

**World Literature Without English:  
*Biswasahitya Granthamala* -  
A Case of the Making of Children's Literature**

**Sonali Ganguly**

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**Abstract**

This paper is an extensive study of the origin and evolution of children's literature in Odia. In this paper, I intend to examine the major issues associated with the creation of children's world literature. It is the study of the entire process of production, publication, circulation, and reception of literary works in the world literary market, followed by its significant role in imbibing a positive reading habit in the children. The paper proceeds to discuss the strategies involved in developing the children's literature for a specific set of readers. I would also elucidate the existing cultural, linguistic and literal hegemony of English in the world literary market which demands a serious attention. *Biswasahitya Granthamala* is a remarkable contribution in the field of developing a new trend of literature and nurturing the reading habits. The selected world authors and the literary

pieces across the world not only portray the global culture but also generates the adaptability and the thinking ability of the child to comprehend the global issues.

**Keywords:** Child literature, Globalization, Production, Reception, Circulation, Translation, Biswasahitya

## **Introduction**

Literature uplifts an individual morally and provides rich cultural nourishment along with a deep insight into the perception and comprehension of the global issues. The rapid accelerating impact of globalization has marked its footprints in every sphere of life including the field of literature. It has not only ensured the growth of world literary market but also had a manifold impact on the production, publication, circulation, and reception of literature across the world. The most significant impact of globalization is the increasing global dominance of the English language which implies linguistic hegemony. It not only deprives the right to study and learn the local language rather instigates to adapt to the linguistic domination that leads to mind control. The readers are exposed to the world literature but through English language textbooks which raises a matter of concern. The literature which consists the flavor of the world reaches to the readers only in one language i.e. English. Gayatri Spivak too expressed her concern regarding this threat of monolingualism and said, “English language world literature textbooks may become pervasive in the future.” Another issue that demands serious attention is the availability of online resources that affects the reading habit of this generation to a huge extent which is viewed as ‘the death of literature due to the shifting interest from reading to the internet’ by Wang Ning, a Chinese anthologist and translator of world literary texts (Ning, 173)’. The children and the students are inclined more towards the technical education pushing literature aside. This is a concern which has also been discussed by the experts. The possible solution of this issue is in the hands of the academicians as perceived by David Damrosch and Martin Puchner. They discussed the necessity of designing the course curriculum through which we could expect a radical change in the expansion of the reading horizon of the students.

## ***Biswasaitya Granthamala***

*Biswasaitya Granthamala* deals with these above-mentioned issues. It was the dream project of three great lovers of literature and thinkers. Sri Abhiram Mohapatra, Late Sridhar Mohapatra, and Sridhar Das first visualized the possibility of the compilation of world literary texts as Biswasahitya Granthamala in abridged Odia translation with an intention to develop a new reading habit among the children. It served a manifold objective. First, it is a way to introduce the culture and history of several countries across the globe in an abridged Odia version and secondly, It was expected to expand the reader's horizon and prepare them for the better assimilation and understanding of the global culture and respond to the global issues.

## **Origin and Evolution of Children's literature**

Children's literature as a genre received attention of the authors, scholars and researchers in the last phase of 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The origin of children's literature can hardly be traced exactly but Adrienne Rivera (2017) and M.O. Greenby (2014) in their respective works have emphasized that it has passed through several stages of evolution. The origin can be traced back to the oral folklore tradition, when, there was no books for children. For instance, children in India grew up listening to the stories of Lord Krishna or Lord Rama and other mythological characters, imagining the strength and valor of the great warriors of the time. The primary objective of those stories was to morally educate the children. Entertainment or amusement through stories was never thought of the. In Europe, it was in 1634, the first collection of folktale including 'Cindrella' and 'Rapunzel' was made available (Greenby, 2014). The children's literature secured a place in the publishing industry by the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century. The journey from the traditional oral age to the golden age is elucidated in the form of a timeline below that clearly reflects the gradual changes of trends in children's literature and the remarkable contribution of the authors.

