

B A Part One (UNIT ONE)

Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore was born on May 6, 1861, in Calcutta, Bengal Presidency, British India [now India]. He is known for his work on [Charulata](#) (1964), [Shyama](#) (2008) and [The Cloud-Capped Star](#) (1960). He was married to Mrinalini Devi. He died on August 7, 1941, in Calcutta. He was the only person to compose the national anthems of two countries (India and Bangladesh). He was the first person to win the Nobel Prize for Literature whose main work was composed in a non-European language (Bengali).

He was knighted in 1915, but he surrendered the knighthood in 1919 as a protest against the Amritsar Massacre by British troops in India. His father Debendranath Tagore and grandfather Prince Dwarkanath Tagore were heads of the Brahmo Association, which paved a long religious movement in Bengal. He directed several plays based on his works, his family members often acted on those plays. He was home educated almost. His nephew Abanindranath Thakur was one of the most influential artists in Bengal. Through his paintings, Swadeshi art (a genre in painting) came into existence. His novel *Khirer Putul* was popular among kids and adults all over India.

Popularly called 'Kabiguru', he was a Bengali poet-philosopher, novelist and painter best known for being the first non-European to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 with his book *Gitanjali*, Song Offerings. He inspired a whole generation through his writings. He was highly influential in introducing Indian culture to the west and is generally regarded as the outstanding creative artist of modern India. He was hailed by W.B Yeats and André Gide. Indian poetry in English of this period can also claim Rabindranath Tagore (1861 - 1941) as one of its own. Tagore continued to "translate" several of his works into English, deviating considerably from the Bengali in the process. Tagore bestrides the world of Indian culture like a colossus. Rabindranath Tagore was well aware of moral and religious considerations, social, political and environmental conditions of his time. The man was a centre point in his thought. To free man from his present sufferings, he had no other choice than to seek help from the Supreme Reality. That may be the reason for his poetry being religious in nature. God resides in his thoughts and actions. The fundamental concept of his religious poetry means that Eternal Transcendental Being is present in human personality.

His poems are strikingly finished, rich in texture and profound in thought. He celebrated and affirmed his pleasure in the world of the senses. He saw the world as imbued with the glory of God. He carried over the plaintive longing for the beloved, the self - chastisement and the humility of the Bhakti poets, but in a more formal, sophisticated and self-conscious manner. He aligned himself with the down-trodden and the suffering masses of India, criticizing the oppression of the British. His sensibility was idealistic and romantic, but his romanticism grappled with modernism and survived it. Rabindranath Tagore was considered the 'epitome of Indian Spiritual Heritage'. Primarily, he wrote his plays in the Bengali language but his plays were translated into English. Some of his plays were translated by himself and others by the Indians and English translators. His well-known plays are *Chitra*, *Sacrifice*, *The Post Office*, *Muktadhara*, *The Cycle of Spring*, *The King of the Dark Chambers*; all these plays are the best examples of Indian Philosophy. Tagore is among them who used symbolism and

allegorical significance as important techniques in their plays. Diana Devlin rightly says, “The philosopher, writer and teacher Rabindranath Tagore unifies Indian and western traditions creating plays which are the mixture of Bengali folk drama and Western medieval mystery plays” The main theme of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry is the essential unity (or continuity) of all creation, which is also the main theme of the ancient Hindu Upanishads.

GITANJALI: Tagore is known for Gitanjali. The word Gitanjali is composed out of git+anjali. Git means song, and anjali means offering, thus it's meant as “Song offerings”. It is of Sanskrit, Indian origin. The publication of the English version of Gitanjali paved Tagore the way to the world of English literature. It was in 1912 he published the Gitanjali and in 1913 he was awarded the Nobel Prize by the Swedish academy.

Song Offerings is a collection of 103 prose poems, selected by Tagore from among his Bengali poems and translated by him into English. The collection brought Tagore international attention and won him the Nobel Prize in Literature. Although Tagore later published more than twenty additional volumes of his poetry in English translation, Gitanjali (Song Offerings) remained one of his most beloved works.

It contained translations of 53 poems from the original Bengali Gitanjali, as well as 50 other poems which were from his drama Achalayatan and eight other books of poetry — mainly Gitimalya (17 poems), Naivedya (15 poems) and Kheya (11 poems).

