

## The Press and Registration of Books Act and the bibliographic control of Bengali publications

Dibyendu Paul

Lecturer, Department of Library and Information Science, University of Kalyani, Kalyani-741235, Nadia,  
West Bengal, E-mail: dibyendu.kly@gmail.com

Deals with the role of legal deposit law particularly the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867 and its resultant current bibliographies in bibliographic control of Bengali publications. Issues of comprehensiveness of coverage and currency of inclusion of titles and the publishers' participation in terms of compliance of the provisions of the Act under study are dealt with by means of quantitative analysis of bibliographic records of latest available five annual volumes of the said bibliographies. The results of a survey of regional publishers, exposing their perceptions about the Act and the bibliographies are also reported. Concludes that the resultant bibliography of the said Act should be able to serve the business interest of the publishers in terms of promotion of their titles to sustain the direct flow of bibliographic information into the system of bibliographic control of any level

### Introduction

Bibliographic control means a system of adequate recording of all forms of information materials added to human knowledge everyday. Society needs sufficient bibliographic information at different levels, such as local, national and global.

India, with many languages, has emerged as one of the ten largest book-producing countries in the world. Any bibliographic account of the intellectual output in a specific language, with a rich literary and cultural heritage like Bengali, is significant. The Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867 (PR Act), for procurement of books from the publishers and others, and its resultant bibliographies are playing important roles in bibliographic control of Indian publications in general and Bengali publications in particular.

Understanding the current status of bibliographic activities, the pattern of reflection of titles in current bibliographies and publishers' participation in the system of bibliographic control is necessary for library personnel for the purpose of collection development.

A study of bibliographic records, which appeared in the latest bibliographic sources of books procured under the provision of the PR Act, was carried out to understand

the reflection of Bengali titles in the said bibliographic sources in terms of comprehensiveness of coverage and currency of inclusion of titles. The other objectives are to understand the nature of publishers' participations and their perceptions regarding compliance of the provisions of the legal deposit act.

### Review of literature

Bibliographic control in a multilingual country like India has its own characteristics. There are several works on different aspects of local level bibliographic control and other related features. Dasgupta<sup>1</sup> has discussed the role of National Library, Kolkata as a bibliographic centre to deal with diversified features of multi-language characters. Kochukosy<sup>2</sup> surveyed the main sources available for the printed books in 13 major Indian languages. It was found that except compilation of INB by different language divisions of Central Reference Library, Kolkata, there is no source for contemporary titles in most of the Indian languages. From this survey, it is evident that only half a dozen of the Indian languages have comprehensive guides to their printed materials. The others are still dependent on catalogues, most of which are just checklists, trade lists or book reviews. Moreover, there are languages which do not even have good trade catalogues. Reddy<sup>3</sup> has discussed the history,

descriptions and coverage of the Indian Books in Print, a trade bibliography of English books published in India.

The history of preparation of list of Marathi printed books started since the enactment of PR Act in 1867. Mahajan<sup>4</sup> attempted to describe the efforts made by the *Maratha* bibliographers and organizations like *Shankar Ganesh Date*, *Date Suchi Mandal* and *Rajya Marathi Vikas Sanstha*. But this article did not mention anything about compilation of bibliography of contemporary Marathi books procured under the provisions of Delivery of Books and Newspapers (Public Libraries) Act, 1954 (DB Act) although one of the public libraries at Mumbai has been designated as the repository library under this act. Satyanarayan<sup>5</sup> has discussed about the bibliographic control of Telegu printed books. One part of his work deals with the activities of retrospective bibliographies and the other with the current bibliographies. The recommended list of books compiled by the Book Selection Committee of Directorate of Public Libraries (Andhra Pradesh) for the purchase of books by *Zilla Granthalaya Sanstha* (District Libraries Association) is as much important as the *Nirbachita Pustak Talika* (list of selected books) in West Bengal. The activities for bibliographic control of Urdu publications have been presented in the article of Fatimy<sup>6</sup>. Ghosh<sup>7</sup> has presented a brief and lucid account of bibliographic ventures of printed Bengali books. The bibliographic ventures from the very beginning are covered along with different retrospective initiatives and library catalogues of importance. The current bibliographic activities other than the INB are not so highlighted in this article. In spite of that the article portrays a vivid picture of bibliographic control of printed Bengali books in recent times. The article concludes that attention should be given to capture the current output. This can be done by National Library, Kolkata in association with publishers, and the State Central Library by joining their hands.

