

Exploring Typography through Rabindranath Tagore's Manuscript with Doodling

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Abstract: This study is an exploration of the visual and literal aspects of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore's handwritten manuscripts in the context of experimental typography. It focuses on examining the presence of visual scribbling or doodling in the handwritten manuscripts of Tagore on the production of linguistic meaning. In exploring the unconventional and more artistic approach of typography through Tagore's handwritten manuscripts, this article emphasizes on the expression of emotion rather than only having a concern for legibility. Its aim thereby lies in carrying out a critical inquiry of forms, structure, and emotion through the complexity of Tagore's manuscripts from a typographic standpoint. Rabindranath Tagore's manuscripts remain the most challenging to analyze as they contain non-text scribbling by the same ink which overlaps or touches the textual region. Tagore's interest in doodling and scribbling developed from 1924 onwards when while modifying his poems in Purobi and later in Kheya, he started covering some words with ink. He linked these covered areas to give a pattern to the doodling and thus made way for irregular designs, free-flowing ribbons, grotesque faces, and birds. The doodles resembled the irregularity of consciousness and poetic imagination, revealing certain underlying forms when they were interlaced with words into a complete and rhythmical configuration. Not only do Tagore's handwritten manuscripts display an excellent sense of fantasy, rhythm, and liveliness, they also blur the lines between low and high culture.

The visual analysis will be carried out based on the selected manuscripts to understand the form, repetition, rhythm of the visual manuscripts. It will do so by referring to a selected number of handwritten manuscripts while focusing on the late 19th to early 20th century, a period significant for understanding the visual form of Tagore's manuscript in the context of modernism. This article explores the visual form of experimental typography and develops an understanding based on the multimodality and semiotic resources from these manuscripts.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, manuscript, Visual Art, Experimental Typography, doodling, scribbling

Introduction

Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) reshaped Bengali literature and music through his creation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

He has developed an interest in doodling and scribbling from 1924 onwards while writing and constantly modifying his poems in Purobi and later in Kheya through covering some words with ink and by adding some freehand symbolism. He further linked these covered areas to provide a pattern to the doodling and thus made way for irregular designs, free-flowing ribbons, surreal faces, and birds. His doodles resembled the irregularity of consciousness and poetic imagination, revealing certain underlying forms when they were interwoven with

words into a whole and rhythmical composition. His doodling includes dark exotic look creatures and resembles with the pre-historic cave paintings. It forms an interaction between written words and visual elements. Rabindranath Tagore's handwritten manuscript is a unique example of visual art and shows an association with his painting style.

These manuscripts not only serve as a connection of verbal narrative, but it also serves as a visual element of semiotic resource with its own meaning of potential. So his handwritten texts are more multimodal in nature compared to the printed text.

Brief Background

Mullen, 2008 stated that the desires to visually express and beautify ourselves and our ambiances are inherent for human being by referring to a theoretical understanding of visual communication while explaining the relationship of cave Art and the origins of typography. Tracing the answer of a similar question that why he has decorated his manuscript with doodling? The answer gives us the same perspective that probably he wanted to decorate his manuscript page with doodling considering his manuscript page as a creative space for expression. Another important aspect needs to be considered is that Rabindranath Tagore's creative background and his contribution to social-cultural phenomena of Bengal. In this context, the researcher would refer to the following quote of Csikszentmihalyi (1996) to explore the relation between Tagore's activity and his background.

"Creativity does not happen inside people's heads, but in the interaction between a person's thoughts and a sociocultural context, it is a systemic rather than an individual phenomenon" (Mullen, 2008 cited Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 23).

Multimodality of Text in Tagore's Manuscript

Drawing from the literature of multimodality on visual space, visual forms of typography, social semiotic this article is an attempt to trace a relation between the Nobel author Rabindranath Tagore's handwritten manuscript with doodling and the idea of modern day experimental typography within visual space. Hypothetically, the purpose of this discussion is to raise questions and contemplate the relationship of his visual-verbal manuscript and the modern form of typography, commonly known as type art. Considering the fact that there is no empirical evidence available, the researcher has woven a net among the major aspects associated with the topic and find cohesion to them. So this essay attempts to elucidate visual-verbal activity in the context of evolutionary, creative and shared communicative factors. Therefore this analysis attempts to understand why Tagore scribble on his manuscript and the larger purpose of this understanding is to link to the present day's experimental typographic forms.