### **Timeline for Children's Literature**

#### **16th Century-Oral Tradition**

#### **17th Century-Traditional Oral Literature**

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- 1634 Giambattista Basile's *The Pentamerone*
- 1656 John Cotton's *Spiritual milk for Boston Babes*
- 1658 John Amos Comenius' *The Visible world in Pictures*
- 1687 Nathaniel Crouch's *Winter Evenings Entertainment*
- 1671-72 James Janeway's *A Token For Children*
- 1712 *A Little Bok for Little Children*

**18th Century- Morality Tales (Didacticism/ realism)**

- 1730 *A Description of Three Hundred Animals*
- 1740 Turning Point**
- 1744 Mary Cooper's *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book*
- 1744 John Newbery's *A little pretty pocket*
- 1746 Mary Homebred's *The Christmas Box*
- 1749 Sarah Fielding's *The Governess*
- 1751-52 Newbery's *The Lilliputian magazine*
- 1765 *The History of little Goody Two-shoes* – Newbery
- 1783 Dorothy Kilner's *The life and Perambulations*
- 1796 Maria Edgeworth's *The purple Jar*

**19th century - Golden Age (Fantasy Tales)**

**1800 Rapid Expansion of Children's Literature**

- 1823 *The Brother Grimm's fairy tales*
- 1846 *Anderson's Fairy tales*
- 1851 Ruskin Bond's *The king of the golden river*
- 1856 Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
- 1857 Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays*

- 1863 Charles Kingsley's *The water- babies: A fair tale for a land baby*
- 1871 George macdonald's *At the Back of the North wind*
- 1874 Christina Rossetti's *speaking likeness*
- 1879 Mrs Ewing's *Jackanapes*
- 1888 Oscar wilde's *The selfish Giant*
- 1894 William Morris' *The well at the world's end*
- 1895 H.G.Wells' *The Time Machine*

**20th Century**

- 1900 L.Frank Baum's *The wonderful wizard of Oz*
- 1902 Beatrix Patter's *Tale of Peter Rabbit*
- 1902 E. Nesbit's *Five Children and it*
- 1904 J.M. Barrie's *Pater pan*
- 1908 Kenneth Grahame's *The wind in the willows*

The above timeline displays the broad division of children's literature into three phases. The first phase was the oral tradition followed by the initiatives taken by a few authors to create rhyme books and picture books for children. The year 1740 can be marked as the turning point. The entire 18th century laid emphasizes on the morality tales intended to teach the behavioral and ethical lessons. The didactic and realistic form of literature dominated till the 19th century when the fantasy stories received momentum and the morality plays were openly criticized for limiting and suppressing the imagination of the children. The romantic authors in this phase followed 'instruction with delight' principle and nurtured the ways of thinking, beliefs, norms, moral and religious codes etc. Gradually the complex issues of psychology were also introduced by Maria Edgeworth. The readers could imagine themselves in the protagonist and learn to rectify their mistakes by perceiving the action of the protagonist.

Biswasahitya Granthamala included the abridged version of several novels which fall under both the categories of morality tales and fantasy tales. The stories of *David Copperfield*, *Oliver*

*Twist*, and *Robinson Crusoe* portrayed the realistic phases of life. The childhood struggle of Copperfield and Oliver evokes pity in the readers and the other stories such as *Palli Samaj*, *Chhama Atha guntha*, *Biraj Bahu* portray the realistic picture of a society and its culture. The stories are also selected that acknowledges the core genre of children's literature i.e. fantasy or fairytale literature. The authors create a make-believe world that partially resembles the real world we inherit. *Alice in the wonder world*, *Gulliver's Travel*, *Anderson's fairy tales* and *Aeshop's fables* are some of the examples. Apart from these, the stories such as *The Time Machine*, *Man on the surface of Moon*, *The Invisible Man* has received popularity as a new genre i.e. Science fiction. Although, the objective of the morality tales and the fantasy tales vary and both the genres were found to be equally influential, the consistent competition between the two continued resulting into the hybrid coexistence of didacticism and fantasy in 19th century. This prepared the ground for the great authors of children's literature. Indian folklore is also rich and imaginative that remains the most interesting source for children's literature such as the *Panchatantra*, *Jataka Stories*, *Puranas*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and many more. Authors such as Rabindranath Tagore and R.K. Narayan had remarkable contributions in the development of the children's literature.

The argument of the paper is based on the study of the development of children's world literature and its reading in Odia language.

