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## Rabindranath Tagore - A Beacon of Light

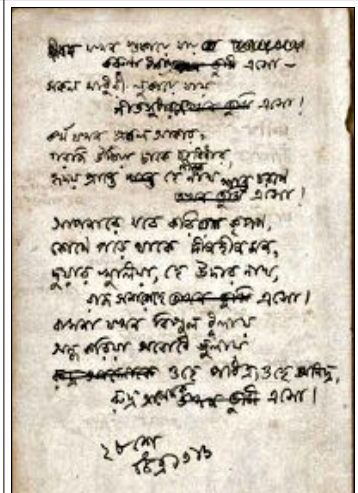
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Jeebono Jokhon Shukaey Jaey  
 Korunadharaey Esho  
 Shokolo Madhuri Lukaey Jaey  
 Geetoshudharoshe Esho  
 Kormo Jokhon Probolo Aakar  
 Goroji Uthiya Dhake Chari Dhar  
 Hridayprante, Hey Jibononath  
 Shanto Chorone Esho  
 Aaponare Jobe Koriya Kripon  
 Kone Pore Thake Deenohino Mon  
 Duraar Khuliya, Hey Udaaro Nath  
 Raajoshomarohe Esho  
 Bashona Jokhon Bipulo Dhulaey  
 Ondho Koriya Obodhe Bhulaey  
 Ohe Pobitro, Ohey Onidro  
 Rudro Aaloke Esho

- a poem from the collection "Gitanjali"

When the heart is hard and parched up  
 come upon me with a shower of mercy.  
 When grace is lost from life  
 come with a burst of song.  
 When tumultuous work raises its din  
 on all sides shutting me out from beyond,  
 come to me, my lord of silence  
 with thy peace and rest.  
 When my beggarly heart sits crouched  
 shut up in a corner,  
 break open the door, my king  
 and come with the ceremony of a king  
 When desire blinds the mind  
 with delusion and dust  
 O thou holy one, thou wakeful  
 come with thy light and thy thunder

- Translated by Rabindranath Tagore



Original writing of Rabindranath Tagore  
Courtesy [Gitabitan.net](http://Gitabitan.net)

This song was sung by Rabindranath Tagore for Mahatma Gandhi, on September 26, 1932, right after Gandhi broke his fast unto death, undertaken to force the colonial British Government to abjure its decision of separation of the lower castes as an electorate in India.

Tagore was and will remain one of the greatest poets and philosophers the world has ever seen. His contribution to Indian literature, music, arts and drama endeared him not only to Bengalis but to Indians and the world at large. Through his innumerable songs, poems and stories, he presented a priceless vessel of creative genius to the nation - a vessel hardened by his unflinching support for India's freedom not only from the British but also from social oppression and mediocrity.

Though it is impossible to touch upon all his work in a single article, we will walk you through the life of Tagore - the poet, decorating the path with a few of the gems he has produced.



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**RABINDRANATH TAGORE**

## Early life

Born on the 7th of May, 1861 in the city Kolkata in what is now West Bengal, India, Rabindranath Tagore was the youngest of the thirteen children of Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi. He was born into a rich household, which was also a center of culture in those days. His family was a leader of the Brahmo Samaj - an offshoot of Hinduism, which shunned deity worship in any form.

Tagore was mostly not taught in the formal confines of education, though he did go to a number of schools in his childhood. Most of the education came from private tutoring at home in the fields of history, modern science and the Sanskrit language. He was greatly influenced by his elder brother Jyotirindranath Tagore - a talented musician and playwright.

Rabindranath Tagore's first brush with poetry came in the form of a poem called "Abhilaash" (desire), published anonymously in a magazine, at the age of thirteen in 1874. In the same year, he successfully undertook a project of translating the Macbeth into Bengali.



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### KRISHNA PLACATES AN ANGRY MANINI RADHA

His lifelong dalliance with fame started in 1877 with the publication of the "Bhanusingher Padavali" - a long poem written in Brajabhasha - a dialect popular around Vrindavan - the birth place of Lord Krishna. This poem was written under the pseudonym Bhanusingh and dealt with the love that Radha felt for lord Krishna, and the associated passion as well as the pangs of suffering that she had to undergo.

