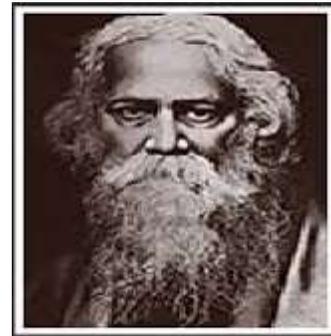
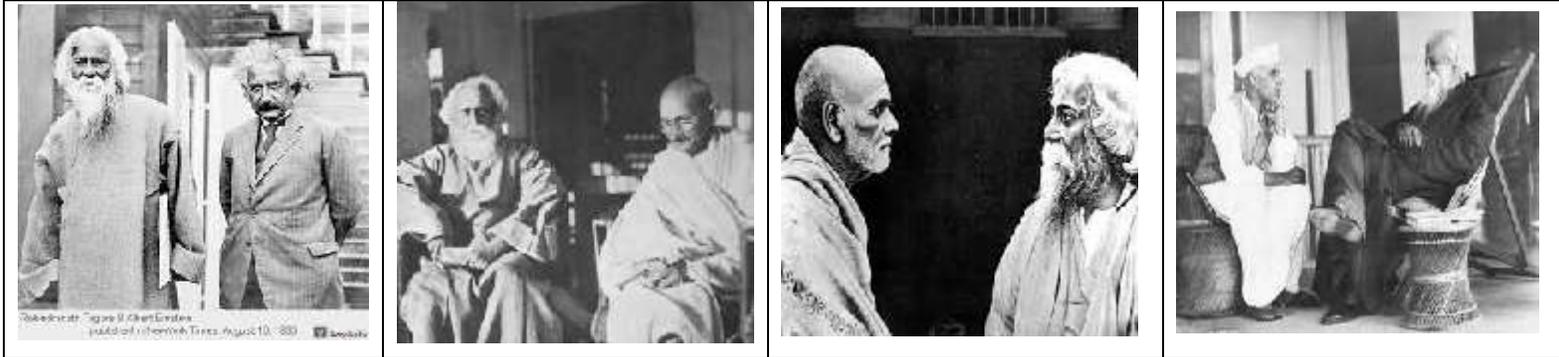


## *Rabindranath Tagore*



Rabindranath Tagore was a Bengali polymath who reshaped Bengali literature and music, as well as Indian art with Contextual Modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Author of *Gitanjali* and its "profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse", he became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. In translation his poetry was viewed as spiritual and mercurial; however, his "elegant prose and magical poetry" remain largely unknown outside Bengal. Tagore introduced new prose and verse forms and the use of colloquial language into Bengali literature, thereby freeing it from traditional models based on classical Sanskrit. He was highly influential in introducing the best of Indian culture to the West and vice versa, and he is generally regarded as the outstanding creative artist of the modern Indian subcontinent.

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### **Where & when born**

The youngest of thirteen surviving children, Tagore (nicknamed "Rabi") was born on 7 May 1861 in the Jorasanko mansion in Calcutta to parents Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi.

### **Brief life history of the person**

Tagore was a Pirali Brahmin from Calcutta with ancestral gentry roots in Jessore. Tagore was raised mostly by servants as his mother had died in his early childhood and his father travelled widely. Tagore largely avoided classroom schooling and preferred to roam the manor or nearby Bolpur and Panihati, idylls which the family visited. His brother Hemendranath tutored and physically conditioned him—by having him swim the Ganges or trek through hills, by gymnastics, and by practising judo and wrestling. He learned to draw, anatomy, geography and history, literature, mathematics, Sanskrit, and English—his least favourite subject.

Tagore wrote poetry as an eight-year-old. At age sixteen, he released his first substantial poems under the pseudonym *Bhānusiṃha* ("Sun Lion"), which were seized upon by literary authorities as long-lost classics. By 1877 he graduated to his first short stories and dramas, published under his real name.

*Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*), *Gora* (*Fair-Faced*) and *Ghare-Baire* (*The Home and the World*) are his best-known works, and his verse, short stories, and novels were acclaimed—or panned—for their lyricism, colloquialism, naturalism, and unnatural contemplation.

Tagore enrolled at a public school in Brighton, East Sussex, England in 1878, but again left school. He opted instead for independent study of Shakespeare, *Religio Medici*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Lively English, Irish, and Scottish folk tunes impressed Tagore, whose own tradition of [Nidhubabu](#)-authored *kirtans* and *tappas* and Brahmo hymnody was subdued. In 1880 he returned to Bengal degree-less, resolving to reconcile European novelty with Brahmo traditions, taking the best from each.



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In 1883 he married Mrinalini Devi, born Bhabatarini, (1873–1902). They had five children, two of whom died in childhood. The period 1891–1895, Tagore's *Sadhana* period, named after one of Tagore's magazines, was his most productive in these years he wrote more than half the stories of the three-volume, 84-story *Galpaguchchha*. It's ironic and grave tales examined the voluptuous poverty of an idealised rural Bengal

While reading any of his works, one will certainly come across at least one common theme, i.e. nature.

He became physically weak during the last few years of his life. He left for the heavenly abode on 7 August 1941, at the age of 80.

### Political Life

Tagore's political outlook was a little ambiguous. Though he censured imperialism, he supported the continuation of British administration in India.