### **Biswasahitya Granthamala**

The Western impact on Odia literature has been the matter of discussion for the scholars. I would like to examine the birth of a new literary trend in Odia literature through translation; re-writing the western literature or possibly re-modeling the texts keeping the existing essence intact meant for specific readers i.e., children. Translation began in Odia literature since the 16th century where the translations of the religious books from Sanskrit to Odia were most prevalent. It was not before the 20th century when the colonial Odisha developed an inclination towards western literature and this interest resulted in the translation of the western literary texts. During this phase, Government took the initiative to establish several national and state institutions such as Commission of Scientific and Technological Terminologies, National Book Trust, Sahitya Academy and Odisha State Bureau of Translation that not only promoted Odia literature but also

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worked for the enrichment of Odia literature through translation. The modern age (20th-21st C) of Odia literature saw the two-fold translation activities and publications. In the early phase of the century, the translators dealt with the Odia translation of the English literary texts whereas the second phase worked on the development of the English translations of the Odia Classics. The leading publication houses such as Oxford University Press, University of California Press, Lark Books, Macmillan India Limited published the English translations of the Odia literary pieces by Gopinath Mohanty, Senapati Fakir Mohan, and many others. In the same phase, there was the emergence of a new genre in form of children's literature. Udaynath Sarangi and Ramakrushna Nanda are some of the remarkable authors of this genre who translated several western and non-western texts into Odia especially for children.

Sahitya Akademi and National Book Trust have their long list of such Odia translations of the western classics and the masterpieces. The translators such as Chittaranjan Das, Sakuntala Balliyar Singh, Prativa Sathpathy, and many others have great contributions in translating the classics, children's literature, Holocaust literature, literary and non-literary texts of the west. Chittaranjan das translated the works of Tolstoy, Sri Aurobindo, Vidyasagar, Rabindranath Tagore and many other authors across the globe in Odia. Mansingh introduced Shakespeare to the Odia readers whereas Shakuntala Balliyarsingh translated the works of Thomas Hardy. Apart from this, several literary texts are translated as part of Govt. undertaken Translation mission. Private publishers such as New Age Publishers, Friends Publishers, Vidyapuri, Orient Blackswan deal with Odia translations. In this context, the contribution of Grantha Mandir through the selected compilation of world literary texts for children is praiseworthy.

### **Seeking and Ensuring Recognition**

To mark the self-recognition in the world forum, translators in Odisha adapted the western texts to match the sensibility and taste of the Odia readers. Later, the Anglo-centric perspective of the translators gave way to a deeper concern with World Literature and chose to translate the British library texts into Odia under the significant initiative taken by Prafulla Das. Under his Guidance, the Nobel Prize-winning books were translated into Odia. The growing concern with world literature was seen in the Biswa Sahitya Granthamala published by Granth Mandir which

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attempted to publish the world classics in an abridged version, meant for the children. It is a remarkable attempt by Grantha Mandir to compile the selective texts of the world authors in abridged Odia translation as Biswasahitya Granthamala which serves a manifold objective. First, it is a way to introduce the culture and history of several countries across the globe in an abridged version. It would expand the reader's horizon and prepare them for the better assimilation and understanding of the global culture and respond to the global issues. The inclusion of 186 books and approximately 800 stories and novels by the world authors in Biswa Sahitya Granthamala can also be considered as a pre-selection of the texts for an anthology of World literature from a modern Indian perspective. If anthologized, it can also be considered as an anthology of world literature in an abridged version for children.

### **Focus on the Reading Interest of the Mass**

Biswasahitya Granthamala addresses the issue of 'the death of literature in the current era of Globalization' and advocates the market demand, especially, the reading interest of the mass with an expectation to find better reception. I had a personal interaction with the owner of the Grantha Mandir, Cuttack, Mr. Manoj Mohapatra. He revealed the perspective behind the publication of Biswasahitya Granthamala. He said- " Great men think alike. Biswa Sahitya Granthamala was the dream project of three literary authors. My father, Sri Abhiram Mohapatra, grandfather Late Sridhar Mohapatra and Sridhar Das first Visualized the possibility of the compilation of world literary texts as Biswa Sahitya. It took lots of effort to finalize the specific texts and the authors keeping in mind their two-fold objective. First, to cover the literature of the countries across the globe to portray the global culture and second to broaden the reading horizon of the children and prepare them with a better knowledge and taste. The most challenging task was to translate the classics and the masterpieces in abridged versions without changing the plot and the essence. Most of the mythological stories and the fairy tales, almost 130 stories were translated by Sridhar Das himself and Abhinav Mohapatra himself requested the concerned translators to take up the responsibility of re-framing the world literary pieces. My father himself was one of the translators who translated 'Dasakumarachrita' and 'Rakta Golapa'". It was the endless effort of 30 translators that made possible the publication of Biswasahitya Granthamala in the year 1965. Since then it has been published and reprinted several times to meet the demand of the market and