*Marana Re, Tuhu Mama Shyamasaman.  
Meghabarana Tujha, Meghajatajuta,  
Raktakamalakara, Rakta-Adhara Puta,  
Tapabimochana Karuna Kor Taba  
Mrityu-Amrita Kare Daan*

- an excerpt from "Bhanusingher Padavali", indicating the despair that Radha feels because of being separated from her lover, lord Krishna

You are like my lord Krishna, O Death.  
Like my Krishna, your body has the color and your tresses, the entangling of clouds  
Like my Krishna, your beautiful palms are as red as blood, and so are your sweet lips  
But unlike my lord, your compassionate lap soothes the heat of suffering  
and unlike my lord, it provides the eternal nectar - the nectar of Death

- contextual translation by the author

In 1878, he went to Britain to study law, in order to become a barrister. However, the work of Shakespeare seemed more enticing to him than law and he ended up exploring the writing and work of Shakespeare. In 1880 he came back to India, without completing his degree in law. Once in India, he went back to pursuing his interest in literature, drama and music. However, this short exposure to the western culture readied his mind to form

the basis of his future form of music and philosophy as the fusion of the progressive nature of the western thought process and the depth and vastness of the Indian culture.

His individualistic style found its first outlet in a collection of poems published as "Sandhya Sangeet" (Evening Songs) in 1882. During the years from 1881 to 1885 he achieved a number of firsts - a first set of devotional songs, his first musical play "Valmiki Pratibha" (The Genius of Valmiki), his first books - "Rudrachhanda" (The Angry Rhythm) and "Bhangahriday" (Broken Heart), and embarking upon his first long novel - "Bauthakuranir Haat" (The Young Queen's Mart).

His young years were highly influenced by his sister-in-law, Kadambari - wife of his brother, Jyotirindranath Tagore. The two were very close, with Kadambari Devi actively encouraging Tagore to write poetry and drama. Since Tagore's mother died when he was very young, Kadambari partially filled the void, in some ways a maternal figure and later, a friend and possibly a muse for Tagore's early work. In fact he had dedicated many pieces of his work to Kadambari Devi. However, it is commonly believed that when Tagore got married in 1883 to Mrinalini Devi, Kadambari possibly felt heart-broken which eventually led to her committing suicide in 1884. This event left an indelible mark in Tagore's mind and he felt highly devastated and lonely. In fact, it is said, that the complexities of the relationships between him, Kadambari Devi and Jyotirindranath Tagore, was explored by Rabindranath Tagore in his novella, Nashtanir in 1901. Kadambari Devi's death was the beginning of a series of tragedies in the form of deaths of many a close ones, that Tagore had to endure through his long life. Shortly after the death of Kadambari Devi, he composed this poem:

<p><i>Hai Kotha Jabe ! Ononto Ojana Desh, Nitanto Je Eka Tumi, Poth Kotha Pabe ! Hai Kotha Jabe ! Mora Keho Shathe Rohibo Na, Mora Keho Kotha Kohibo Na. Mora Boshe Kandibo Hethaey, Shunne Cheye Dakibo Tomaey; Moha She Bijon Majhe Hoyto Bilapdhoni Majhe Majhe Shunibare Pabe Hai Kotha Jabe !</i></p>	<p>Alas, where will you go! In that endless, unknown land, and you alone, all alone, How will you find your way! Alas, where will you go! None of us will be there for you None of us to chat and talk to We shall sit here and shall weep, Gazing off into the void, we'll call to you; Amidst that vast, that lonely place perhaps our lamentations You might chance to hear from time to time, Alas, where will you go!</p>
<p>- "Kothay"</p>	<p>- translated by Rabindranath Tagore</p>

From 1884 to 1890, Rabindranath Tagore produced more masterpieces like the musical play "Mayar Khela" (Game of Illusion), a collection of essays on literary criticism, a five act drama "Rajo-o-Rani" (King and Queen) and the play "Visarjan" (Sacrifice).

## The Growth of a Genius

The years from 1891 to 1895 are marked as the "Sadhana Period" (period of contemplation) for the poet and saw him produce some of his most well-known work. Fate probably conspired to help him by having him manage his family estates in Shilaidaha (now in Bangladesh) where he found a lot of time by himself where he could give shape and firm up his ideas, philosophies and style of writing. It was in this period that he wrote the famous short stories, "Post Master", "Khsudito Pashan" (Hungry Stones) and others. He wrote the famous musical play Chitrangada during this period. He also wrote a major portion of a the collection of 84 stories - "Galpaguccha" which



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**LIFE IN RURAL INDIA**

was published in 1890. He began writing poems for what would later become the famous collection, "Sonar Tori" (The Golden Barge). These poems mark a definite change in the Tagore's style of poetry, when he started to use colloquial Bengali in place of the formal literary idiom which was the conventional mode of verse. His other work at the time include "Chitra" and "Katha o Kahini" (Tales and Stories). All of these poems and writings were influenced by the life of rural Bengal.