He criticized 'Swadeshi Movement' by Mahatma Gandhi in his essay "The Cult of the Charka", published in September 1925. He believed in the co-existence of the British and the Indians and stated that British rule in India was "political symptom of our social disease".

He never supported nationalism and considered it to be one of the greatest challenges faced by humanity. In this context he once said "A nation is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose". Nevertheless, he occasionally supported the Indian Independence Movement and following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, he even renounced his knighthood on 30 May 1919.

On the whole, his vision of a free India was based not on its independence from the foreign rule, but on the liberty of thought, action and conscience of its citizens.

As an exponent of the Bengal Renaissance, he advanced a vast canon that comprised paintings, sketches and doodles, hundreds of texts, and some two thousand songs; his legacy endures also in the institution he founded, Visva-Bharati University.

Tagore modernised Bengali art by spurning rigid classical forms and resisting linguistic strictures. His novels, stories, songs, dance-dramas, and essays spoke to topics political and personal.

His compositions were chosen by two nations as national anthems: India's *Jana Gana Mana* and Bangladesh's *Amar Shonar Bangla*.



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### Critical moments in his life

On 10 September 1937, Rabindranath Tagore—poet, painter, philosopher, educationist, and perhaps the greatest multifaceted genius India has produced in the 19th and 20th centuries—fainted suddenly due to an attack of erysipelas. He was seventy-seven years old. Since there was no telephone in Santiniketan, in rural Bengal where he lived, he was in a coma for sixty hours before a medical team arrived from Calcutta and he began to respond to the treatment.

On 15 September, propped up on pillows, almost the first thing he did was ask for a brush and colours and paint a landscape on a piece of plywood he noticed lying in the room, “a dark wood with streaks of yellow light breaking through its gloom,” a painting one of his many biographers calls “remarkable . . . and obviously symbolic.” On 25 September, he wrote the first poem of a cycle of eighteen poems on life and death, dying and “after death,” published under the title Prantik, the last one written on 25 December 1937. These poems, translated from their original Bengali by Tagore himself, are some of the finest meditations on death and after death in world literature.

Tagore’s preoccupation with death goes back to a traumatic event of his youth—the suicide of his Muse and the love of his life, his sister-in-law Kadambari, three months after the poet’s marriage at the age of twenty-three. In his first autobiography, penned at the age of fifty, he writes as below:

“I had seen nothing beyond life, and accepted it as ultimate truth. When of a sudden death came, and in a moment tore a gaping rent in its [life’s] smooth-seeming fabric, I was utterly bewildered. All around, the trees, the soil, the water, the sun, the moon, the stars, remained as immovably true as before; and yet the person who was as truly there, who, through a thousand points of contact with life, mind and heart, was ever so much more true for me, had vanished in a moment like a dream. What perplexing self-contradiction it all seemed to me as I looked around! How was I ever to reconcile what remained with which had gone?

The terrible darkness which was disclosed to me through this rent, continued to attract me night and day as time went on. I would ever and anon return to take my stand there and gaze upon it, wondering what there was left in place of what had gone. Emptiness is a thing man cannot bring himself to believe in: that which is not, is untrue; that which is untrue, is not. So our efforts to find something where we see nothing are unceasing.

Just as a young plant confined in darkness stretches itself on tiptoe as it were, to reach the light, so the soul, when



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death surrounds it with negation, tries and tries to rise into affirmatory light ... Yet amid unbearable grief, flashes of joy sparkled in my mind on and off in a way which quite surprised me. The idea that life is not a fixture came as tidings that helped to lighten my mind. That we are not forever prisoners behind a wall of stonyhearted facts was the thought that kept unconsciously rising uppermost in rushes of gladness.”

The attempt to find a meaning in death is part of our universal heritage, as old as human consciousness of mortality. Where Tagore gives this search his imprint is in the insistence that death has a meaning because of the existence of life.

“If to leave this world be as real as to love it—then there must be a meaning in the meeting and parting of life. If that love were deceived in death, then the canker of this deceit would eat into all things, and the stars would shrivel and grow black.”

### **Awards & Achievements**

- Rabindranath Tagore won Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 and Rabindranath was the first Indian to won Nobel Prize.
- British crowned Rabindranath Tagore with Knight Title in 1915, but after the incident at Jallianwala Bagh, Rabindranath Tagore refused to keep Knight Title further at 1919 to protest the terror.
- In 1930 the Paintings of Rabindranath Tagore was exhibited in Paris and London.
- In 1940, Oxford University awarded him with a Doctorate of Literature in a special ceremony arranged at Shantiniketan
- Rabindranath Tagore was the co-founder of Dartington Hall School in Japan.
- Indian Postage Department showed their tribute to Rabindranath Thakur on 7th May 1961 when a Stamp released in the name of Rabindranath Tagore.
- Indian Government, West Bengal Government and many Private Firms showed respect to Rabindranath Tagore by opening Institutions, Health Centers, and many Seva Centres worldwide in the name of Rabindranath Tagore.

### **Some of the celebrated books**

- Gitanjali [1913]
- Saddhana, The Realisation of Life [1916]
- The Crescent Moon [1913]



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- Fruit-Gathering [1916]
- Stray Birds [1916]
- The Home and the World [1915]
- Thought Relics [1921]

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