

A HOMAGE TO RABINDRANATH TAGORE

FROM INDIA AND THE WORLD

IN CELEBRATION OF HIS SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY



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FOREWORD

LONG with the readers of this volume and the members of the Golden Book of Tagore Committee, I am grateful to and cordially thank the ladies and gentlemen who have contributed to it, as they have enabled all of us thereby to have some idea of the genius, personality and achievement of Rabindranath Tagore. But these are so great and many-sided that a complete appraisal of them is hardly practicable within any manageable compass. Nevertheless, I, too, on whom has been conferred the honour of editing this book, must venture to write briefly what I know of the Poet—if only in obedience to a natural public desire.

Rabindranath Tagore is our greatest poet and prose-writer. Son of a Maharshi (a "great seer"), and himself a seer and sage, he belongs to a family the most gifted in Bengal in the realms of religion, philosophy, literature, music, painting, and the histrionic art. There is no department of Bengali literature that he has touched which he has not adorned, elevated, and filled with inspiration and lighted up by the lustre of his genius. Difficult as it undoubtedly would be to give an exhaustive list of his multifarious achievements from early youth upwards—for his is a many-sided and towering personality, even the departments of literature and knowledge which he has touched and adorned would make a pretty long list. The late Mahamahopadhyaya Haraprasad Sastri, M.A., D.LITT., C.I.E., said of the Poet in the course of his presidential address at the preparatory meeting for the Tagore Septuagenary Celebrations:

He has tried all phases of literature—couplets, stanzas, short poems, longer pieces, short stories, longer stories, fables, novels and prose romances, dramas, farces, comedies and tragedies, songs, operas, kirtans, $p\bar{a}l\bar{a}s$, and, last but not least, lyric poems. He has succeeded in every phase of literature he has touched, but he has succeeded in the last phase of literature beyond measure. His essays are illuminating, his sarcasms biting, his satires piercing. His estimate of old poets is deeply appreciative, and his grammatical and lexicographical speculations go further inward than those of most of us.

Tennyson, in his poem addressed to Victor Hugo, called that great French author "Victor in Drama, Victor in Romance, Cloud-weaver of phantasmal hopes and fears," "Lord of human tears," "Child-lover," and "Weird Titan by thy winter weight of years as yet unbroken." All these epithets and many more can be rightly applied to Rabindranath Tagore.

Many works and some kinds of works of Rabindranath in Bengali have not yet been translated into English or thence into other Western and Eastern languages. In the translations, moreover, much, if not all, of the music, the suggestiveness, the undefinable associations clustering round Bengali words and phrases, and the aroma racy of Bengal and India, of the original has been lost. No doubt, the translation of the poems and dramas—particularly when done by the Poet himself, have ofte gained in directness, in the beauty and sublimity of simplicity, and in the music an strength belonging to the English or other language of the translations. Bu admitting all this, one is still constrained to observe that, for a correct estimate an full appreciation of Rabindranath's intellectual and literary powers, his gifts ar genius, it is necessary to study both his original works in Bengali and their Englist translations as well as his original works in English like Personality, Sadhana, ar The Religion of Man. What high estimates of Tagore as an author many competer judges have formed without the advantage of reading his Bengali works, will apper from their contributions to this volume.

The music of his verse, and often of his prose as well, which fills the outer earlies but an echo of the inner harmony of humanity and the universe—"the music the spheres"—which exists at the heart of things and which he has caught and manifest by his writings. How wonderfully full of real life and colour and motic and variety they are! His hymns and sermons and some of his other writings is us unconsciously into the secret of his access to the court of the King of kings, no to His very presence, and of his communion with Him. His hymns and oth writings in a spiritual vein have, therefore, brought healing to many a troubled so

Insight and imagination are his magic wands, by whose power he roams whe he will and leads his readers thither, too. In his works Bengali literature has or grown its provincial character and has become fit to fraternize with world literature. Universal currents of thought and spirituality have flowed into Bengal through I writings.

In philosophy he is not a system-builder. He is of the line of our ancie religio-philosophical teachers whose religion and philosophy are fused components one whole. Both his poetry and prose embody his philosophy—the latest prose-we in English being *The Religion of Man*.