<p><i>Joto Chao Toto Lao Toroni-Pore</i>  <i>Aar Achhe? - Aar Nai, Diyechhi Bhore.</i>  <i>Etokaal Nodikule</i>  <i>Jaha Loey Chhinu Bhule</i>  <i>Shokoli Dilam Tule</i>  <i>Thore Bhithore -</i>  <i>Ekhon Amare Laho Koruna Kore</i></p> <p><i>Thain Nai, Thain Nai - Chhoto She Tori</i>  <i>Amari Sonar Dhane Giyeche Bhor.</i>  <i>Shrabongogono Ghire</i>  <i>Ghono Megh Ghure Phire,</i>  <i>Shunnoy Nodir Teere</i>  <i>Rohinu Pori -</i>  <i>Jaha Chhilo Niye Gelo Sonar Tori</i></p> <p>- excerpt from the poem "Sonar Tori"</p>	<p>Take it, take as much as you can load.          Is there more? No, none, I have put it aboard.          My intense labour here by the river -          I have parted with it all, layer upon layer;          Now take me as well, be kind, take me aboard.</p> <p>No room, no room, the boat is too small.          Loaded with my gold paddy, the boat is full.          Across the rain-sky clouds heave to and fro,          On the bare river-bank, I remain alone -          What I had has gone: the golden boat took all.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- translated by William Radice</p>
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In the following ten years, he worked on his serial novels, "Chokher Bali" (Sand in the Eye, or Eyesore) and "Naukadubi" (The Boat Wreck). He also wrote several essays and poems, many of which were to be a part of "Gitanjali" (Offering of Songs) - a collection of 157 devotional poems published in 1910.

## Tagore - the Educationist

In 1901 he shifted to Shantiniketan where he founded a school-cum-ashram which was to later become a center for experimental nature-integrated education, based on the ancient system of forest schools in India. Rabindranath Tagore successfully implemented his ideas on unshackled education through his school in Shantiniketan, which went on to become a university in 1921. Even today, Shantiniketan is the foremost center of learning for the arts and music.

The running of Shantiniketan created financial troubles for him in the initial years when he had to sell parts of his property and family jewelry. His wife, Mrinalini, and daughter, Renuka, died within a span of six months in 1902, after which he composed a collection of poems, "Smaran" (In Memoriam), which he dedicated to the memory of his late wife. The death of his father in 1905 saw him inherit part of the family estates. This and royalties from his work helped him tide over the financial difficulties. In 1907, after the death of his son, Samindranath, he withdrew from most public life, leaving the affairs of running the Shantiniketan school to his colleague.

Since the British government never helped with the finances of the school, most of whatever he earned - royalties, lecture honoraria, and rents from his estate, and even the prize money from the Nobel prize he got, was poured into running the school - to ensure that his ideals of education being the foundation stone of a strong nation was eventually implemented.

## Tagore - the Activist



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**TAGORE AND HIS POEM**

His political views were articulated in various lectures, essays, poems and songs that he composed or wrote. He was closely associated with the Indian National Congress during this time. In 1896, he set to tune, the poem "Vande Mataram" (Mother, I bow to thee), which was originally composed by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in 1882, as a part of the novel Anandamath. Tagore sang the song in the 12th session of the Indian National Congress in 1896. This song later went on to be adopted as the national song of India.

In 1905, Lord Curzon formally partitioned Bengal, ostentatiously to improve administration. The real motive, apparently, was to separate the Muslims from Hindus and hopefully to weaken the national movement, at the forefront of which, were Bengali Hindus, who were in a majority in the western part of Bengal and a minority in the eastern part. Rabindranath Tagore strongly opposed this decision and strongly demanded the annulment of the partition. In 1906, he composed the song "Amar Shonar Bangla" (My Golden Bengal), which became a rallying song meant to unify the people of Bengal against the partition. The partition was finally withdrawn amongst large scale protests in 1911.

<p><i>Amar Sonar Bangla</i> <i>Ami Tomay Bhalobashi</i></p> <p><i>Chirodin Tomar Akash,</i> <i>Tomar Batash,</i> <i>Amar Prane Bajae Banshi.</i></p> <p>- an excerpt from "Amar Shonar Bangla"</p>	<p>My Bengal of Gold, I love you.</p> <p>Forever your skies, Your air set my heart in tune As if it were a flute.</p> <p>- translated by Syed Ali Ahsan</p>
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As a result of the angst of the people caused by the partition, the "Swadeshi Movement" (Swadeshi means of one's own country) started in 1905, led by leaders like Aurobindo Ghosh, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai, which entailed the boycotting of foreign goods in favor of indigenously produced goods. Rabindranath Tagore vociferously supported the movement and wrote many patriotic songs and poems in support of the movement. However, when the movement took on the color of violence and rifts started between Hindus and Muslims, he felt heartbroken and withdrew from the movement

He was critical of the later part of the Swadeshi movement and wrote essays like "Byadhi o Pratikar" (The disease and its cure) in protest of the highly confrontationalist path that the Swadeshi movement was taking, and its resultant violence that many agitated youth were participating in.