Chandrashekharaiiah<sup>8</sup> has dealt with the problems and prospects of bibliographic control of Kanada literature. This Ph. D. work has revealed the “unfortunate proposition that there is no up-to-date, regular and complete bibliographic tool available on Kanada language to cover all the books published in this language”. Paul, in his recent Ph. D. thesis, has dealt with the current state of bibliographic control of Bengali publications by means of quantitative analysis of bibliographic records reflected in various current

bibliographic sources. The main features of the study include the issues of comprehensiveness of coverage and currency of inclusion of Bengali titles in the bibliographies under study<sup>9</sup>.

There are many writings in Bengali too on bibliographic control at different levels. Most of them have dealt with the history, form and format of descriptions of INB. The authors like Basu<sup>10</sup>, Dutta<sup>11</sup>, Ghosh<sup>12</sup> and others have written about the sources of information of Bengali books printed in early period. Ghosh has highlighted the role of newspapers and periodicals in transmission of information of printed Bengali books in earliest period. Basu has presented facts and news about printed Bengali books that appeared in Bengali periodicals in the early period.

Roychowdhury<sup>13</sup> had raised the problems and suggested potential remedies regarding non-availability of source list of books available for purchase. It should be noted that the compilation of select lists of Bengali books began during the 1980s. In the former half of this decade, two important editorials of *Granthagar*<sup>14, 15</sup>, a Bengali periodical, have appeared on the same issue of non availability of source lists for purchase of Bengali books.

Besides the works mentioned above, the forewords of some bibliographies of printed books are full of information about bibliographic activities in this respect and are equally important. The introductory sections of *Bangla Mudrita Granthadir Talika: Pratham Khanda* (list of printed Bengali books: first part) by Bhattacharya<sup>16</sup> and *Rabindra Granthapanji* (bibliography of Tagore’s work) by Sen<sup>17</sup> are few of such good examples in this regard.

### **The PR Act and its impact in bibliographic activities**

The Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867 (PR Act) and the Delivery of Books Act (DB Act), the two major acts are in force in our country, are the legal instruments for bibliographic control in regional and national levels. The first one existed well before the second. The then British government, with the intent to keep a record of the rapidly increasing number of periodicals, journals and various other kinds of printed materials, passed the PR Act in 1867.

The official objectives of this act were read as: "... firstly, that a complete catalogue of all books published in India should be made and that one copy of book should also be sent to England for the benefit of the scholars and two other copies of those books should be preserved and in order that the government might, through the literature of the country, be better informed of the conditions, opinions and feeling of the people".

Though the actual intentions were camouflaged but a beginning was made with regard to legal deposit and the bibliographic activities like periodical recording of contemporary books printed in different languages in India. 'British Museum or the Secretary of State for India or to the British Museum and the said Secretary of State, as the case may be' has been replaced by 'Central Government' in 1948. The provision for registration of newspapers was incorporated by another amendment in 1955. The Act has undergone "thirteen amendments between 1890 and 1960. However, the major provisions remained unchanged compelling the delivery of copy(s) of each book and each newspaper for the scrutiny of state authorities."<sup>18</sup>

Most important operative sections of this act are as follows:

**Section 9: The printer must, within one calendar month of the publication of the book, deliver one best copy, and if required two more copies, free of cost to an officer designated by the State Government (generally the Registrar of Publications).**

**Section 11: The State Government from time to time would dispose one copy as determined by it (generally to the concerned State Central Library) and another copy transmitted to the Central Government.**

**Section 12: A penalty will be lodged for non-compliance of the provision of section 9, which comprises a fine not exceeding two thousand rupees or imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or both.**

**Section 18: The designated officer of the State Government should maintain a 'Catalogue of Books Printed in India' in which 'shall be registered a memorandum of every book' delivered by the printer along with specified particulars. The titles of books in Indian languages should be translated in English.**

Section 19: The 'memorandum registered during each quarter in the said catalogue' should be published quarterly in the Official Gazette and a copy of the publication shall be sent to the Central Government'.