This research article refers to wide range of literature includes the book "*Giotto and the orators: humanist observers of painting in Italy and the discovery of pictorial composition, 1350-1450*", to understand the verbal and visual association of typography, doodling, and modernism to considered analytical approach on how literal and visual forms communicate meaning (Baxandall, 1986). The literature also includes recent studies of a picture book, comics, and translation of comic to understand the verbal-visual perspective of multimodality of Rabindranath Tagore's handwritten manuscript page with doodling and how these modes interact and contribute

to the creation of meaning. Regarding the structure of the present paper, it initially focuses on the concept of multimodality and inter-semiotic relationships between modes.

Tagore's manuscript works within and across several sign systems to construct meaning (Siegal, 2006). The mode of written language is governed by the logic of time, whereas the doodling associated with the handwritten manuscript is governed by the logic of association among the visual elements to develop symbolism (Kress, 2003). In written text the meaning is derived from position in the progressive order and in a visual image the meaning is derived from the visual grammar developed through the distinct arrangements of visual elements. In his manuscript the doodling spread around the written text to create conflict in-terms of meaning creation.

Using a semiotic perspective as a lens for understanding the ways in which the readers construct meaning with the multimodal manuscript. The amalgam of visual elements of doodling and handwritten manuscript into multimodal ensembles presents readers with new challenges and required an expanded view to draw upon to make sense of this complex text with a spontaneous form of doodling (Serafini, 2012). The visual mode of scribbling and the mode of a handwritten manuscript are combined in several ways to symbolize and construct meaning (Pantaleo, 2015). So the multiple modes present in his manuscript responsible for interacting within a known cultural context and communicate meaning.

Social Semiotic approach considered for this article to understand the cultural connotation associated with Tagore's manuscript. Few of the selected manuscript considered to understand the verbal-visual relationship of Tagore's manuscript.