He began concentrating on the wholesome development of the rural society - specially of the people of estates owned by him. He encouraged the youth of Bengal to engage in the uplift of society by means of education and service.

## Tagore and the World

While Rabindranath Tagore was already popular amongst the people of Bengal, he was also being recognized not only by the rest of India but also by the world. The fact that many of his poems and stories were available translated in English helped a lot. Most of these translations had been carried out by Tagore himself, though others too were involved at times. In 1912, Tagore traveled to London and met William Rothenstein, a

famous painter. With Tagore were the translations of a few of his poems from Gitanjali. He had carried out the translations during his journey from India to London. At a gathering of literary personalities in London, William Butler Yeats read out the translated poems and the poems were greatly appreciated. Amongst the great personalities Tagore met at that time were Bertrand Russel, Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells.

His plays, "Dak Ghar" (Post Office) and "Raja" (King) were translated into English and became popular. The Royal Albert Hall in London saw the dramatized version of his short story "Dahlia" (the dramatized version was named The Queen of Arakan). Amongst all this adulation, Tagore went on to visit the United States where he delivered a number of lectures on metaphysical aspects. These lectures were later to become a part of his book "Sadhana: The Realisation of Life".

The India Society of London published a collection of translated poems by Rabindranath Tagore under the title "Gitanjali". This original was a slender volume, with a beautiful introduction by Yeats. Later, the final collection had 103 translated poems, out of which 52 poems were from the originally published "Gitanjali" in Bengali, while the rest 51 were collected from other works of Tagore. These translations, as always, were not literary translations but a free-form verse writing, capturing the essence of the poems. The Gitanjali became immensely popular in the western world and publishers and journals around the world published translated versions of many more of his poems and plays.

<p><i>Tumi Kemon Kore Gaan Koro He Guni Ami Obaak Hoye Suni, Kebol Suni Surer Alo Bhubon Phele Chheye Surer Haowa Chole Gogon Beye Pashan Toote Byakul Bege Dheye Bohiya Jay Surer Suro Dhwoni</i></p> <p><i>Mone Kori Omni Sure Gai Konthe Amar Sur Khuje Na Pai Koite Ki Chai Koite Kotha Bandhe Har Mene Je Poran Amar Kande Amay Tumi Phelecho Kon Phande Choudike Mor Surer Jal Buni</i></p> <p>- poem 22 from the original "Gitanjali" in Bengali</p>	<p>The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on.</p> <p>My heart longs to join in thy song, but vainly struggles for a voice. I would speak, but speech breaks not into song, and I cry out baffled.</p> <p>Ah, thou hast made my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master!</p> <p>- translated by Rabindranath Tagore, poem 3 in the translated version of "Gitanjali"</p>
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On November 14, 1913, Rabindranath Tagore got to know of his being awarded the Nobel prize in literature - making him the first Asian Nobel Laureate. The citation said that he was awarded the Nobel prize

*"because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West"*

The very same year, he was also awarded the honorary D. Litt. degree by the Calcutta University. In 1915, the British Crown bestowed knighthood on him. His work continued to be translated in most major European languages and even in Arabic.

## The World of Tagore

Through all the awards, accolades and fame that he kept receiving, Tagore kept on with his profusion of novels, poems, plays and essays.

### Poems and Music

As explained throughout this article, his profusion of poems was what saw him catapulted to the zenith of fame and popularity. While "Gitanjali" remains his most popular collection of poems - all devotional in nature, his other famous collections include "Manasi", "Sonar Tori", "Balaka" and "Purobi". Through his poems, he painted through words, the varying

emotions of the human mind - from sorrow to joy, from hatred to love. He portrayed the life of rural Bengal as well as he displayed the confusion of urban Bengal. He also very passionately brought the theme of patriotism in many of his poems, urging the youth to serve the country.

His poetic language varied with the times he lived in - starting from the archaic literary form in which he used the formal written language to the colloquial style of writing. His poems display the versatile nature of Tagore - he adapted the concepts of modern poetry, when many modern poets began to question the relevance of Tagore's work as years went by, thus proving that his importance in the literary world would be cemented forever - the poems "Camelia" and "Africa" are examples of his poems from his latter body of work.

While part of his poetic work was standalone and was written for the purpose of writing poetry, a major part was integral to his other bodies of work, like novels and plays. His musical plays have a huge collection of poems, expressing the emotions of the characters.

Rabindranath Tagore set to tune many of his poems, thus leaving us with a sea of songs, most of which are still in popular use in India. It is said that he composed nearly 2300 songs. These songs are categorized into four groups - worship, love, nation and nature and together are known as "Rabindra Sangeet" (Music of Rabindranath).