For the period of 1868 to 1900, the details of printed books are available in the appendix of the *Calcutta Gazette*<sup>19</sup>. These quarterly lists of books were popularly known as *Bengal Library Catalogue* (BLC). The British Museum and the India Office Library, both at London, also prepared catalogues of books procured under this act. The BLC and the catalogues of these libraries were considered very important and are major sources of Bengali books at least until the period of Indian independence. The books are still received by the Registrar of Publications, West Bengal but the state of maintaining the said catalogues and their quarterly publications are in a chaotic condition and virtually non-existent.

The statistics of Bengali books deposited at the office of the said Registrar since 1983 is given in Table 1. It reveals that the number of books received in 1993 is 276% more than the books received ten years earlier. The rate of increase in 2003 in respect of 1993 is only 126% (01.1% in respect of 2002). From 2001, the procurement of titles remains more than 3000 every year and is increasing very slowly.

The absolute number of received books is still lower than the actual production but there is no known instance of any 'penalty for non-compliance of provision of Section 9 of the Act'. Many books are not deposited within the stipulated period after its printing and/or publication. Most of the printers/publishers deposit their copies once at a time in a year. They react only when they are invited to deposit their copies for preparation of annual select list of books (intended for public library purchase also) through press insertion in the local media. The library purchase is the main motivating factor to deposit copies under PR Act.

### Contribution of SCL, West Bengal

The establishment of State Central Library (SCL) is another landmark in the library movement and bibliographic activities during the post-independence era at the state level like National Library in the national level. Owing to the repository library of acquired books

Table 1 — Books received by Registrar of Publications, West Bengal

Year (1)	Books received (2)	Rate of increase (3)
1983	0391	—
1993	1471	276.2%
1998	2289	55.6%
1999	2554	11.6%
2000	2439	-04.5%
2001	3048	25.0%
2002	3294	08.1%
2003	3332	01.1%
2004	3464	04.0%

Source: Annual Administrative Progress Reports of Registrar of Publications (unpublished)

under the provisions of the PR Act, the SCL in West Bengal has come forward in compilation of bibliographies of books available for purchase during the respective contemporary period since 1980.

Before 1980, the “Directorate of Education, Government of West Bengal was preparing lists of books available for purchase every year for the use of public libraries and social education centers containing the books published during the respective previous years”<sup>20</sup>. The SCL directly involved directly in compilation of at least seven bibliographies of Bengali books.

The 1980 compilation of selected contemporary books in print was the first such attempt in West Bengal, which contained 9312 books published within 1979 (Bengali Year 1385). The 1986 compilation consists of 6196 selected books available in the market for purchase as on May 1986. Both the bibliographies were maintained standard for bibliographic descriptions and arrangement. The major source of these two important compilations was the then collection of SCL. Though it is not mentioned in these two compilations, but it is a fact that the major source of SCL collection is the copies acquired under the provisions of PR Act. In addition to the collection they hold, the SCL requested all publishers and other related persons of Bengali books to submit their current imprints at SCL within a stipulated date.

After a long gap of 20 years the SCL has started again to compile and publish annual bibliographies. During 2001 to 2005, it has released five annual lists covering

different periods. Though it has undertaken the project to publish annual lists of books deposited under the provision of this act but such lists have appeared sometimes in selected form and sometimes as list of all books deposited. The frequency of publications of these lists is very irregular too.

### Bibliographic records under quantitative analysis

The latest five annual volumes have been chosen for the quantitative analysis of bibliographic records in this study. The first three among these have been compiled after selection by a committee, established for this purpose and entitled as *Nirbachita Pustak Talika* (NPT) meaning select list of books. Whereas the books in the last two lists are not selected. All books, acquired under the provisions of the PR Act are included in these and entitled as ‘*PR Act Onujayee Joma Pora Boier Talika*’ (list of books deposited under PR Act). However, all the five lists hereafter will be mentioned as NPT in this paper.

The first two and the last two annual lists under study were released in two single covers in 2001 and 2005 respectively. Only NPT 00-01 was released separately in 2002.