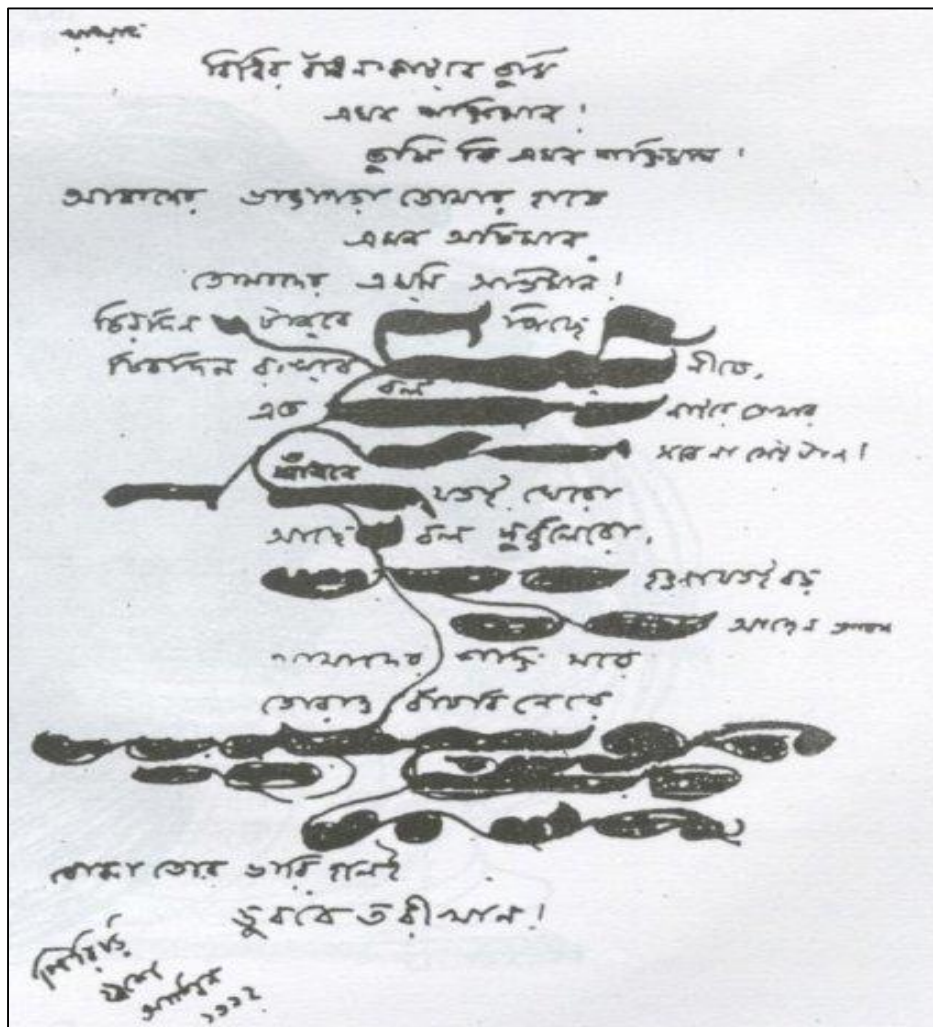


Figure1. Rabindranath Tagore authorial likeness in written text and scribbling

At some point, while writing he moved his pen within the manuscript and draw a freehand pattern with the repetition of visual elements. His doodle shapes placed around the words and develop a close association of verbal and visual elements. The visual elements are placed in a symmetrical and asymmetrical manner within close proximity around the handwritten text. Doodling in this manuscript would seem to imply concentration towards the verbal-visual communication rather than an interruption. His doodled motifs discover the consequence by navigating the visual puzzlement of continuous text in a vertical manner. In other words, doodling here extracts language as the intermediary vehicle of communication; words are displaced by their essential parts. His manuscript with doodling is an instance of the pictorialism of text (Stevenson Stewart, 2013). The extraordinary lyrical arrangement of his handwritten manuscript with scribbling makes it possible to symbolize the verbal and visual association. It creates a temporal immediacy between the act of scribbling and the consequences of the act produces.