Tagore collated various musical styles not only from Bengal but from around India and even from Europe. While the tunes of some songs are based on the folk music of Bengal, others float on the style of Carnatic music from south India. Many of his songs strictly adhere to the Ragas of classical music while others are free-floating blends of various Ragas to form a unique style. There are a few songs based on popular western dance rhythms and even church music. Some of these inspired tunes are replicas of the originals, while others have been remodeled by him to suit his style or the emotion he wanted to portray.

<p><i>Kotobaaro Bhebhechhinu Apona Bhuliya Tomaro Chorone Dibo Hridoyo Khuliya. Chorone Dhoriya Tobo Kohibo Prokashi Gopone Tomare, Shokha, Koto Bhalobashi. Bhebhechhinu Tumi Kotha Shworgero Debota, Kemone Tomaare Kobo Pronoyero Kotha. Bhebhechhinu Mone Mone Dure Dure Thaki Chirojonmo Shongopone Pujibo Ekaki-- Keho Janibe Na Moro Gobhiro Pronoyo, Keho Dekhibe Na Moro Oshrubaarichoy. Aponi Ajike Jobe Shudhaichho Ashi Kemone Prokashi Kobo Koto Bhalobashi.</i></p> <p>- from the collection "Prem o Prakriti"</p>	<p>Often have I wanted to lose my self and bare my heart at your feet. To clasp your feet and say out loud secretly, my friend how I love you. There you were the Lord of heavens How could I tell you of my love? In my secret heart did I think: though afar and away from you All my life will I worship you in solitary seclusion None will know of my deep love None will see the tears that flow Now that you come and ask me today How do I say aloud how much I love you</p> <p>- possibly translated by Rupak at: (<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9xevcsNGGY">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9xevcsNGGY</a>)</p>
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Together, these songs express the entire gamut of human emotions. One can always find a song appropriate for any particular occasion or any particular emotion. That is probably why even today, around a century away from the time these songs find relevance in everyday life. Movies and soaps widely use them in soundtracks. Not only Bengali movies, but also mainstream Hindi movies use music based on the songs of Tagore. One encounters them very frequently on television, radio and even on the lips of the common public. Experts continually experiment with the songs - by stylizing them to suit the occasion - but the underlying emotion and basis of tune always remains the same since they touch the very soul of the listener.

## Novels and Short stories

Tagore wrote a number of novels and novellas, with each depicting a facet of Indian life at the time it was written, seen through the socio-political lens of Tagore. "Ghare Baire" (The Home and the World) depicts Tagore's angst at the means that the freedom movement had employed through his portrayal of a rich home in feudal India, and its interaction with a machiavellian freedom fighter.

On the other hand, "Gora" depicts the conflicts inherent in the changing social and religious outlook of India - the demands of a deep rooted Hindu outlook pitted against the apparent liberalism of the Brahmo Samaj.

In the novel "Chokher Bali" (Sand of the Eye, or Eyesore), Tagore explores the state of widows in India. He paints the desires and longings of an educated widow through the interplay of relationships and sexuality.

His novel, "Shesher Kobita" (The Last Poem), written in 1928, at the age of 67, was a beautiful attempt by Tagore to showcase his hold over the skills of story-telling, irrespective of the society he belonged to at that time. It was a modern approach to outline the ways of the educated men and women of the time, their aspirations and their broader outlook to issues of marriage, love and loyalty. His style of writing was also like never before, with sparkling conversations, interspersed with modern poetry. In the novel, he even goes to the extent of including a character by the name of Rabi Thakur (his own name, called in affection), who is made a subject of ridicule by the male protagonist, since the protagonist believes that a poet should never outlive his age since his writing can never continually reflect the changing aspirations and outlook of society. By writing the novel in this manner, Tagore was able to underline the fact that he could never be made to be extinct, as some modern poets of the time had been hinting at, through various fora.

The novella "Nastanir" (Broken Nest) provided an insight into the relationship that Tagore shared with his brother and brother's wife but more importantly provided a very modern view of the separated concepts of attraction, love and marriage.

While Tagore's novels were beautiful, it was his plethora of short stories that really showcased Tagore's talent in prose better. The stories written around the time he was in Shilaidaha reflected the life and aspirations of the poor people of rural India. Some of these stories were "Kabuliwala" (The Fruitseller from Kabul), "Khshudita Pashan" and "Atithi".

"Kabuliwala" explores the longing borne out of being torn away from one's native land in the lap of nature by the dictates of earning livelihood. It also effectively questions some deep rooted notions and prejudices existing in the society. "Atithi" depicts the transient nature of the poet himself through the story of a runaway child, who is adopted by a Zamindar (nobleman) and who again runs away when the Zamindar arranges the marriage of his daughter to him. It portrays the longing for shackle-free living and a sense of non-permanence in attachment, that Tagore too might have felt at the time.