As shown in column 7 of Table 2 above, there is a clear dissimilarity between the numbers of titles listed in first two and the next three. The average of the latter three is double of the average of the first two annual volumes. The first three are the selected lists and the last two are the lists of all books. So there is nothing unusual in such difference. The annual volume of NPT 00-01, having 2892 titles is an exception.

Total titles included in all five annual volumes under study are 12851 consist of 809 titles in English, Urdu, Hindi and Santhali and 12042 titles in Bengali. There is a separate list of 253 Bengali books for neo-literate in the joint issue of first two annual lists. All the titles in this list have also been included under different subject headings in the main lists of Bengali books. These titles were not considered separately in the present study.

Only Bengali titles were compiled from all five annual volumes in a pre-designed MS Access database for analysis. A title with more than one part or volume has been described in a single record in NPT. *Collected*

Table 2 — Annual lists of NPT and amount of contents under study

NPTs under study (1)	Print line (2)	Dateline to deposit (3)	Period of publication of titles submitted (4)	Bengali titles (5)	English & others (6)	Total records (7)
NPT 98-99	2001	31/05/2000	5/1998 - 4/1999	1504	98	1602
NPT 99-00	2001	31/05/2000	5/1999 - 4/2000	1553	79	1632
NPT 00-01	2002	31/08/2001	5/2000 - 4/2001	2721	171	2892
NPT 02-03	2005	31/07/2003	6/2002 - 5/2003	2897	233	3130
NPT 03-04	2005	31/07/2004	6/2003 - 5/2004	3367	228	3595
Total		12042	809	12851		
Common titles for neo-literate, listed separately in the Joint issues of NPT 98-99 & 99-00						253

Table 3 — Periodic distribution of bibliographic records as included in NPT

NPTs under study (1)	Year of publications						Total titles (7)	1999-2003 (8)	Repeated entry of titles of 1999-2003 (9)	Unique titles of 1999-2003 (10)
	No year (2)	Before 1980s (3)	During 1980s (4)	During 1990s (5)	During 2Ks (6)					
NPT 98-99	08	03	06	1523	0001	1541	0993	043	0950	
NPT 99-00	11	02	01	758	0814	1586	1396	047	1349	
NPT 00-01	18	00	02	366	2351	2737	2623	127	2496	
NPT 02-03	28	00	01	048	2819	2896	2834	086	2748	
NPT 03-04	72	01	06	051	3240	3370	1473	109	1364	
Total	137	06	16	2746	9225	12130	9319	412	8907	

*Works of Tagore* in 7 volumes, for example, has been described in a single record. Parts or volumes of a title were recorded separately in our database. For this reason, the total records in our database have increased to 12130 (88 more).

### Quantitative analysis and findings

#### Year of publication of titles included in different NPTs

Table 3 shows the distribution of all 12130 records according to their publication years. One hundred and thirty seven records with no publication years were found. Out of the remaining 11993, only six are published before 1980s. The titles published in 1916, 1917, 1925, 1951, 1976 and 1978 may have appeared by printing mistake or by mistake in compilation. Only

sixteen appeared titles were published in 1980s. The records with publication years 1999 to 2003 are sorted out in column 8 of this Table for detailed analysis.

#### Repeated appearance of title

All 9319 records published during 1999 to 2003 are not unique titles. Four hundred and twelve titles have reappeared in more than one issue which indicates the presence of duplicate titles. About twenty eight percent of such repetitions had happened in the same annual volumes. Some titles under different subject headings in the same annual list are also seen. Such repetitions may have been caused by resubmission of titles by the depositors. There should be an appropriate checking system to avoid such kind of repetition of listing.