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the reading public. The response it received in the market is evident through the selling rate. In the words of Mr. Manoj Mohapatra, “approximately, 100 sets of *Biswasahitya Granthamala* are sold annually since 1970.”

This collection of books can be categorized into two segments. The first segment deals with the ancient classics and the most popular stories of all the time in the second segment such as- Arabian Nights, brother Grimm’s tales, Hans Anderson’s tales, Aesop’s fables, and the fairy tales from France, China, India, Africa, Indonesia and many more. The figure below shows the selection of the texts from different parts of the world which complements the title *Biswasahitya Granthamala* means the Collection of World Literary texts giving the flavor of global culture to the children.

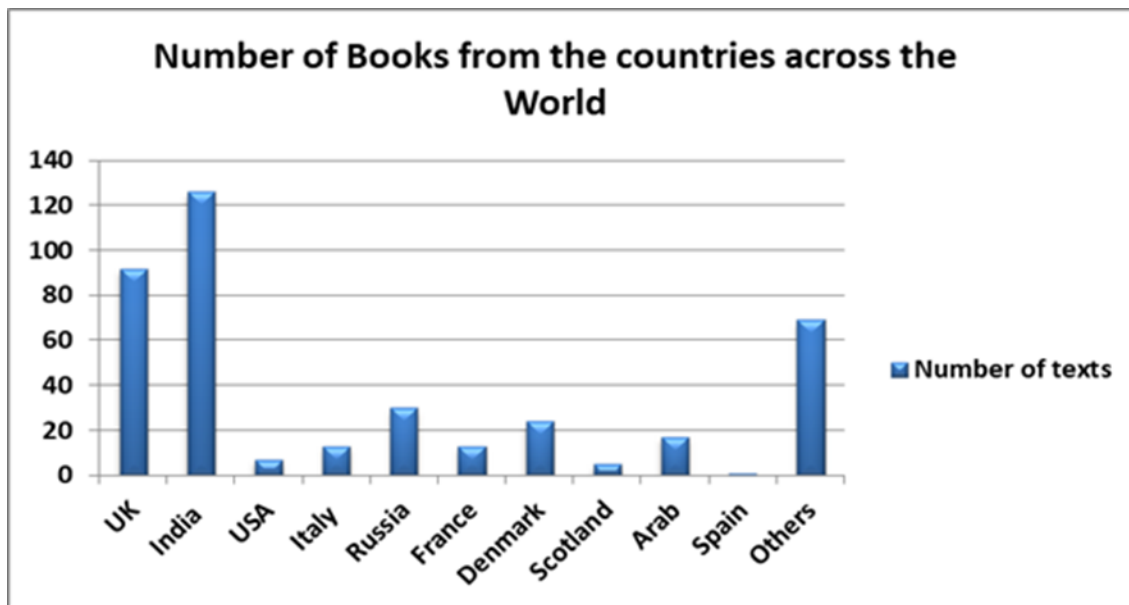


Figure1: Number of books selected from the countries across the globe in *Biswa Sahitya Granthamala*

The above graph depicts that the highest number of texts are being selected from India and the second highest position is acquired by the UK. In the graph, 70 texts are from other countries such as Africa, Indonesia, Greece, Holand, Japan, China, Egypt, Belgium, Paris, Burma, Germany, Rome and many more.