In the short stories in his later years, Tagore explores the human psyche deeply and touches upon various socially relevant issues. "Haimanti" shows the shallowness of the institution of marriage and how the married woman must stifle her sensitiveness and spirit of freedom in order to save her marriage and yet she must prove her virtuosity to her husband, like Sita had to do for lord Rama in the Ramayana.



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**THE HINDU BRIDE**

In "Strir Patra" (The Letter from the Wife) he takes up the issue of emancipation of women and the drudgery of a married woman's life. The last line from the story summarizes Tagore's view of what a woman should be:

*"Ami Banchbo. Ei Banchlum"* (I shall live. And now, I live)

Similarly "Jibito-o-Mrito" (Living and Dead) portrays the difficult life of a widow and the various superstitions that became a barrier to free living of women of those days. This story too ends with a haunting line, when the widow commits suicide in the end:

*"Kadambini Moriya Proman Korilo She More Nai"* (By dying Kadambini proved that he did not die)

In "Musalmanir Golpo" he explores the hypocrisies of religious fundamentalism and depicts how eventually humanity is what enlivens a person and not the narrowness of religious rigidity.

"Darpaharan" (Humbling of Pride) provide peeks at Tagore's own past - his self-doubts, his growth as a broad-minded individual from a holder of a prejudiced view of women. Other famous short stories include "Samapti" (The End), "Postmaster" and "Monihara" (Necklace of Pearls) - these three being bundled into a single collection titled "Teen Kanya" (The Three Ladies).

A very common thread running through most of his stories and novels is his portrayal of the Indian woman. The stories are aligned to underline the need to liberate women from the boundaries of superstition, religion and subjugation.

Even today, movie makers and television producers often base their work on the novels and short stories of Tagore, each individual wanting to present this same story in his or her own style. Most of his novels and many of his short stories have already been presented on the movie screen and television screen a number of times in varying forms - not only in Bengali but also in Hindi.

## **Dramas and Musical Plays**

Starting with "Valmiki Pratibha" (The Genius of Valmiki) in 1881 to "Shyama" in 1939, he wrote more than 30 dramas - some as musical operas and some as prose. His style as a playwright tended towards allegory and symbolism, subtly revealing his views on society,

religion and life. Differing from the commonly tread path of conventional Bengali drama he created dramatic canvases of philosophy through his unique lyrical and rhythmical way of story telling.

In his musical play, "Chandalika" (Untouchable Girl), he beautifully showcases the problem of untouchability, which at that time, so plagued the followers of the Hindu religion, in the backdrop of the three way conflict of love, asceticism and social taboos. Similarly in another musical play, "Tasher Desh" (Kingdom of Cards), through a highly allegorical medium, Tagore displays his apprehension of a stifled society shackled by rules and norms.

On the other hand, he also dabbled in the complexities and travails of love in the musical plays of "Shyama", "Shapmochan" (Release of the Curse) and "Mayar Khela" (Game of Illusion). In the musical drama "Chitrangada", Tagore uses the mythological tale from Mahabharata, of Arjuna (one of the protagonists of Mahabharata) and Chitrangada - princess of Manipur - to uphold his vision of woman as a partner rather than a goddess or a mere pet. He ends the play with the female protagonist (Chitrangada) proclaiming her nature thus:

<p><i>Ami Chitrangada, Ami Rajendranandini Nohi Debi, Nohi Samanya Nari. Puja Kari More Rakhibe Urdhe She Nohi Nohi Hela Kari More Rakhibe Pichhe She Nohi Nohi. Jodi Parshe Rakho More Shonkote Shompode, Shommoti Dao Jodi Kothino Brote Shohaye Hote Pabe Tobe Tumi Chinite More. Aaj Shudhu Kori Nibedon Ami Chitrangada Rajendranandini</i></p>	<p>I'm Chitrangada, I am the empire's princess Not a goddess, not one of ordinary prowess By worshipping me and keeping exalted That's not me, not me. By neglecting me and keeping inept That's not me, not me If you keep my at your side During strife, wealth abide, Promise, if under a severe vow, Take me as companion for thou Me, you'll know, that is how. Today I'll only make a petition -- I'm Chitrangada; the empire's princess</p>
<p>- ending of the musical play "Chitrangada"</p>	<p>- translated by Rabindranath Tagore</p>

"Rakta Karabi" (Red Oleanders) turned out to be Tagore's most popular play in prose. In this complex symbolic play, he tackles the subject of subjugation of people to meet the greed of the ruler and how both greed and subjugation is destroyed by the presence of an unfearing free spirit. Another highly allegorical play was the "Dakghar" (Post Office), where Tagore explores the psyche of a sick and dying child, bound to his room with only a window being his contact to the outside world with his only wish of meeting the royal physician, which is ultimately met at the time of his death. Through his beautiful play, Tagore brings forth the concept of spiritual freedom and the way one remains bound throughout life.