Table 4 — Current, follow-up and backlog years and contribution of NPTs under study

NPTs	Total titles	Current			Follow-up			Backlog		
		Years	Titles	%	Years	Titles	%	Years	Titles	%
NPT 98-99	1533	1999	993	65	1998	367	24	Pre 1998	173	11
NPT 99-00	1575	2000	814	52	1999	582	37	Pre 1999	179	11
NPT 00-01	2719	2001	1571	58	2000	780	29	Pre 2000	368	13
NPT 02-03	2868	2003	1789	62	2002	899	31	Pre 2002	180	07
NPT 03-04	3298	2004	1788	54	2003	1274	39	Pre 2003	236	07
Total	11993		6955	58		3902	33		1136	09

### Features of Bengali titles noticed in NPT

#### *Currency of inclusion of titles in NPT*

The three main seasons of Bengali publishing are: i) the month of January (eve of the Kolkata Book Fair), ii) the month of April (eve of the Bengali new-year), and iii) the month of October (eve of the Puja Festival). “Two third of Bengali publications come out on the eve of Kolkata Book Fair. ...the shares of other two seasons are more or less same with near about 5% of the total publication”<sup>21</sup>. The NPT adopts the financial year i.e. from the month of April to March of the next year to enlist the books. The month of October belongs to the period of prefixed year and January and April belong to the period of suffixed year of the combination of a financial year. Therefore in an annual issue like 1998-1999, the titles published in 1999 will be the major share. The number of titles published in the prefixed year (here 1998) will come next. The years other than these two types have also contributed titles in every NPT under study. So, 1999, for an example, might be considered as the current year in respect of the annual issue of NPT 98-99. 1998 might be considered the follow-up year and the years other than 1998 and 1999 might be considered as backlog years in respect of the same annual issue of NPT. A particular year of publication might be treated under all three categories of contributions simultaneously in respect of its appearance in different annual volumes of NPT under study. In this way all the titles excluding those with no year of publication are categorised under current, follow-up and backlog titles as mentioned in Table 4.

Total current contributions made by all five annual volumes are 58%, well above the half way mark. The

highest and the lowest contribution of current titles have been made by NPT 98-99 and NPT 99-00 respectively. Both of them have contained the lists of selected titles. So, preparation of list by selection with the features of currency of inclusion of titles in NPT could not be correlated.

There is a clear difference in the percentage of backlog contributions between the select lists and the others. The average backlog titles in the volumes with selected titles are more than 12% and the same for the last two volumes is nearly only 7%. The selection of book may have a certain role behind the inclusion of backlog titles.

It could be inferred that the annual volumes of NPT under study contains a high percentage of current titles. The backlog contribution is the lowest in every annual volume of NPT. This is due to the stipulation of date of publication of titles to be deposited for listing in NPT. The currency of NPT is satisfactory in this respect. But it should be noted that two annual volumes have been published after one year of their corresponding current year and remaining three have been published after two years in the same respect. So the titles have lost its currency when the particular volume has finally appeared in public. Therefore, the compiled lists, either selected or full, must be published without delay.

#### *Comprehensiveness of inclusion of titles in NPT*

According to the publishers' own calculation, as cited in the edited work of Malhotra<sup>22</sup>, more than 4000 Bengali titles were published during 1997. This is the only stated figure regarding the total annual output of Bengali titles in recent time. Considering this old figure, the current

inclusion of Bengali titles in NPT and the actual output of it can be compared. The average titles published during the period of five years, as per reflection in NPT, is only 1781. That is nearly 45% of the stated figure. A stipulated date of publication has been maintained for listing of titles in every volume of NPT. So there is very low chance of inclusion of many backlog titles over a long period of years.

The year 1999, although has got five full length of years, has accumulated only 1728 titles. Whereas, as a result of high current contribution, the year 2003, with only two annual volumes, has contributed 2931 titles, the highest among five years. The year of publication included in the first three annual volumes have not got exhaustive scope of inclusion due to selection of titles for listing. The years associated with these volumes, either as current and/or follow up years are 1999, 2000 and 2001. So an exhaustive reflection of titles published in these years could not be expected. The years, associated with the last two volumes, containing lists of all books, either as current and/or follow up years, are 2002 and 2003. The year 2002 has not been able to associate as current year with any annual volume under study due to non-release of NPT 01-02. As a result, the year 2002 has appeared with only 983 titles.