The major theme in Gitanjali is devotion to God. Indian philosophical aspects and the theme of devotion is superb. Gitanjali focuses on the all-pervading presence of God everywhere. Gitanjali brings its readers into direct contact with the Infinite. For example ‘Where The Mind Is Without Fear’ is a pre-independent poem in which the poet sincerely urges God to awaken his fellow beings for the realization that the essential need to live in a free and united country. He wants his countrymen to awake and enjoy a life of full dignity and honour. It is a prayer to God. It is an extremely patriotic poem. Western readers immediately noted similarities between Gitanjali (Song Offerings) and the biblical Song of Songs, which most theologians insist deals not with a human union but with Christ's love for his church. Though Gitanjali also is filled with sensual [imagery](#), there is no doubt that Tagore's subject is the relationship between a human being and the divine.

Gitanjali Song Offerings is a collection, not a single narrative, still, it does have a certain unity. All of the poems are devotional in nature, and they all have the tender tone of conventional love poems. There are also several motifs or subordinate themes that are repeated and recombined throughout the collection. In the first three poems, for example, the writer emphasizes his smallness and his helplessness before his lord. Then the emphasis shifts to what is expected of the writer.

Tagore's Lyricism: Poet, dramatist, novelist, short-story writer, critic, musician, educationist and genius par excellence, Tagore was one of the most remarkable figures in the recent history of India, besides being almost certainly the greatest Indian poet of the century. Rabindranath Tagore is primarily and pre-eminently a lyric poet. KRS Iyengar says “He wrote the largest number of lyrics ever attended by any poet”. Tagore composed about 2000 lyrics of incomparable beauty and sweetness. Its lyrics are both rich in content and form and they are noticeable for the exquisite blending of the harmony of thoughts, feelings and melody of the world. They are meditative, reflective and remarkable for their spiritual character.

Tagore's English lyrics are mainly prose poems in which he uses musical language and an incantatory tone.

Tagore's lyrics are characterized by the versatility of themes, but it is the manifestation of divinity in all objects and the aspects of the Universe. He composed lyrics on God, Love, Nature, Children, Love of the world and humanity and so on. No other poet, even Sarojini Naidu who has been hailed as the 'Nightingale of India' composed lyrics of such a vast variety of themes. In his lyrics, Tagore recaptures the theme and spirits of Indian philosophy and vividly creates the Indian atmosphere and the influence of Upanishads, the Vaishnava Poets, the folk songs of Bengal and Kalidasa.

'Where the Mind is Without Fear" by Rabindranath Tagore is one of his vastly read and discussed poems. It was originally composed in Bengali possibly in 1900 under the title "Prarthana", meaning prayer. It appeared in the volume called 'Naibedya' in 1901. Later in 1911, Tagore himself translated the Bengali poem into English and that translation appeared as poem 35 in his Nobel winning anthology "Gitanjali" (Song Offerings) published by the Indian Society, London in 1912.

So when the poem was written, India was under British Rule and people were eagerly waiting to get their freedom from British Rule. The poem is written in the form of a prayer to God, the Almighty for true freedom for his country. And thus Tagore reveals his own concept of freedom throughout the poem, Where the Mind is Without Fear.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

In the very first line, the poet prays to the Almighty that his countrymen should be free from any fear of oppression or forced compulsion. He wishes that everyone in his country has his head held high in dignity. In other words, according to him, in a truly free country, every person should be fearless and should have a sense of self-dignity.

Where knowledge is free;

In the second line of Where the Mind is Without Fear the poet dreams of a nation where knowledge would be free. Education should not be restricted to the upper class only but everybody should be allowed to acquire knowledge. Not only that, the children should learn freely from nature and the world around them. They should not be forced to memorize some predetermined lessons. And this is Tagore's typical concept of education.

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments

By narrow domestic walls;

In the next two lines, the poet emphasizes the unity of not only of his countrymen but also of the entire world. He thinks there should be no division among people based on their caste, creed, colour, religion or other baseless superstitions. In other words, prejudices and superstitions should not divide people into groups and break their unity.

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

In line 5 of Where the Mind is Without Fear, Tagore wants a nation where people are truthful. They should not be superficial and words should come out from the depth of their hearts.