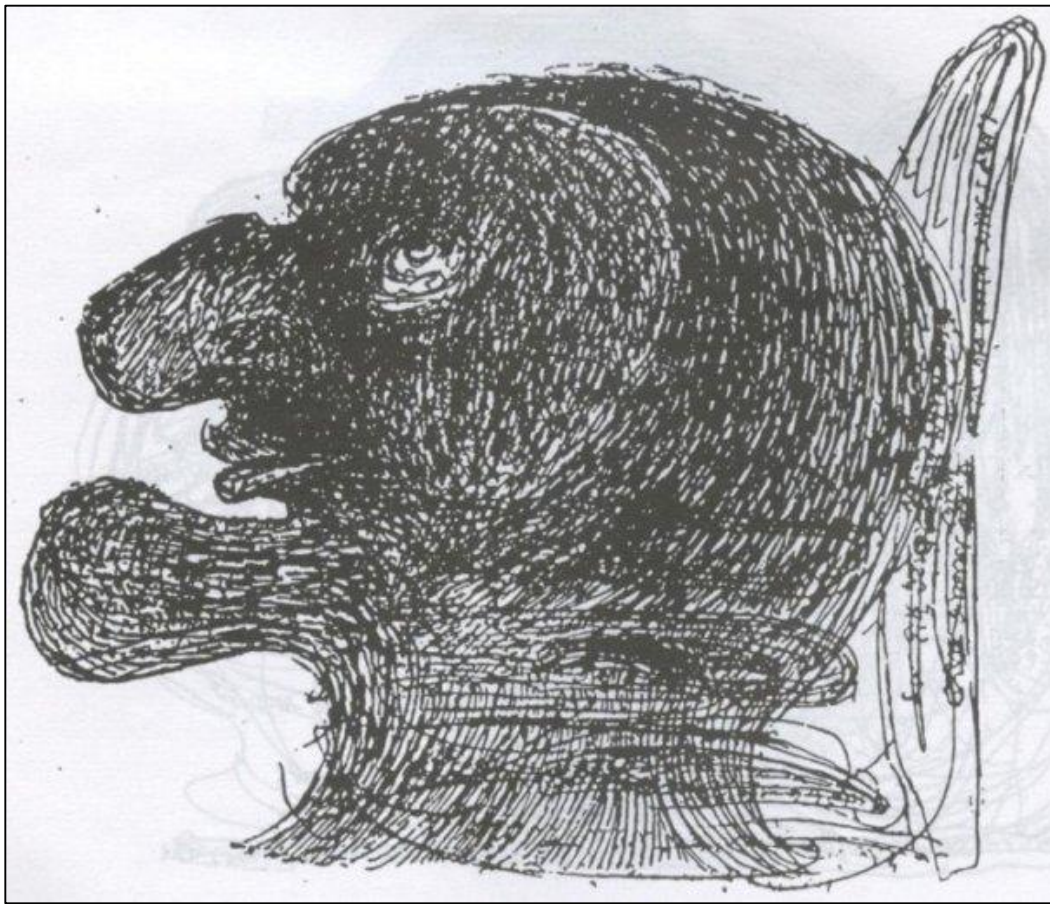


Figure2. Surreal face with irregularity of perception

The doodles resembled the surreal face with the irregularity of perception and lyrical imagination, revealing certain underlying forms. Joining freehand lines together form meaningful collusion in Figure2. Tagore's doodle is a paradigm of symbolism with an exaggerated and bulging nose, extended chin, and inappropriate features. Tagore positioned encrusted figure with intangible forms overlapping with the textual limitation.

Stevenson Stewart, 2013 stated in the context of Erasmus' doodles that,

"Doodling is here understood as a habit, a practice that rehearsed, in the most literal sense, the linkages between textually, figuration, and authorial selfhood."

Tagore's manuscript of doodling sometimes fragments of textual engagement of verbal construction and visual production.



Figure3. Self portrait of Tagore by doodling

One of his most fascinating works is doodle on the self-portrait of his bearded face. He has metamorphosed his bearded face into a complex visual form by simple bold repetitive lines and develops a rhythmic unpredictable complexity of visual form. The empty background and the enhanced line push the figure out from the ground. The evenness of the figure is enriched by the absence of colour and the use of primitive looking pencil lines.

Conclusion

The reasonable resemblance of verbal and visual elements of his manuscript suggests that it was neither a spontaneous nor a singular creation. It seems Tagore was a habitual doodler and he often made figurative and abstract scribbles while writing and correcting. Stevenson Stewart, 2013 has written an elaborating explanation of Erasmus' doodles and similar observation is found in Tagore's handwritten manuscript with doodling serve as "evocative textual" responsiveness within the fragments of active textual and visual engagement. His doodles produce multi-modality of linguistic production and visual conception and create uncertainty between readership and authorship. Doodling within the same space of the manuscript page would seem to imply more concentration rather than an interruption.

It seems that Tagore has opposed the beauty of the visual art of using color, contrasting tone and proportion within the visual-verbal space. His manuscript with scribbling gives an indication of modern graphic art rather than the classical representation of visual art. His doodle embraces an essential aspect of human experience and something has its own set of emotional responsibilities. So the visual and verbal interaction initiates a question whether his manuscript with doodling is textually mediated communication or visually mediated communication. A manual act of doodling is a method for the integration of visual elements and text to register an unconventional way of thinking through the text.

The quoting here of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore probably provides a self-clarification of the rhythmic representation of complex visual forms in his doodles.

“The only training which I had from my young days was the training in rhythm, the rhythm in thought, and 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 merciful finality of rhythm than in carrying on what was my obvious task.” (“DOODLING BY RABINDRANATH TAGORE”, 2013)

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