But he is not simply a literary man, though his eminence as an author is su that for a foreigner the Bengali language would be worth learning for his writing

It does not in the least detract from his work as a musician to admit that he not an ustad or "expert" in music, as that term is understood in common parlamered has such a sensitive ear that he appears to live in two worlds—one, the world visible forms and colours, and another, which one may call the world of sound-form and sound-colours. His musical genius and instinct are such that his achieveme in that art has extorted the admiration of many "experts." This is said not wing reference only to his numerous hymns and patriotic and other songs and the ture to which he has himself set them, or to his thrilling, sweet, soulful and rapt singing different periods of his life, but also in connection with what he has done if

absolute music. He is not only the author of the words of his songs, possessed of rare depth of meaning and suggestiveness and power of inspiration, but is also the creator of what may be called new airs and tunes.

Six years ago, I had the good fortune to be present at some of the meetings in Germany and Czechoslovakia where he recited some of his poems. His recitations were such that even when the poems recited were in a language not understood by the vast majority of the audience, he had to repeat them several times at the earnest request of the hearers. Those who have heard him read his addresses and deliver his extempore speeches and sermons in Bengali know how eloquent he could be as a speaker, though his delivery in years past was often so rapid and his sentences branched out in such bewildering luxuriance as to make him the despair of reporters.

He is a master and a consummate teacher of the histrionic art. Those who have seen him appear in leading rôles in many of his plays have experienced how natural and elevating acting can be. From the prime of his manhood upwards he has been in the habit of reading out his new poems, discourses, short stories, plays and novels to select circles. On such occasions, too, his elocution and histrionic talents come into play.

If it is true that the credit of reviving music in public for respectable women goes to the Brahma Samaj, that credit belongs in great part to the Tagore family and Rabindranath Tagore. They have also made it possible for girls and women of respectable classes to act in public. The poet has also rehabilitated in Bengal dancing by respectable girls and women as a means of self-expression and innocent amusement and play.

Tagore's patriotic songs are characteristic. They are refined and restrained, and free from bluff, bravado, bluster and boasting. Some of them twine their tendrils round the tenderest chords of our hearts, some enthrone the Motherland as the Adored in the shrine of our souls, some sound as a clarion call to our drooping spirits filling us with hope and the will to do and dare and suffer, some call on us to have the lofty courage to be in the minority of one; but in none are heard the clashing of interests, the warring passions of races, or the echoes of old, unhappy, far-off historic strifes and conflicts. In many of those written during the stirring times of the Swadeshi agitation in Bengal more than a couple of decades ago, the Poet spoke out with a directness which is missed in many of his writings, though not in the Katha-O-Kahini ballads which make the heart beat thick and fast and the blood tingle and leap and course swiftly in our veins.

To Andrews Fletcher of Salton, a famous Scottish patriot, is attributed the authorship of the observation that "if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation." He is generally quoted, however, as having said so with respect to songs. Both ballads and songs have much to do with the making of nations. Rabindranath's songs and ballads—the former to a greater extent than the latter, have been making Bengal to no small extent and will

continue to mould the character of Bengalis, literate and illiterate, town-dwellers and village folk, and their culture and civilization. But it is not merely as a maker of songs that he has taken part in the Swadeshi movement. His socio-political addresses, the annual fairs suggested or organized by him, are part of the same national service. He has worked earnestly for the revival of weaving and other arts and crafts of the country—particularly village arts and crafts, and contributed his full share to making education in India Indian as well as human and humane in the broadest sense, and to the sanitation, reconstruction, reorganization and rejuvenation of villages. Even official reports have praised him as a model landlord for his activities in these directions in his estate.

His scheme of Constructive Non-co-operation, as outlined in some of his writings and addresses about a quarter of a century ago, was part of his Swadeshi movement politics. The "no-tax" campaign adumbrated in his play Paritran ("Deliverance") and the joyful acceptance of suffering and chains by its hero, Dhananjay Bairagi, are his idea of what political leaders should do on such occasions.