Tagore's plays are frequently performed and adapted for new experimental versions in the world of drama even today. And their popularity extends to lands beyond India.

## Paintings



**DANCING GIRL**  
**PAINTING BY RABINDRANATH**  
**TAGORE, UNDATED**  
 Courtesy: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

An less known facet of Rabindranath Tagore is his penchant for the brush. Throughout his manuscripts one can find examples of his talent. He skillfully managed to convert the cross-outs in his writings into abstract art. Tagore formally took up the brush at the age of sixty and in his unique coloring and visual style, had many successful exhibitions both within and outside India.

## World View

Rabindranath Tagore remained an enigma to many, as far as his political views were concerned. Though he was a patriot to the core, his views were often criticized and even ridiculed - probably because they never aligned with the conventional view of nationalism.

His love for his country is sufficiently underlined in numerous patriotic songs he wrote in his lifetime. Two of these songs are now national songs of two countries. As already mentioned, Bangladesh adopted "Amar Sonar Bangla" as its national song, though the origin of this song lay in Tagore's protest of the British decision of the partitioning of Bengal in 1905.

India adopted Tagore's song, "Jana Gana Mana" as its national song. This song was first sung in 1911 at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress. The national song adopted the first two stanzas of the a five stanza song written in Sanskrit.

<i>Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka Jaya Hey          Bharata Bhagya Vidhata          Punjaba Sindhu Gujarata Maratha          Dravida Utkala Banga          Vindhya Himachala Yamuna Ganga          Uchhala Jaladhi Taranga          Tava Shubha Namey Jagey          Tava Shubha Ashisha Mangey          Gahey Tava Jaya Gatha          Jana Gana Mangala Dayaka Jaya Hey          Bharata Bhagya Vidhata          Jaya Hey Jaya Hey Jaya Hey          Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey !</i>	Thou art the ruler of the minds of all people, Dispenser of India's destiny. Thy name rouses the hearts of Punjab, Sind, Gujarat and Maratha, Of the Dravida and Orissa and Bengal; It echoes in the hills of the Vindhya and Himalayas, mingles in the music of Jamuna and Ganges and is chanted by the waves of the Indian Sea. They pray for thy blessings and sing thy praise. The saving of all people waits in thy hand, Thou dispenser of India's destiny. Victory, victory, victory to thee.
<p>- the Indian national song</p>	<p>- translated by Rabindranath Tagore</p>

While many doubted Tagore's patriotism, he suitably demonstrated otherwise by rejecting the knighthood bestowed on him by the British monarchy in protest of the Jalianwala Bagh killings in Punjab by British forces, in 1919.

Tagore's view of national love was based on education and liberation from oppression of all kinds - body or soul - as against the popular notion of nationalism being to drive away the British any which way. In fact, Tagore openly criticized Mahatma Gandhi's means of a mass movement based on stirring people's emotions by creating the dream of "Swaraj" (self rule). Tagore believed that until the people of India defeated the ills of superstition, illiteracy and bigotry, ejecting a foreign oppressor would simply result in a new oppressor - this time from within the nation. When Gandhi called for the boycott of British educational institutions as a part of the non-cooperation movement in 1921 with the slogan "Education can wait but not Swaraj", Tagore completely opposed this call since he believed that it was only through education that the strength of the nation could be built. To this end, he not only built and expanded the school at Shantiniketan in spite of huge financial difficulties but also took up the cudgels of reaching education to the people of India, which saw to the setting up of the National Council of Education, that later led to the foundation of the Jadavpur University - a more Indianized university than the largely British influenced Calcutta university.



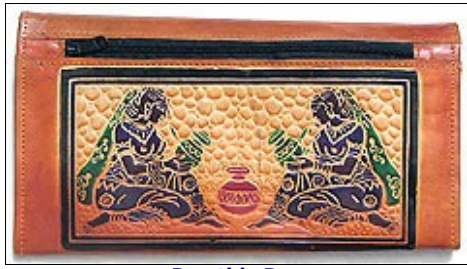
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**MAHATMA GANDHI AND OTHER  
FREEDOM FIGHTERS**

Tagore also was against Gandhi's ideals of self-denial as a means of spiritual liberation and as a guideline for the Indian way of living, since Tagore believed that liberation needs to come through enlightening one's soul through self inquiry and not by following any pre-laid principles.

