Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

Rabindranath Tagore was a Poet, Philosopher, Musician, Writer, Educator, and the first Indian Nobel Laureate for Literature (1913). Tagore has been labeled the "King of Poets" for his beautiful and exquisite poetry. In particular Tagore had a deep love and reverence for nature which he was able to express through lyrical poetry.

Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861 in Calcutta into a wealthy and prominent Brahman family. His father was Maharishi Debendranath Tagore, a religious reformer and scholar. His mother, Sarada Devi, died when Tagore was very young. Tagore's grandfather had established a huge financial empire for himself. He helped a number of public projects, such as Calcutta Medical College.

Tagore received his early education first from tutors and then at a variety of schools. Among them were Bengal Academy where he studied history and culture. At University College, London, he studied law but left after a year - he did not like the weather. Tagore started to compose poems at the age of eight. Tagore's first book, a collection of poems, appeared when he was 17; it was published by Tagore's friend who wanted to surprise him. In England Tagore started to compose the poem 'Bhagna Hridaj' (a broken heart).

In 1883 Tagore married Mrinalini Devi Rai chaudhuri, with whom he had two sons and three daughters. In 1890 Tagore moved to East Bengal (now Bangladesh), where he collected local legends and folklore.

Between 1893 and 1900 he wrote seven volumes of poetry, including SONAR TARI (The Golden Boat), 1894 and KHANIKA, 1900. This was
highly productive period in Tagore's life, and earned him the rather misleading epitaph 'The Bengali Shelley.' More important was that Tagore wrote in the common language of the people. This also was something that was hard to accept among his critics and scholars. Tagore was the first Indian to bring an element of psychological realism to his novels. Among his early major prose works are CHOKHER BALI (1903) and NASHTANIR (1901), published first serially. Between 1891 and 1895 he published forty-four short stories in Bengali periodical, most of them in the monthly journal Sadhana.

In 1901 Tagore founded a school outside Calcutta, Biswa-Bharati, which was dedicated to emerging Western and Indian philosophy and education. It becomes a university in 1921. He produced poems, novels, stories, a history of India, textbooks, and treatises on pedagogy.

Tagore wrote his most important works in Bengali, but he often translated his poems into English. At the age of 70 Tagore took up painting. He was also a composer, settings hundreds of poems to music. Many of his poems are actually songs, and inseparable from their music. Tagore's 'Amar Sonar Bangla' (Our Golden Bengal) became the national anthem of Bangladesh.

A project dear to the heart of Tagore was his school 'Santiniketan'. Tagore tried to combine traditional Indian culture with Western ideas; all the children contributed significantly to Bengali literature and culture.
Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913 for his book ‘Gitanjali’. W. B. Yeats in particular was deeply impressed with this work and wrote an introduction. With this honour Tagore became famous in both India and the West. In 1915 Tagore was knighted by King George; however Tagore was to return his knighthood in protest of the Amritsar massacre (1919) where British troops killed some 400 Indian demonstrators.

Between the years 1916 and 1934 he travelled widely. From his journey to Japan in 1916 he produced articles and books. In 1927 he toured in Southeast Asia. Letters from Java, which first was serialized in *Vichitra*, was issued as a book, *JATRI*, in 1929. His Majesty, Riza Shah Pahlavi, invited Tagore to Iran in 1932. On his journeys and lecture tours Tagore attempted to spread the ideal of unifying East and West. While in Japan he wrote: "The Japanese do not waste their energy in useless screaming and quarreling, and because there is no waste of energy it is not found wanting when required. This calmness and fortitude of body and mind is part of their national self-realization."

Tagore and Einstein met through a common friend, Dr. Mendel. Tagore visited Einstein at his residence at Kaputh in the suburbs of Berlin on July 14, 1930.

Although Tagore stayed out of politics he remained a good friend of Gandhi. In fact it was Tagore who would often persuade Gandhi to give up his fasts in the interest of the nation.

As a writer, Tagore primarily worked in Bengali, but after his success with Gitanjali, he translated many of his other works into English. He wrote over one thousand poems; eight volumes of short stories; almost
two dozen plays and play-lets; eight novels; and many books and essays on philosophy, religion, education and social topics.

Tagore's wife died in 1902, next year one of his daughters died, and in 1907 Tagore lost his younger son.

As well as literature Tagore had a great love of music, in particular Bengali music. He composed more than two thousand songs, both the music and lyrics. Two of them became the national anthems of India and Bangladesh.

Only hours before he died on August 7, in 1941, Tagore dictated his last poem. His written production, still not completely collected, fills nearly 30 substantial volumes. Tagore was not just a poet but also productive in the fields of art, music and education. Tagore played a large role in the artistic and cultural renaissance of India which occurred in the 20th Century.

**Mind Without Fear**

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up
into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection; Where the clear stream of reason...
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

- From Gitanjali
Rabindranath Tagore Family Tree:
Poems on Beauty
-by Tagore

Beauty is truth's smile
when she beholds her own face in
a perfect mirror.

~

Beauty is truth's smile
when she beholds her own face in
a perfect mirror.

~

Beauty is in the ideal of perfect
harmony
which is in the universal being;
truth the perfect comprehension of
the universal mind.

Poems on Love
-by Tagore

Love adorns itself;
it seeks to prove inward joy by
outward beauty.

~

Love does not claim possession,
but gives freedom.

~

Love is an endless mystery,
for it has nothing else to explain it.

