



## Rabindranath Tagore (Biography)

Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel laureate poet, writer, philosopher was the ambassador of Indian culture to the rest of the world. He is probably the most prominent figure in the cultural world of Indian subcontinent and the first Asian man to be awarded with Nobel prize. Even though he is mainly known as a poet, his multifaceted talent showered upon different branches of art, such as, novels, short stories, dramas, articles, essays, painting etc. And his songs, popularly known as *Rabindrasangeet*, have an eternal appeal and is permanently placed in the heart of the Bengalis. He was a social reformer, patriot and above all, a great humanitarian and philosopher. India and Bangladesh - the national anthems of these two countries are his composition.

Tagore was born on Tuesday, 7th May 1861 in a wealthy family in Calcutta at the address of 6, Dwarkanath Thakur Lane, Calcutta. He was the ninth son of Debenadrath and Sarada Devi. His grand father Dwarkanath Tagore was a rich landlord and social reformer. Even though he was from a very wealthy family, in those days Jorasanko house ( Tagore house ) was a center of culture.

He was first admitted into Oriental Seminary School. But he did not like the conventional education and started home study under several teachers. Later he went to Normal School, Bengal Academy and St Xaviers School , but all lasted for a brief period. At the age of 7 he wrote a rhyme. Went to visit Northern part of India and Himalayas with this father. In 1874, his first published poem *Abhilaash*(Desire) was published anonymously in a magazine called *Tattobodhini*. Mother Sarada Devi expired in 1875. For the first time a poem with his name as author was published in *Amritabazar Patrika* (weekly). He translated Macbeth into Bengali verse which was later published in *Bharati* magazine. Following the style of *Vaisnava Padavali* (verses), he wrote *Bhanusingher Padavali* under the penname of *Bhanusingha*. In the beginning of his literary works, there was impact of his elder brother Jyotirindranath and his wife Kadambari Devi. Two magazines, *Bharati* and *Balak* - were used to get published from the Tagore house and he regularly contributed to those. His first book of poems, *Kabi Kahini* ( tale of a poet ) was published in 1878. In the same year, he sailed to England with his brother Satyandranath. He got admitted into the University College in England and started studying under Prof Henry Morley. Returned to India on 1880. Wrote two musical plays - *Valmiki Prativa* (The Genius of Valmiki) and *Kalmrigaya* (The Fatal Hunt ). Acted in these plays too. Left for England in 1881, but changed his mind and came back from Madras and went to Mussorie to meet his father. In 1882, he wrote *Sandhya Sangeet* ( Evening Songs ) which impressed Bankim Chandra Chatterjee so much that he took off his garland of greeting from his neck and put around that of Tagore in a function. Wrote a famous poem - *Nirharer Swapnabhanga* ( The Fountain Awakened from its Dream ). Got married to Bhabatarini Devi in 1883 at the age of 22. Later her name was changed to Mrinalini Devi. In 1884 wrote a collection of poem - *Kadi-o-kamal* (Sharp and Flats). Continued