As he has denounced Nationalism in his book of that name, taking the word to mean that organized form of a people which is meant for its selfish aggrandizement, even at the expense of other peoples by foul, cruel and unrighteous means, and as he is among the chief protagonists of what is, not quite appropriately, called Internationalism, his profound and all-sided love of the Motherland, both as expressed in words and as manifested in action, has sometimes not been evident perhaps to superficial observers. But those who know him and his work and the literature he has created, know that he loves his land

"with love far-brought From out the storied Past, and used Within the Present, but transfused Thro' future time by power of thought."

His penetrating study of and insight into the history of India and Greater India have strengthened this love.

The origin of what is called his Internationalism has sometimes been traced to his revealing and disappointing experiences during the Anti-partition and Swadeshi movement of Bengal of the first decade of this century. Such experiences are not denied. But his love and interest in the affairs of the whole of humanity are traceable even in his writings of his boyhood in his teens. And in maturer life, this feature of his character found distinct expression in a poem, named Prabasi, written thirty-one years ago, in which he says that his home is in all lands, his country in all countries, his close kindred in all homes, and that he is resolved to win this country, this home and these kindred.

In his patriotism there is no narrowness, no chauvinism, no hatred or contempt of the foreigner. He believes that India has a message and a mission, a special work

entrusted to her by Providence. But he has never denied that other countries, too, may have their own special messages and missions. He does not dismiss the West with a supercilious sneer, but respects it for its science, its strength and will to face martyrdom in the cause of truth, freedom and justice and its activities for human welfare, and wishes the East to take what it should and can from the West, not like a beggar without patrimony or as an adopted child, but as a strong and healthy man may take wholesome food from all quarters and assimilate it. This taking on the part of the East from the West, moreover, is the reception of stimulus and impetus, more than or rather than learning, borrowing or imitation. The West, too, can derive advantage from contact with the East, different from the material gain of the plunderer and the exploiter. The study of his writings and utterances leaves us with the impression that the West can cease to dominate in the East only when the latter, fully awake, self-knowing, self-possessed and self-respecting, no longer requires any blister or whip and leaves no department of life and thought largely unoccupied by its own citizens.

His hands reach out to the West and the East, to all humanity, not as those of a suppliant, but for friendly grasp and salute. He is among the foremost reconcilers and uniters of races and continents. He has renewed India's cultural connection with Japan, China, Siam and Islands-India by his visits to those lands.

In spite of the cruel wrongs inflicted on India by the British *nation*, and whilst condemning such wrong-doing unsparingly, he has never refrained from being just and even generous in his estimate of the British *people*.

His politics are concerned more with the moulding of society and character-building than with the more vocal manifestations of that crowded department of national activity. Freedom he prizes as highly and ardently as the most radical politician, but his conception of freedom is full and fundamental. To him the chains of inertness, cowardice and ignorance, of selfishness and pleasure-seeking, of superstition and lifeless custom, of the authority of priestcraft and letter of scripture, constitute our bondage no less than the yoke of the stranger, which is largely a consequence and a symptom. He prizes and insists upon the absence of external restraints. But this does not constitute the whole of his idea of freedom. There should be inner freedom also, born of self-sacrifice, enlightenment, self-purification and self-control. This point of view has largely moulded his conception of the Indian political problem and the best method of tackling it. He wishes to set the spirit free, to give it wings to soar, so that it may have largeness of vision and a boundless sphere of activity. He desires that fear should be cast out. Hence his politics and his spiritual ministrations merge in each other.

Age and bodily infirmities have not made him a reactionary and obscurantist. His spirit is ever open to new light. He continues to be a progressive social reformer. His intellectual powers are still at their height. His latest poetic creations of the month—perhaps one may safely say, of the week or the day—do not

betray any dimness of vision, any lack of inspiration or fertility, nor are there in them any signs of repetition. He continues to be among our most active writers. This is for the joy of creation and self-expression and fraternal giving, as he loves his kind, and human intercourse is dear to his soul. His ceaseless and extensive reading in very many diverse subjects, including some out-of-the way sciences and crafts, and his travels in many continents enable him to establish ever new intellectual and spiritual contacts, to be abreast of contemporary thought, to keep pace with its advance and with the efforts of man to plant the flag of the conscious master in the realms of the unknown—himself being one of the most sanguine and dauntless of intellectual and spiritual prospectors and explorers.