~

Love's gift cannot be given,
it waits to be accepted.
Selected works of Tagore:

- KABIKAHINI, 1878 - A Poet's Tale
- SADHYA SANGEET, 1882 - Evening Songs
- PRABHAT SANGEET, 1883 - Morning Songs
- BAU-THAKURANIR HAT, 1883
- RAJASHI, 1887
- RAJA O RANI, 1889 - The King and the Queen / Devouring Love
- VISARGAN, 1890 - Sacrifice
- MANASI, 1890
- IUROPE-JATRIR DIARI, 1891, 1893
- VALMIKI PRATIBHA, 1893
- SONAR TARI, 1894 - The Golden Boat
- KHANIKA, 1900 - Moments
- KATHA, 1900
- KALPANA, 1900
- NAIVEDYA, 1901
- NASHTANIR, 1901 - The Broken Nest
- SHARAN, 1902
- BINODINI, 1902
- CHOCHER BALI, 1903 - Eyesore
- NAUKADUBI, 1905 - Haaksirikko
- KHEYA, 1906
- NAUKADUBI, 1906 - The Wreck
- GORA, 1907-09 - suom.
- SARADOTSAVA, 1908 - Autumn Festival
- GALPAGUCCHA, 1912 - A Bunch of Stories
- CHINNAPATRA, 1912
- VIDAY-ABHISAP, 1912 - The Curse at Farewell
- GITANJALI, 1912 - Song Offerings (new translation in 2000 by Joen Winter, publ. Anvil Press) - Uhrilauluja
- JIBAN SMRTI, 1912 - My Reminiscenes - Elämäni muistoja, translated by J. Hollo
- DAKGHRAR, 1912 - Post Office
- The Crescent Moon, 1913
- Glimpses of Bengal Life, 1913
- The Hungry Stones and Other Stories, 1913
- CHITRA, 1914 - transl.
- GHITIMALAYA, 1914
- The King of the Dark Chamber, 1914
- The Post Office, 1914
- Sadhana, 1914
- GHARE-BAIRE, 1916 - The Home and the World - Koti ja maailma
- BALAK, 1916 - A Flight of Swans
- CHATURANGA, 1916 - transl.
- Fruit Gathering, 1916
- The Hungry Stones, 1916
- Stray Birds, 1916
- PERSONALITY, 1917 - Persoonallisuus
- The Cycle of Spring, 1917
- Sacrifice, and Other Plays, 1917
- My Reminiscene, 1917
- Nationalism, 1917
- Mashi and Other Stories, 1918
- Stories from Tagore, 1918
- PALATAKA, 1918
- JAPAN-JATRI, 1919 - A Visit to Japan
- Greater India, 1921
- The Fugitive, 1921
- Creative Unity, 1921
- LIPIKA, 1922
- MUKTADHARA, 1922 - trans.
- Poems, 1923
- Gora, 1924
- Letters from Abroad, 1924
- Red Oleander, 1924
- GRIHAPRABESH, 1925
- Broken Ties and Other Stories, 1925
- Rabindranath Tagore: Twenty-Two Poems, 1925
- RAKTA-KARABI, 1925 - Red Oleanders
- SADHANA, 1926 - suom.
- NATIR PUJA, 1926 - transl.
- Letters to a Friend, 1928
- SESHER KAVITA, 1929 - Farewell, My Friend
- MAHUA, 1929 - The Herald of Spring
- JATRI, 1929
- YAGAYOG, 1929
- The Religion of Man, 1930
- The Child, 1931
- RASHIAR CHITHI, 1931 - Letters from Russia
- PATRAPUT, 1932
- PUNASCHA, 1932
- Mahatmahi and the Depressed Humanity, 1932
- The Golden Boat, 1932
- Sheaves, Poems and Songs, 1932
- DUI BON, 1933 - Two Sisters
- CHANDALIKA, 1933 - transl.
- MALANCHA, 1934 - The Garden
- CHAR ADHYAYA, 1934 - Four Chapters
- BITHIKA, 1935
- SHESH SAPTAK, 1935
- PATRAPUT, 1936
- SYAMALI, 1936 - trans.
- Collected Poems and Plays, 1936
- KHAPCHARA, 1937
- SEMJUTI, 1938
- PRANTIK, 1938
- PRAHASINI, 1939
- PATHER SANCAY, 1939
- AKASPRADIP, 1939
- SYAMA, 1939
- NABAJATAK, 1940
- SHANAI, 1940
- CHELEBELA, 1940 - My Boyhood Days
- ROGSHAJYAY, 1940
- AROGYA, 1941
- JANMADINE, 1941
- GALPASALPA, 1941
- Last Poems, 1941
• The Parrots Training, 1944
• Rolland and Tagore, 1945
• Three Plays, 1950
• Crisis in Civilization, 1950
• Sheaves, 1951
• More Stories from Tagore, 1951
• A Tagore's Testament, 1955
• Our Universe, 1958
• The Runaway and Other Stories, 1959
• Wings of Death, 1960
• GITABITAN, 1960
• A Tagore Reader, 1961 (ed. by Amiya Chakravarty)
• Towards Universal Man, 1961
• On Art and Aesthetics, 1961
• BICITRA, 1961
• GALPAGUCCHA, 1960-62 (4 vols.)
• Boundless Sky, 1964
• The Housewarming, 1964
• RABINDRA-RACANABALI, 1964-1966 (27 vols.)
• Patraput, 1969
• Imperfect Encounter, 1972
• Later Poems, 1974
• The Housewarming, 1977
• Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Poems, 1985


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