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

In the sixth line of the poem, the poet wants everyone to work hard to reach their goal, and in the long run to reach perfection. . He thinks they should not be tired by working. People should not be lazy and ignore their work.

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way

Into the dreary desert sand of dead habits;

In line 7, the poet compares 'reason' or logical thinking to a "clear stream" and in the next line compares 'dead habits' or superstitious beliefs to a 'dreary desert'. He wants the stream of a reason not to lose its way into the desert of prejudices. In short, people's thoughts should be monitored by rational thinking, not by superstition; logic should rule over old baseless beliefs.

Where the mind is led forward by thee

Into ever-widening thought and action;

In lines 9 and 10, the poet wishes his countrymen to be progressive and broad-minded. He wants their minds to be "led forward" to "ever-widening thought and action" by the Almighty.

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake

In the final line of the poem, the poet addresses God as 'Father'. He asks him to awaken his country into such a 'heaven of freedom where the above conditions meet.

To make it clear, the poet prays to the Almighty (my Father) to raise or lift (awake) his country to such heights where freedom would be realised at its best (heaven of freedom). In turn, he is actually praying that God awakens his countrymen so that they come out from the darkness of ignorance, prejudices, disunity and all other evils.

In the poem, the poet's message is very clear. If all the people of a nation are not wise enough to lead a happy and peaceful life free from all evils, they cannot enjoy their freedom well. So to the poet, only political freedom is not so important unless you are fearless, self dignified, knowledgeable, truthful, hard-working and broad-minded enough to enjoy it fully.

One cannot deny the fact that his poems are of outstanding excellence and of permanent and universal significance. The poet has seen life in its naked realism. His poetry tries to diagnose the ailments of modern life and embodies its spirit. "Realism' in subject matter has the modern thinkers wipe out artificiality." Reality does not mean Supreme Being here. Realism means pathos, grief, sorrow, and sadness of the world, which prevails in human conduct and nature directly. Tagore's realism can be characterized by the use of colloquial diction, words, speeches, rhythms etc. He has spiritualized nature like Wordsworth and intellectualized like Shelley. Tagore does not love nature alone, but also lower creatures, living in the lap of nature. His poetry deepens a sense of pity for the poor and the suffering. The spread of democracy has made the poet more and more conscious of the dignity of man. He may have achieved his great and lasting popularity just because he was a poet of hope.

Tagore a Dramatist and a Novelist: Tagore's literary reputation is disproportionately influenced by regard for his poetry; however, he also wrote novels, essays, short stories, travelogues, dramas, and thousands of songs. Of Tagore's prose, his short stories are perhaps most highly regarded; indeed, he is credited with originating the Bengali-language version of the genre. His works are frequently noted for their rhythmic, optimistic, and lyrical nature. Such stories mostly borrow from the deceptively simple subject matter: the lives of ordinary people. Tagore wrote eight novels and four novellas, including *Chaturanga*, *Shesher Kobita*, *Char Odhay*, and *Noukadubi*. *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*).

Political Thought: Rabindranath Tagore was writing at a time when the entire country was thrown into the fever of freedom struggle and he plunged with deep passion into the struggle. He took part in the freedom movements by opening a Swadeshi shop selling only Indian goods and by rejecting foreign goods. He also composed many patriotic songs and

articles especially during the painful partition of Bengal in 1905. Those songs inspired the youth of the country. He gave us the National Anthem: "Jana Gana Mana". He had also composed the National anthem of Bangladesh: "Amar Sonar Bangla". He also wrote the lyrics of Sri Lanka's National Anthem.

Death

Tagore died on August 7, 1941, at Calcutta leaving behind a legacy of world-class literature. He is one of the most influential Indian writers and so not only the nation but also the entire intellectual community of the world suffered an irreparable loss. The nation lost a great poet, philosopher, social reformer, mystic and a greater human being.

He was not only a representative of the nation but a wholesome product of Mother Earth, an amalgamation of Indian and modern values. Even though he is not among us, his presence can be felt through his vast works. His birthday is celebrated as Rabindra Jayanti in West Bengal. He will always be remembered as the source of inspiration for noble thoughts and great ideas for humanity.