



Centre for Comparative Literature
Bhasha Bhavana
Visva-Bharati

cordially invites you to

CARCA: EXERCISE IN COMPARATIVISM

**Topic: Select Song-Texts from the English *Gitanjali* and their
Bangla Originals: Issues in Text, Translation and Performance**



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Date: 27.08.2025

Time: 11 AM

Venue: Room No. 305

Bhasha Bhavana



Abstract

Gitanjali is a unique text because of the multi-genericity projected by its title and subtitle in the Macmillan edition, namely, *Song-offerings which are also prose-poems*. The intimacy, if not indistinguishability, of the song and the poem in Indian poetics is of course provenanced by *Natyashastra*. So, the English *Gitanjali* is already an inter-media translation, and not just an interlingual one. It entails a transcreation from rhymed verse and often rhymed, structured song, to poetic or lyric prose with its own looser musicality. It is interesting to explore whether the rhapsodic, i.e. performative quotient was a priority with either Tagore or his editor-collaborator Yeats in the project that *Gitanjali* became. One would imagine so, in view of the particular strengths of the book highlighted by Yeats in his Introduction. The distinction made by Yeats between glossy coffee table books and the anthem-like liquidity of *Gitanjali* helps us understand where exactly Tagore's poem-songs struck him as having the promise of the classic. The people's classic, then, is not one that remains decorative or awe-inspiring in a distancing way, but one that is embraced by the body of the people across generations, by the voice, and the soul of people at large, not of an elite few. This formal liminality is pivotal to Yeats's argument.

The question one is inclined to ask is whether *Gitanjali* as a people's classic is a project duly accomplished in its own time and the decades following, or a yet unfinished project presenting newer challenges in *our* time. This question acquires relevance in view of the continued debates over the cultural ownership of Tagore, especially his songs today.

The proposed presentation will juxtapose various translations and renditions of select song numbers that find place in the English *Gitanjali* to substantiate the above contention.

