

# 'Sanskrit Yantra' Press and Bharatchandra's 'Annadamongal': In Search of Real Editor of the Verse

## Abstract

It is needless to say that 'Annadamongal' is a famous verse composed by Bharatchandra in the history of Bengali literature in 18<sup>th</sup> century. Bharatchandra wrote this in 1752-53 under the auspices of Krishnachandra Roy, king of Nadia. Since then numerous manuscripts of the verse were found over the next century. In the year 1816 'Annadamongal' was first published in printed form with illustrations by Gangakishore Bhattacharya.<sup>1</sup> But this edition was not edited perfectly. Next to Gangakishore's edition several new editions of the verse had been published but most of them were full of printing mistakes and wide range of textual differences. In 1847 a correct and reliable edition of 'Annadamongal' was published from 'Sanskrit Yantra' press which was set up under the joint venture of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and his friend Madanmohan Tarkalankar.<sup>2</sup> The 'Sanskrit Yantra' edition had been edited on original manuscript of 'Annadamongal' preserved in the court of Nadiaraj at Krishnagar. There is a rumour that Annadamongal was edited by Vidyasagar based on its original manuscript. But the contemporary governmental records substantiate that Madanmohan Tarkalankar, a partner of the press, was its actual editor. In this paper I have tried to find out the true story behind the hearsay.

**Keywords:** Annadamongal, Bharatchandra, Vidyasagar, Madanmohan Tarkalankar, Sanskrit Yantra Press, Fort William College, Sanskrit College, G.T.Marshall.

## Introduction

'Annadamongal', written by Bharatchandra, was a brilliant literary work of 18<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. Outstanding craftsmanship of the poet and the lucidity of the verse led it to achieve its adorability among different kinds of readers in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal after its first publication (printed) in 1816. Even N.B. Hallhad used many lines of the verse as example in his book entitled 'A Grammar of the Bengal Language' published in 1778.<sup>3</sup> For its popularity and usefulness 'Annadamongal' was included in the syllabus of Bengali language in Fort William College.<sup>4</sup> In 1847 the verse was published as the first initiative of 'Sanskrit Yantra' Press by Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and his associate Madanmohan Tarkalankar, professor of the then Calcutta Sanskrit College. Madanmohan was the chief editor of the book. But his name was not printed on the title page. That is why a myth had been buzzing over the years that Vidyasagar was the editor of the verse. Many of his biographers mentioned him to be the editor of 'Annadamongal'. But Jogendranath Vidyabhusan, son-in-law of Madanmohan Tarkalankar, was the only man who pointed out that none but Madanmohan was the actual editor of the 'Annadamongal' though he had no supporting documents to establish the fact. After a century Arabinda Guha was the first to find out some contemporary governmental papers which explicates that Madanmohan was the real editor of 'Annadamongal'.

## Review of Literature

In 1871 Jogendranath Vidyabhusan composed a biography of Madanmohan Tarkalankar entitled 'kabibar Madanmohan Tarkalankarer Jibonchorit O Tad Grantha Samalochona' which displays a brief account of Madanmohan's life and work. There the writer pointed out Madanmohan to be the editor of 'Annadamongal'. In his book 'Vidyasagar Jeebonchorit O Vramaniras' Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna rendered a concise description how 'Sanskrit Yantra' press was established. In 1971 Arabinda Guha edited a book named 'Unpublished Letters of Vidyasagar' where he proved that Madanmohan was the real editor of 'Annadamongal'. Asis khashagir in his edited book 'Shishusiksha' (2009) discussed about the 'Sanskrit Yantra'



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press and the publication of 'Annadamongal'. Biswanath Roy in his essay 'Annadamongaler Sampadak Madanmohan Tarkalankar' ('Madanmohan Tarkalankar Smarakgrantha', edited by Nirmal Das in 2008) discussed about Madanmohan Tarkalankar as the editor of 'Annadamongal'. The article 'Madanmohan tarkalankar', written by Dilip Mazumder and published in 'Bonami (2017, September issue), depicts the life and work of Madanmohan Tarkalankar.

#### Objective of the Study

This paper investigates the following questions:

1. Why was the verse 'Annadamongal' famous at that time?
2. What was the background of establishing the press—'Sanskrit Yantra'?
3. Why is 'Annadamongal' published as the first book from 'Sanskrit Yantra'?
4. Who was the actual editor of the verse—Madanmohan or Vidyasagar?

Though being written in 18<sup>th</sup> century, 'Annadamongal' held its popularity over the next century. I have already mentioned that the poem was first published by Gangakishore Bhattacharya in 1816. This was a significant phenomenon in the history of Bengali literature as the book was the first printed book with illustrations.<sup>5</sup> The verse is comprised of three volumes—'Annadamongal', 'kalikamongal' or 'Vidyasundar' and 'Annapurnamongal' or 'Mansingha'. The first volume describes mythological episode of Shiva and Durga whereas the second one depicts the mortal love-story of Vidya and Sundar. The third volume contains historical perspective of Mughal era in Bengal. The story of Vidya-Sundar was more popular than the other two volumes as it was very close to the real life of Bengalis and thus became the matter of public interest.