Tagore was also against the notion of nationalism taking on a color of chauvinism in the form of extreme pride for one's roots, culture or past glory. He instead believed in the wholesome development of the mind and thus, the nation. This is why he not only opposed the form of nationalism promoted by the mainstream political leaders of the Congress as well as the violent revolutionary movement. He believed that it was this animal-like nationalist feeling which was the cause of the strife and war which enveloped most of the first half of the 20th century. Tagore wrote "Chitto Jetha Bhoysunnyo" (Where the mind is without fear) in his collection of poems, "Gitanjali":

*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  
has not lost its way into the dreary  
desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is lead forward by thee  
into ever-widening thought and action-  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father,  
let my country awake.*



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**EMBOSSSED LEATHER BAG FROM SHANTINIKETAN**

Though he was a very staunch supporter of indigenous industry, he opposed the blind boycott and burning of foreign textile items that were the main source of livelihood for many people in the country. Tagore believed that the indigenous industry needed to be built and made competitive instead of simply destroying the competition. He himself worked tirelessly on developing cooperative banks and helping in uplifting of tribals in the estates he owned.

In spite of the fact that Tagore was opposed to most of the views and methods of Mahatma Gandhi, he respected and loved Gandhi as much as Gandhi revered Tagore. Both viewed each other as great patriots and saints and a lot has always been written about their camaraderie. This is what Tagore had to say about Gandhi:

*An ascetic himself, he does not frown on the joy of others, but works for the enlivening of their existence day and night. He exalts poverty in his own life, but no man in India has striven more assiduously than he for the material welfare of his people.*

His religious views were shaped by his upbringing in a household which followed the way of the Brahma Samaj - belief in God as an infinite singularity, omnipresent and omniscient, and the self as originating from this singularity and eventually dissipating into it. Brahma Samaj followers did not believe in idol worship and shunned all forms of ritualism and superstition. Tagore, because of his conditioning, believed in the same premises and used to preach the importance of knowledge over all else and of love rather than rivalry in various communities.

## Tagore's Tryst with God

On the topic of death, Tagore said:

*Death is not extinguishing the light; it is putting out the lamp because dawn has come*

His later life was marked by two phases of painful illness, which severely restricted his travels within and outside India. However, he spent a lot of time in thought and introspection and his poems of these last years, from 1937 to 1941 are filled with symbolization of death, realization and sometimes even the hope of recovery.

He also explored the world of science and he compiled a collection of essays called Visva Parichay, which was book on science for children and general readers. He underscored the need for a holistic approach to education where science was an integral part of humanities and vice-versa. His last few works too included references to science or scientists.

The end came on the 7th of August, 1941, two months after he turned 80, in the same house that he spent his childhood in. He was cremated in the banks of river Ganga, which was preceded by a procession through the streets of Calcutta, where an ocean of admirers accompanied his body, becoming a single mass of sorrow and tears.

Tagore left the world but the world will remember him as the medium of Devi Saraswati - the Hindu goddess of learning - for it was through Tagore that she must have shown the world a way to live through love.



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**RABINDRANATH TAGORE**

<p><i>Tobu Mone Rekho Jodi Dure Jai Chole. Tobu... Jodi Puratono Prem Dhaka Pore Jae Nobopremojale Tobu Mone Rekho... Jodi Thaki Kachhakachhi, Dekhite Na Pao Chhayar Moto Achhi Na Achhi Jodi Jol Aashe Ankipate Ek Din Jodi Khela Theme Jae Modhurate Tobu Mone Rekho... Ek Din Jodi Badha Pore Kaje Sharodo Prate Tobu... Jodi Poriya Mone Chholochholo Jol Nai Dekha Daie Noyonokone Tobu Mone Rekho</i></p> <p>- a poem from the collection "Manasi", in the form it is popularly sung</p>	<p>Even so, remember me If I should move far away Even so... If the old love should be lost in the mazes of a new passion Even so, remember me... And if although I am near My presence, like a shadow, is shrouded with doubt Your eyes might cloud with tears And if one lonely night this game should end Even so, remember me... If, on an autumn moon, the final blow should fall Even so... And if, remembering me, tears do not glisten in the corners of your eyes Even so, remember me...</p> <p>- translated by the Sunetra Gupta, novelist (<a href="http://sunetrugupta.com/Templates/evenso.asp">http://sunetrugupta.com/Templates/evenso.asp</a>)</p>
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This article was written by **Nilanjan Guin**. Nilanjan is professionally a web developer ([Unlimited FX Web Technologies](#)), an amateur photographer and a movie buff.

Our efforts have been directed at making this article informative and refreshing for you. We will truly appreciate all forms of feedback. Please send your feedback to [info@dollsofindia.com](mailto:info@dollsofindia.com).

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