## Strategies to Produce Children's World Literature

The translators of Biswasahitya Granthamala adapted a specific strategy in the adaptation of the voluminous texts to represent the same in the abridged version keeping the storyline and essence intact. The plot structure of each story remains the same with the changes in the events and the details. The preferred themes for the above are- the adventure tales, fairy tales, thriller, detective series, tales of gods and legends, stories of mysterious lands and mythical characters that adorn the stories of children. In some of the books, the translators provided a brief information regarding the original author or the background of the story to help the readers in recognizing the author and understanding the plot simultaneously. Sunanda Kar discussed the religious sentiments attached to Bible before translating the stories of Bible and also compared king Vikramaditya with King Arthur in the preface to make the readers accept the protagonist as expected. Nandakishore Singh in one of the translated books mentioned that his intention was not to depict the replica of the work of the author but was to make the translation, not a translation. The authors such as Jane Austen, William Shakespeare, Senapati Fakirmohan, Premchand, Charles Dickens, H.G.Wells and many more were not introduced as are assumed to be known already whereas some translators gave brief introduction about the original author of the texts such as Joseph Conrad, Bankim Chandra, Sir Henry Rider Haggard and many more.

Arthur Conan Doyle had 63 stories translated and included in this children's literature. There are many such authors whose single story or novel is also taken into consideration keeping in mind the specific theme these books deal with. The stories of the authors such as Louisa May Alcott, Wilkie Collins, Charlotte Bronte, Charles Reade, and Anna Sewell are very less in number. These authors along with few others have been calculated as others in the graph below. The figure below reflects the choice of authors and the number of their works translated as children's literature:

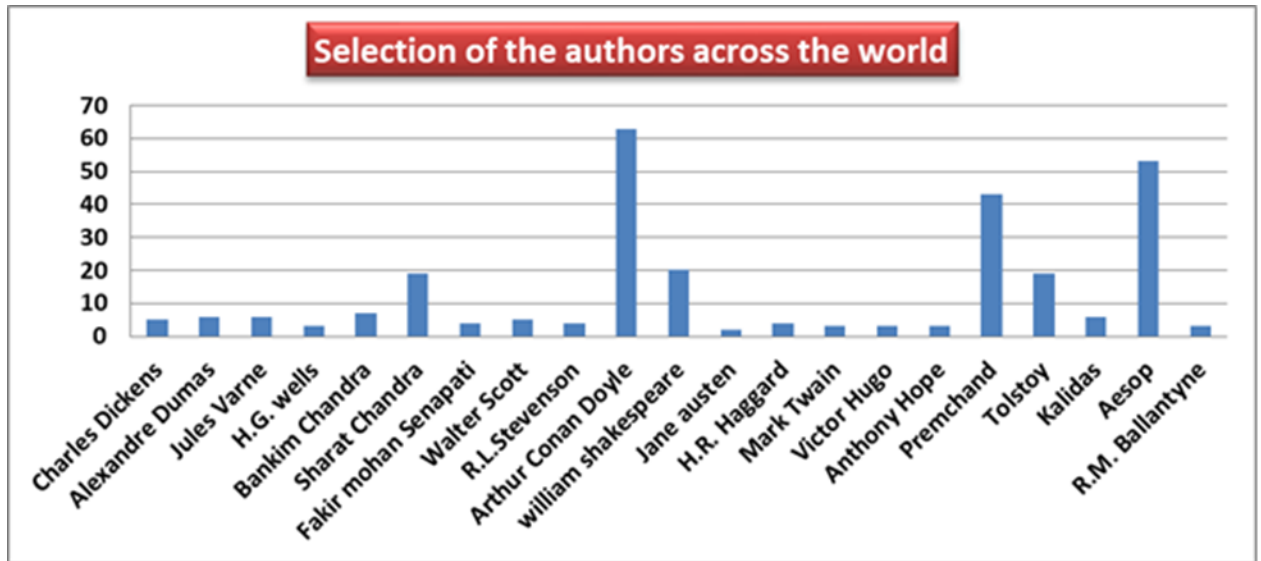


Figure II- Selection of the authors across the world in *Biswa Sahitya Granthamala*

*Biswasahitya Granthamala* is the compilation of the texts from across the world where we also find the compilation of several short stories which cannot be detected as being written by any specific author. The tales of Africa, China, Germany, Ayarland, Indonesia may be the collection of short stories written by multiple authors which are kept under the category of anonymous authors in the above graph.

The immediate readers of this canon of text being the children, it is also an attempt to foresee the inner moral development of the children and the nourishment of the thinking ability to behold the global issues addressed in that text. It would also imbibe the spirit of adaptability within the child. Another remarkable objective of this canon of literary texts is to introduce the world writers across the globe to the children and the literature of different countries starting from Arab to Africa, Indonesia to Italy, and Greece to Japan.

