes, birds, animals, nudes, etc. Every picture has its own childlike imaginary rhythmic speciality. Regarding the head study, the sculptor Marguerite Milward remarked, "Perhaps the heads attract me the most, faces of every shape, sometimes only eyes that haunt and follow me out of the dark. Here is a portrait perhaps, very soft and flat in colour, a shape of hair, oval face and smiling mouth. A dream indeed weird and beautiful"¹¹. Vossische Zeitung's observation at the Berlin exhibition dated 16 July 1930 is-"New visions were seized in his pictures that descend to the depth, to the origin, of which the reality of the world is only a feeble copy, reflected light. Animals play a great part in them, but not those from the zoo, but those who alarm us in black nightmares. The way Tagore coloured these monkeys, tigers, vultures and marauders, displays the educated sensitive taste of oldest culture; radish brownish yellowish tones that

ate full of coloured life often contrast with the black background that plays an important part- it is the night of dream. We meet with dark harmonies of the deep mystery, from where the objects often emerge with light outlines" ¹².

For painting, Rabindranath mainly used ink (41.51%). But single or various combinations of pen ink, waterproof ink, water colour, crayon, poster colour, pastel, pencil, vegetable colour etc., were used mainly on paper (96.88%). Whatever medium Rabindranath used "his colours are scattered through nature"¹³. Regarding role of lines with different medium in paintings Rabindranath had deep feelings as he narrated in his speech in London India Society—"It interests me deeply to watch how line finds their life and character, as their connection with each other develops in varied cadences, and how they begin to speak in gesticulations. I can imagine the universe to be a universe of lines"¹⁴.

Conclusion

The analysis shows the variety of colours, themes, sizes, dates, etc., of Tagore paintings and drawings. However, it is difficult to explain why Rabindranath began painting at the age of sixty-seven. There are many guesses, including his declining reputation, conflicting ideologies and fear of death. Nandalal Bose's remarked, "majority of the artists begin the creative processes with the subject or idea..., but Rabindranath, it seems, often begins creating even before the subject has taken any conscious form in his mind. This might easily lead one to suppose that mere craftsmanship or mere architectural design or the mere effect of colours were his end, but when the

Table 7—Titles and sizes of Tagore's paintings						
Sl. no.	Title	Theme	Size in CM.	Date		
1.	"Suo Rāni Duo Rāni"	Flower study	21.5 X 33			
2.	"Jantur juju"		42 X 9.5	17.11.193		
3.	"Chandraloke"	Composition	25 X 31.5	March 1931		
4.	"Chāndar Khāta"	Zoomorphic form	14.6 X 23			
5.	"Galpa-Salpa"	Group of figures	21 X 29	Sept 1940		
6.	"Chitralipi"		13.2 X 20.5			
7.	"Baibāhik"	Standing figure	17 X 20			
8.	"Consoler"		20.5 X 35.5			
9.	"Pollarām"	Man with a stick	21.5 X 36.4			
10.	"Nara bud bud"		18.5 X 23			
11.	"Hāsi"	Head of an animal	11 X 19			
12.	"Gandi Sang-dung"	Zoomorphic form	17 X 21			
13.	"Sandhān"	Animal form	11.2 X 14.5			
14.	"Minati"	Dog	12.8 X 18.8			
15.	"Bholānāth"	Figure	13.5 X 22			
16.	"Utkata-danti"		14 X 25	7.11.1936		
17.	"Pāndeji"	Head study	13 X 17.5			
18.	"Byasta"	Human figure	14 X 19			
19.	"Strir bon"	Female figure	13 X 18.5			
20.	"Eskul Arano"	Face of a boy	14.3 X 17			
21.	"Mejo Bau"	Female figure	17 X 21			
22.	"Neyamat Darji"	Face of a man	11 x 19.5			
23.	"Pachamba"	Female figure	11.2 X 19			
24.	"Benu"	Figure	13.5 X 23.2			
25.	"Sakal Atta"	Reclined figure	13 X 16.5			
26.	"Mokter"	Illustration for "Se"	13 X 18.2			
27.	"Adhkhānā Bel"	Illustration for Khāpchhādā	12 X 17.5			
28.	"Khudirām"	Sketch of a boy	12 X 21.5			
29.	"Dāmodar Seth"	Man in profile-illustration for Khāpchhādā	11 X 20	6.11.1936		
30.	"Pencho"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	12.5 X 19.5			
31.	"Matilāl Nandi"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	10.6 X 15.7			
32.	"Narahari Sharmā"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	7.5 X 14.5			
33.	"Kabi Ādhunik"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	16 X 21	1936		
34.	"Rānnār sab thik"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	12 X 16			
35.	"Bādsa"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	16 X 19.5			
36.	"M.Sc."	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	8 X 13			
37.	"Chhoto Bau"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	16 X 19.5			
38.	"Sindh kata"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	16 X 20.2			
39.	"Paltār khudu"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	16 X 20			
40.	"Bāneshwar"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	16 X 20			
41.	"Mukh dheke"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	16 X 20			
42.	"Neyāmat darji"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	16 X 20			
43.	"Dāktār"	Illustration for <i>Khāpchhādā</i>	16 X 20			
44.	"Sirāj"	*	16.2 X 25			
45.	"Ālu"		17.3 X 23			
46.	"Aluke"	Mask like face	22 X 30	16.4.40		

picture is complete we discover all the essential constituents of a work of art in it, all blended in one subject and pervaded by that rhythm of life which the hand of genius alone can impart. That is why his paintings are always real, though rarely realistic¹⁵. Actually it is not realistic, but "his art is mainly symbolic-whether it is poetry, or music, or dance, or painting... Even the portraits were the symbols of abstract qualities"¹⁶. Yeat's opinion on Tagoreana can be applicable to Tagore paintings and drawings as well. He had said, "Most persons write so that if you were to detach a sentence from its context, it would have no meaning. With Tagore's writing, however, it is just the other way round. Almost any sentence will stand by itself- almost any clause. The more you study his compositions, the more significant do they become. They grow upon you'17. A more realistic view may be "his artistic language and skills were limited, but within those limitations he created a very personal form of modernism with the power to disturb and astonish"18. His paintings may not follow Bradford's law, but it does follow the dictum, a few accounts for the lion's share.

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