Bharat Chandra made the verse dissimilar from other 'Mongal kabyas' by his distinct and unique craftsmanship. He introduced his verse as 'Nutan Mongal' i.e. a new effort among conventional 'Mongal kabyas'. This made the verse famous among the people. Reverend Wenger remarked in this respect as follows:

Among all the popular Bengali books Annada Mangal is the one most entitled to a prominent notice, for various reasons. It probably is the greatest favourite with the middle and upper classes, especially with the fair sex ; and may be regarded, upon the whole, as a mere creditable specimen of elegant literature than any other work of genuine Bengali origin...

Bharat Chandra appears to have been possessed of a true poetical genius. His work contains poetry of almost all kinds, and in all metres; and some of the pieces are really beautiful. Nothing can be more pleasing than the cadence of certain of his verses; and he

displays a wonderful mastery of all the sources of the language. In the narrative part, however he introduces a very large number of Hindustani words; and many of the Bengali term have ceased to be intelligible...<sup>6</sup>

'Annadamongal' was very popular at that time. Even the women of conservative elite families enjoyed the love-story of the prince Sundar and princess Vidya.<sup>7</sup> Romantisism and sexual elements of this volume of 'Annadamongal' achieved a highly appreciation by so called Bengali *Babu*-Society. Pramatha Chowdhury, the renowned critic, remarked regarding the verse as follows:

The whole of our poetic literature was intimately connected with religion, and thereby had assumed not only a semi-religious, but almost a sectarian character.

But there is one striking exception to this rule. There is a unique book, the Vidya Sundar of Bharat Chandra- unique both in its merits and faults,- which marks the birth of secular spirit in our literature... the Vidya Sundar is a love story, novel in verse. And the love he treats of has nothing spiritual or ideal about it, but is of the common mundane passion which lends itself to humorous and even indelicate treatment.<sup>8</sup>

In the first half of nineteenth century many poets followed the poetic ideal of Bharatchandra's 'Annadamongal'.<sup>9</sup> Especially they were highly influenced by 'Vidya-Sundar', the romantic love-story. We can see that Taracharan Das's 'Manmatha kabya', Muni Eradat's 'kuranga- bhanu', Madanmohan Tarkalankar's 'Vasabadutta', Umacharan Trivedi's 'Madanmadhuri' which were written under the influence of Bharatchandra's poetic style. This proves the popularity and supremacy of 'Annadamongal' at that time.

In the history of printed book 'Annadamongal' deserves a special mention because of its extensive numbers of editions. Due to its massive popularity among the common people many presses initiated to print the book. Even the publishers of *Battala* published several editions of the verse though most of them were full of printing mistakes. The revised edition of the verse compiled according to the actual manuscript preserved in the court of Nadiaraj was first published from the 'Sanskrit Yantra' Press in 1847. The press took a significant role at that time. It was the joint venture of Vidyasagar and Madanmohan. They took many initiatives for the welfare of the society when they had been working at Sanskrit college. At that time they had planned to establish a press for publishing books. The idea of setting up the press first sprouted in the mind of Madanmohan. Then he informed Vidyasagar about the matter without delay. But there was a hindrance to set up the press as they had not enough money with

them. Under such circumstance Vidyasagar borrowed 600 rupees from his common friend Nilmadhab Mukhopadhyay and handed it to Madanmohan. After that Madanmohan purchased the press and it was named 'Sanskrit Yantra'. Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, younger brother of Vidyasagar gave an account of the press.<sup>10</sup> According to his description Vidyasagar and Madanmohan were worried about how to repay the money of Nilmadhab babu. At that time an idea came in Vidyasagar's mind. He informed Madanmohan that they might proceed to G.T.Marshall, secretary of Fort William College for obtaining tender for the printing of book. One day Vidyasagar went to Marshall and asked for the tender regarding the printing of book. In response Marshall told vidyasagar that Bharatchandra's 'Annadamongal' had been included in the syllabus of Bengali department in Fort William College. But the editions of the book available in the market were full of printing mistakes and printed in bad quality of paper. If they published a correct edition of the verse in good quality of paper, he might consider for purchasing one hundred books at the rate of six rupees per book. Vidyasagar readily accepted his proposal and collected the real manuscript of 'Annadamongal' preserved in the court of Nadiaraj. Then he published the manuscript by editing it and at last repaid the debt of Nilmadhab babu.