Painting



Painting



Painting



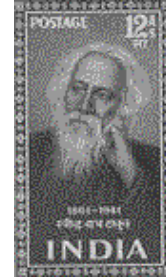
Painting



writing in different forms. His first child ( daughter ) Madhurilata was born in 1886. Wrote musical drama - *Mayar Khela*. Also wrote dramas - *Raja-o-rani* ( King and Queen ) and *Visarjan* ( Sacrifice ). In 1890 daughter Renuka was born. In 1890 Tagore went to Shilaidaha ( now in Bangladesh ) to take care of the family estate. Here he was influenced by the natural beauty and simple life of rural Bengal. Attended session of Indian National Congress and sang the song *Vandemataram* on the opening day. Wrote famous dance/musical drama - *Chitrangada*. His youngest daughter Mira was born in 1892. In 1894 , wrote famous collection poems - *Sonar Tari* ( The Golden Boat ). Son Samindra was born in 1894. In 1901 he took the editorial charge of the magazine *Bangadarshan*. Got involved with freedom fighting movement. Established *Bolpur Bramhacharyaashram* at Shantiniketan, a school in the pattern of old Indian *Ashrama*. In 1902 his wife Mrinalini died. Composed *Smaran* ( In Memoriam ), a collection of poems, dedicated to his wife. Within six months from this incident his daughter Renuka expired. The demise of father Debendranath happened in 1905. He strongly protested Lord Curzon's decision to divide Bengal on the basis of religion. Wrote a number of national songs and attended protest meetings. He introduced the *Rakhibandhan* ceremony , symbolizing the underlying unity in undivided Bengal. Was shocked by the sudden death of son Samindra in 1907. In 1909 started writing *Gitanjali* from Silaidaha. Composed *Janaganamana* in 1911 which later became the national anthem of India. In 1912 went to Europe for the second time. On the journey to London he translated some of his poems/songs from *Gitanjali* to English. He met William Rothenstein, a noted British painter, in London. He was first introduced to Rothenstein in Calcutta at a gathering at Abanindranath Tagore's house before. Rothenstien was impressed by the poems, made copies and gave to Yeats and other English poets. He arranged a reading in his house where Yeats read Tagore's poems in front of a distinguished audience comprising of Ezra Pound, May Sinclair, Ernest Rhys etc. Tagore sailed for America ( for the first time ) from England. Reached New York, came to Urbana, Illinois, gave a lecture and went to Chicago. In the mean time, India Society of London published *Gitanjali* ( song offerings ) containing 103 translated poems of Tagore. Yeats wrote the introduction for this book and Rothenstein did a pencil sketch for the cover page. The book created a sensation in English literary world. Tagore was traveling America . Delivered lectures in Rochester, Boston, Harvard University. Ezra Pound's "*Poetry*" Magazine published from Chicago had the honor of publishing first English poem of Tagore. His six *Gitanjali* poems appeared in *Poetry* in December, 1912 issue. Poet returned back to Calcutta. In 13th November of 1913, Indians came to know that the Nobel prize for literature has been awarded to Tagore for his *Gitanjali*. On 26th Decemeber, University of Calcutta conferred on him the honorary degree of "D.Litt.". Received Knighthood in 1915. Proceeded to Japan in 1916. On the way gave speech at Rangoon, Singapore, Hongkong. In Sep, 1916 got invitation from different institutions in USA and reached Seattle ( Washington). Lectured at Portland, San Fransisco, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Salt Lake

Shilaidaha House

STAMPS



India



Bangladesh



Russia



Brazil



Argentina



City, Chicago, Iowa, Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Boston. At Columbia Theatre, New York read translation from his novel *Raja*. Returned to Calcutta in 1917. In 1918 his eldest daughter Madhurilata passed away. In 1919, the poet started a tour to South India. Delivered lectures on different topics at Bangalore, Mysore, Ooty, Coimbatore, Palghat, Salem, Trichy, Sirangapatnam, Kumbakonam, Tanjore and Madras. At Madras spoke as Chancellor of National University, founded by Annie Besant and stayed as a guest of Mr. Besant at Adyar. In 1919, he wrote a historic letter to Lord Chelmsford repudiating his Knighthood in protest of the massacre at Jalianwalabag, Punjab. In 1920 he went to Gandhiji's Sabarmati Ashram and visited Ahmedabad, Surat and Bombay. Call came from Europe again in 1920. Toured different places in England and Paris, Hague, Brussels. From Europe to America. Delivered lectures at New York, Princeton, Chicago and came back to Europe. His effort to raise fund for Viswabharati was not very fruitful in America, mostly because he was seen as anti-British and pro-German. He continued talks at Geneva, Zurich, Hamburg, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Berlin, Frankfurt, Vienna, Prague and in other cities.

In 1921, established Viswabharati University. He gave all his money from Nobel Prize and royalty money from his books to this University. Went to Bombay and from there to Poona. Visited and lectured at Mysore, Bangalore, Coimbatore, Trivandam, Cochin and Colombo. Got invitation from China and visited Shanghai, Peiking. Visited Japan again in this tour. Went to South America. Met Argentine poet Madam Victoria Ocampo at Buenos Ayres. The poet gave her a name, *Vijaya* and wrote *Purabi* - a collection of poems dedicated to her. On the return journey visited Italy and lectured in Milan, Venice, Florence. Mahatma Gandhi visited Santiniketan in poet's birthday. In 1926 visited Dacca, Moimonsingha, Comilla. Visited Europe again and this time went to Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania, Greece and Egypt. In 1927 went to Malayasia, Java, Thailand. In 1929 Canada. In 1930 Russia. In 1932 Iran, Iraq. And in 1934 to Sri Lanka.

In 1940 Oxford University arranged a special ceremony in Santiniketan to honor the poet with Doctorate Of Literature. Tagore passed away on 7th August, 1941.



Sweden



Venezuela