The year 2003 has appeared highest in number, nearly with 3000 titles. The titles, published in 2003, might be included further more as backlog entry in the coming annual volumes of NPT. The average of backlog titles in every NPT is less than ten per cent of their total contribution. If we consider a next volume of NPT with around 3500 titles then the share of backlog titles, published in 2003, will not be more than ten per cent of total. If we consider it as even ten per cent, then the possibility of further addition of titles, published in 2003, will not be more than 350. In that case, the maximum possible number of titles published in this year and reflected in NPT will not be more than 3350. This is also below the stated number of yearly production of Bengali titles. It can be inferred from the above discussion that the NPT has an estimated capacity of capturing more than 80% of the total output of Bengali titles.

#### **Publishers' participations in compliance of the PR Act**

Only the titles published in 1999 to 2003 are considered for analysis in this section. Out of 8907 titles published

in this period, 11 titles were found with no name of publishing responsibility. The authors themselves are the publishers of another 31 titles. A total of 1228 publishers appeared with remaining 8865 titles. The average number of titles per publisher participated is only seven during this period. 597 (48.62%) publishers have contributed only one title each with a total contribution of 6.73% titles. On the other hand only eight publishers have contributed more than 18% titles, out of which the top two publishers have contributed more than 9% titles. The small publishers have participated in large numbers but with low contributions.

#### ***Publishers' perceptions about PR Act and NPT***

Publishers are the direct source of the flow of bibliographic information. Their perceptions about different current bibliographic sources, in the perspective of the promotion of their titles, are vital concerns of interest. Paul<sup>23</sup> has incorporated the results of a publishers' survey revealing their perceptions about different current bibliographic activities and its related aspects in one of the chapters of his Ph. D. thesis. One of the most important intentions of this survey was to study the publishers' awareness of different legal deposit acts and the resultant bibliographies including the PR Act and the NPT. The survey includes following features of publishers' awareness in this respect:

1. Awareness regarding the existence of the acts,
2. Awareness regarding the provisions of compulsory deposition of titles under these acts,
3. Awareness regarding the provisions of listing of titles acquired under these acts, and
4. Awareness regarding the publication of bibliographies of the procured titles.

The PR Act is slightly ahead of the DB Act in all these features. The provision of listing of titles which are acquired by the Registrar of Publications, WB and NPT, are less known to the respondents. The publishers may not find any direct connection between the first two features in respect of their business interests. But they could uncover the direct link of the last two features i.e., provision of listing and the resulting product of bibliography with their business interests.

NPT is directly linked with public library purchase. Publishers are very much aware of this fact as well as

the NPT. As a result, the publishers not only realize NPT's potency towards promotion of titles in general but they could visualize the business returns straightway from the mandate of the particular act.

The overall indication is that the competence to serve the business interest directly gets priority to the broader interest of preservation of national heritage. Awareness about the bibliography is one of the most important aspects to attract publishers to deposit their titles. The poor visibility of bibliography leads to poor reflection of titles.

The respondents were also asked to answer, first of all, whether they send copies of their titles to different bibliographic agencies at all or not and secondly, whether they send the copies regularly or not. The act has specified that the copies should be submitted within one month of the publications. NPT has ranked top in regard of regularity in compliance compared to other several bibliographies.

To understand how publishers are grading different current bibliographic sources according to the importance and effectiveness in respect of promotion of their titles was another most important intention of this survey. The NPT is considered as a good promotional media by 44 per cent of total respondents. Sixteen per cent publishers thought NPT to be excellent in this regard. The respondents were also asked to mark their preference among three such provisions where they are submitting copies of their titles. According to their preference the PR Act has been ranked on top followed by the DB Act and the book review media. Overall, according to this survey, the publishers' perceptions are fairly positive towards the NPT compared to the other current bibliographies of similar kind.

### Conclusion

Bibliographic information about each and every published material should be provided as completely as possible and with minimum delay. The comprehensiveness of coverage, the currency of inclusions and the thoroughness of bibliographic descriptions are the three basic pillars of success of any bibliographic tool. The first two features mentioned above could be maintained suitably by means of timely and regular publication of the corresponding

bibliographies of the procured books under the specific legal deposit act. The legislative provisions for compulsory deposition of published materials are an established way towards a comprehensive bibliographic control. Improvement of the visibility of bibliographic products by means of, at least, speedy and regular publication of bibliography should obviously be the major attraction for the publishers and others responsible for deposition of their titles to the concerned agency. The listing should come into view to be a promotional tool for the published materials.

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