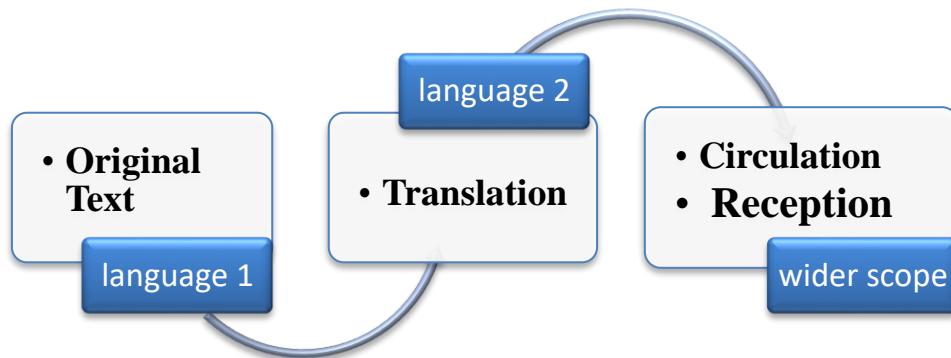
The books also carry the images of few characters, events, lands that bridges the gap between the story and the readers enriching their imagination. The adventures of Sindabad, David Copperfield, Don Quixote carry the images that holds the attention of the readers throughout the story. It prepares the ground for imagination and a better understanding of the plot and the

characters. The gripping effect is apparently visible in the response of the children as Manoj Mahapatra reveals that approximately 100 sets of books are sold annually since 1970.

The use of plain words with simple sentence structures maintains the flow of the stories well. The occasional use of idioms, proverbs, metaphors, personifications makes the literary writing more amusing for the readers. This is evident in the story of *Don Quixote*, *Time Machine*, and the detective stories of Sherlock Homes. The translation attempts to present the storyline to the children but not to translate the complete original text. The social realism in Jane Austen, picture of the rural- colonial set up in Bankim Chandra, Fakir Mohan Senapati, the imaginary world of fantasy in Anderson, the morally developed characters in Charles Dickens, the adventure and detective stories of Jules Verne and Sherlock, the science fiction of H.G. Wells unitedly takes care of the cultural, moral, literal, and ethical nourishment of a child.

### Value and Importance of Translation

The entire study of the making of children’s world literature in Odia would remain incomplete without discussing the importance of translation in increasing the reception of this canon of text. The figure below explains the process of translation and its significant role in the circulation and reception of literary texts.



*Figure 1: The process of translation of texts*

This process gets complicated when it remains under the subjugation of one language in the name of the global connection, and its dominance implicitly indicates the cultural and literal colonialism. It also deprives the children of non-English speaking background to get exposure of

the literature of the countries across the globe. The English Language is at the center of production and circulation of the world literary market that attracts all literary works (Puchner) that surrender to its monopoly. Hence, I propose to reverse the order of the center-margin relationship. It means to reverse the approach to study the literary texts from margin to center. I propose to study the canon of children literature in a marginalized Indian language i.e., Odia.

## Conclusion

Children’s world literature is not always confined to the imaginary and unrealistic world of fantasy. The current scenario demands the exposure of the children to the real world and their understanding of the ethical, moral, cultural, and literal issues across the world. The Universities have taken the initiative to design the course curriculum accordingly and involve the study of Shakespearean plays that in one way or the other portrays the different aspects of human life. The science fiction, the epics, the classics of the ancient time not only enrich the creativity and imagination of the children but also prepare them for a better future. The clash between the western and colonized literature demanding their own literary space also doesn’t remain marginalized anymore. A piece of literature not only provides knowledge but also contributes to the world peace and nourishment of human values. This can be made with the mutual acceptance of the cultural and literary treasure from the whole world. We need to visualize literature not only in English but in several languages to get the real essence of literature. Furthermore, this can also be perceived as an attempt to pinpoint the existing cultural and linguistic hegemony of English; and to foresee the possibility to enhance the reading habits of the readers through *Biswa Sahitya Granthamala* which carries the flavors of different nations and cultures.

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