

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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Rabindranath Tagore (7 May 1861 – 7 August 1941) was a Bengali polymath who worked as a poet, writer, playwright, composer, philosopher, social reformer and painter. He reshaped Bengali literature and music as well as Indian art with Contextual Modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Author of the "profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful" poetry of Gitanjali, he became in 1913 the first non-European and the first lyricist to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Tagore's poetic songs were viewed as spiritual and mercurial; however, his "elegant prose and magical poetry" remain largely unknown outside Bengal. He was a fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society. Referred to as "the Bard of Bengal", Tagore was known by sobriquets: Gurudev, Kobiguru, Biswakobi.

A Bengali Brahmin from Calcutta with ancestral gentry roots in Burdwan district and Jessore, Tagore wrote poetry as an eight-year-old. At the age of 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. As a humanist, universalist, internationalist, and ardent critic of nationalism, he denounced the British Raj and advocated independence from Britain. 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 also endures in his founding of Visva-Bharati University.

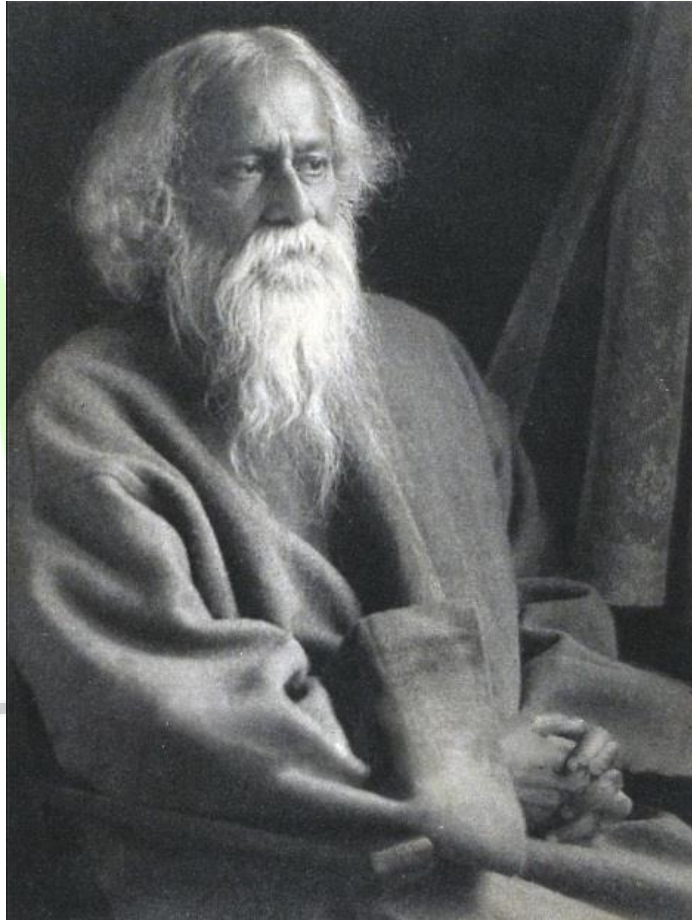
Tagore modernised Bengali art by spurning rigid classical forms and resisting linguistic strictures. His novels, stories, songs, dance-dramas, and essays spoke to topics political and personal. Gitanjali (Song Offerings), Gora (Fair-Faced) and Ghare-Baire (The Home and the World) are his best-known works, and his verse, short stories, and novels were acclaimed—or panned—for their lyricism, colloquialism, naturalism, and unnatural contemplation. His compositions were chosen by two nations as national anthems: India's "Jana Gana Mana" and Bangladesh's "Amar Shonar Bangla". The Sri Lankan national anthem was inspired by his work.

EARLY LIFE: 1861–1878

The youngest of 13 surviving children, Tagore (nicknamed "Rabi") was born on 7 May 1861 in the Jorasanko mansion in Calcutta, the son of Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905) and Sarada Devi (1830–1875).

Black-and-white photograph of a finely dressed man and woman: the man, smiling, stands with the hand on the hip and elbow turned outward with a shawl draped over his shoulders and in Bengali formal wear. In front of him, the woman, seated, is in elaborate dress and shawl; she leans against a carved table supporting a vase and flowing leaves.

Tagore was raised mostly by servants; his mother had died in his early childhood and his father travelled widely. The family was at the Bengal renaissance. They hosted the publication of literary magazines; theatre Bengali and Western featured there regularly. Tagore's father invited several professional musicians to stay in the house and teach Indian classical music to the children. Tagore's oldest brother Dwijendranath was a philosopher and poet. Another brother, Satyendranath, was appointed to the elite Indian Civil Service. Yet another brother, Jyotirindranath, was a musician, and a playwright. His sister Kadambari Devi, Tagore's wife, was a dear friend and powerful influence. Her abrupt suicide in 1884, soon after he married, left him profoundly distraught for years.



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Tagore largely avoided classroom schooling and preferred to roam the manor or nearby Bolpur and Panihati, 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 drawing, anatomy, geography and history, literature, mathematics, Sanskrit, and English—his least favourite subject. Tagore loathed formal education—his scholarly travails at the local Presidency College spanned a single day. Years later he held that proper teaching does not explain things; proper teaching stokes curiosity.

After his upanayan (coming-of-age rite) at age eleven, Tagore and his father left Calcutta in February 1873 to tour India for several months, visiting his father's Santiniketan estate and Amritsar before reaching the Himalayan hill station of Dalhousie. There Tagore read biographies, studied history, astronomy, modern science, and Sanskrit, and examined the classical poetry of Kālidāsa. During his 1-month stay at Amritsar in 1873 he was greatly influenced by melodious gurbani and nanak bani being sung at Golden Temple for which both father and son were regular visitors. He mentions about this in his *My Reminiscences* (1912)

The golden temple of Amritsar comes back to me like a dream. Many a morning have I accompanied my father to this Gurudarbar of the Sikhs in the middle of the lake. There the sacred chanting resounds continually. My father, seated amidst the throng of worshippers, would sometimes add his voice to the hymn of praise, and finding a stranger joining in their devotions they would wax enthusiastically cordial, and we would return loaded with the sanctified offerings of sugar crystals and other sweets.

He wrote 6 poems relating to Sikhism and a number of articles in Bengali children's magazine about Sikhism. Tagore returned to Jorasanko and completed a set of major works by 1877, one of them a long poem in the Maithili style of Vidyapati. As a joke, he claimed that these were the lost works of newly discovered 17th-century Vaiṣṇava poet Bhānusiṃha. Regional experts accepted them as the lost works of the fictitious poet. He debuted in the short-story genre in Bengali with "Bhikharini" ("The Beggar Woman"). Published in the same year, Sandhya Sangit (1882) includes the poem "Nirjharer Swapnabhanga" ("The Rousing of the Waterfall").

MUSEUMS

There are eight Tagore museums, three in India and five in Bangladesh:

- Rabindra Bharati Museum, at Jorasanko Thakur Bari, Kolkata, India
- Tagore Memorial Museum, at Shilaidaha Kuthibadi, Shilaidaha, Bangladesh
- Rabindra Memorial Museum at Shahzadpur Kachharibari, Shahzadpur, Bangladesh
- Rabindra Bhavan Museum, in Santiniketan, India
- Rabindra Museum, in Mungpoo, near Kalimpong, India
- Patisar Rabindra Kacharibari, Patisar, Atrai, Naogaon, Bangladesh
- Pithavoge Rabindra Memorial Complex, Pithavoge, Rupsha, Khulna, Bangladesh
- Rabindra Complex, Dakkhindihi village, Phultala Upazila, Khulna, Bangladesh