By this account of Shambhuchandra most of the people think that Vidyasagar was the editor of 'Annadamongal'. But the real fact is something different. Arabinda Guha was the first to prove that Vidyasagar was not the editor of the 'Annadamongal'. He remarked:

Vidyasagar, when he was employed as Assistant Secretary in the Sanskrit College, set up the Sanskrit Press jointly with Madanmohan Tarkalankar. Bharatchandra's Annadamangal, published in 1847, was the first book printed in Sanskrit Press. Annadamongal does not contain the name of its editor.

It is generally believed that Annadamongal was edited and published by Vidyasagar. But contemporary Government records give a different account.<sup>11</sup>

He collected a letter of Madanmohan written to G.T Marshall in which Madanmohan said:

I presume you are aware of that of all the literary works hitherto written in Bengalee those of the poet Bhaurut Chunder are alone considered the most classical and remains unrivalled in excellence up to this day. It is however great to be regretted that the editions of these works at present in circulation differ so materially from the author appears in several places to have been either totally or partially destroyed.

Having fortunately obtained the author's manuscript and thinking it very desirable that there should be

correct edition of such a valuable production, I have the honor to state, should you be pleased to subscribe for 100 copies of the same that I shall be happy to undertake to print.

I beg herewith to submit a specimen of the paper and printing for your approval. The work will contain about 500 pages and be valued of 6 rupees per copy. (General Department Proceedings No. 33, 9 June 1847)<sup>12</sup>

Here it is clear that it was only Madanmohan who gave the proposal of publishing 'Annadamongal' to Marshall. Even he attached a specimen of printing copy and paper with the letter and mentioned the probable quantity of the book and its price. After receiving the letter Marshall became convinced of the said proposal of Madanmohan and granted it for recommendation. He forwarded the proposal of Madanmohan to F.J. Halliday, secretary of the Government of Bengal with a recommendation letter as follows:

I have the honor to forward for submission to the hon'ble the Deputy Governor of Bengal, copy of a letter from Mudun Mohun Surma, professor of General Literature in the Sanskrit College together with a specimen of a Bengalee poem which he proposes to publish.

Considering the celebrity of the work referred to and the imperfect manner in which it has before been edited and printed, I would beg to recommended that the Government should encourage the pundit who is highly qualified for the undertaking by purchasing 100 copies at the price fixed, namely, 6 rupees per copy. (General department proceedings no. 32, 9 June 1847)<sup>13</sup>

Here it is noteworthy that Marshall described Madanmohan as 'the pundit highly qualified'. It proves that Madanmohan was well-known to Marshall as he was once a professor of Fort William College. Marshall knew very well the capability of Madanmohan as a scholar. That's why he recommended for Madanmohan to the Government. However, the Government responded to Marshall as follows:

I am directed to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated the 7<sup>th</sup> instant with enclosures, and to inform you that the Deputy Governor has been pleased to authorized you to purchase 100 copies of the work therein mentioned at a total cost of company's rupees 600-0-0. (General Department Proceedings No. 34, 9 June 1847)<sup>14</sup>

Here it is clear that the Government was convinced by the letter Marshall wrote. They agreed to sanction the tender of the book for Fort William College. In response Marshall wrote to F.J. Halliday, secretary of the Government of Bengal as follows:

“One hundred copies of “Annoda Mungul” subscribe for by Government order dated 9<sup>th</sup> June 1847 having been received into the college library, I have the honor to transmit Mudan Muhan Shurma’s bill for the same amounting to 600 Rupees with a request that the payment of the same may be sanctioned by the Hon’ble the Deputy Governor of Bengal. (General Department Proceeding No.32, 13 October 1847)<sup>15</sup>

After that the Sub-treasurer was ordered by the Government to pay the bill for 100 copies of ‘Annadamongal’—

I am directed to request that you will pay on presentation a Bill from Mudan Mohan Shurma amounting to CO.’s Rs.600 being the charge for 100 copies of a Bengallee Poem “Annoda Mungul” purchased by Government for the use of the college of Fort William. (General Department Proceeding No. 33, 13 October 1847)<sup>16</sup>

#### Conclusion

The above mentioned documents prove that none but Madanmohan Tarkalankar was the editor of ‘Annadamongal’. In his book entitled ‘kabibar Madanmohan Tarkalankarer Jibon chorit O Tad Grantha Samalochona’ (1871) Jogendranath Vidyabhushan, son-in-law of Madanmohan, remarked that Bharatchandra’s ‘Annadamongal’ was published from ‘Sanskrit Yantra Press’ after being corrected by

Madanmohan. In spite of that most of the biographers of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar considered him to be the editor of ‘Annadamongal.’ This became a myth over the years after years. In 20<sup>th</sup> century Arabinda Guha was the first to prove by the governmental documents that Madanmohan Tarkalankar was the real editor of the ‘Annadamongal’

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