When Curzon partitioned Bengal against the protests of her people, he threw himself heart and soul into the movement for the self-realization and self-expression of the people in all possible ways. But when popular resentment and despair led to the outbreak of terrorism, he was the first to utter the clearest note of warning, to assert that Indian nationalism should not stultify and frustrate itself by recourse to violence, though with him abstention from the use of force under all circumstances is not a religious principle. He has been equally unsparing in his condemnation of the predatory instincts and activities of nations, whether of the military or of the economic variety. He has never believed that war can ever be ended by the pacts of robber nations so long as they do not repent and give up their wicked ways and the spoils thereof. The remedy lies in the giving up of greed and the promotion of neighbourly feelings between nation and nation as between individual men. Hence the poet-seer has repeatedly given in various discourses and contexts his exposition of the ancient text of the Ishopanishad:

ईशावास्यमिदंसर्व्वे यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्। तेन त्यक्तेन भुजीथा मा गृधः कस्यसिद्धनम्॥

"All this whatsoever that moves in Nature is indwelt by the Lord. Enjoy thou what hath been allotted by Him. Do not covet anybody's wealth."

In pursuance of this line of thought, while the poet has expressed himself in unambiguous language against the use of violence by the party in power in Russia, and while he still holds that private property has its legitimate uses for the maintenance and promotion of individual freedom and individual self-creation and self-expression and for social welfare, he sees and states clearly the advantages of Russian collectivism, as will be evident from his following cabled reply to a query of Professor Petrov, of V.O. K.S., Moscow:

"Your success is due to turning the tide of wealth from the individual to collective humanity."

As an educationist, he has preserved in his ideal of Visva-bharati, the international university, the spirit of the ancient ideal of the tapovanas or forest retreats

of the Teachers of India—its simplicity, its avoidance of softness and luxury, its insistence on purity and chastity, its spirituality, its practical touch with nature, and the free play that it gave to all normal activities of body and soul. While the ancient spirit has been thus sought to be kept up, there is in this open-air institution at Santiniketan no cringing to mere forms, however hoary with antiquity. The Poet's mental outlook is universal. He claims for his people all knowledge and culture, whatever its origin, as their province. Hence, while he wants the youth of India of both sexes to be rooted in India's past and to draw sustenance therefrom, while he has been practically promoting the culture of the principal religious communities of India as far as the resources of the institution permits, he has also extended a friendly invitation and welcome to the exponents of foreign cultures as well. This has made it possible, for any who may so desire, to pursue the study of comparative religion at Santiniketan. He wants that there should be no racialism, no sectarian and caste and colour prejudice in his institution.

Visva-bharati stands neither for merely literary, nor for merely vocational education, but for both and more. Tagore wants both man the knower and man the maker. He wants an intellectual as well as an artistic and aesthetic education. He wants the growth of a personality equal to meeting the demands of society and solitude alike. Santiniketan now comprises a primary and a high school, a college, a school of graduate research, a school of painting and modelling and of some crafts, a music school, a school of agriculture and village welfare work, a co-operative bank with branches and a public health institute. Here students of both sexes have their games and physical exercises, including jugitsu as taught by a leading Japanese expert and other arts of defence. The poet's idea of a village is that it should combine all its beautiful and healthy rural characteristics with the amenities of town life necessary for fullness of life and efficiency. Some such amenities have already been provided in his schools. There is co-education in all stages. It is one of the cherished desires of the poet to give girl students complete education in a Woman's University based on scientific methods, some of which are the fruits of his own insight and mature experience.

When he is spoken of as the founder of Visva-bharati, it is not to be understood that he has merely given it a local habitation and a name and buildings and funds and ideals. That he has, no doubt, done. To provide funds, he had, in the earlier years of the school, sometimes to sell the copyright of some of his books and even temporarily to part with some of Mrs. Tagore's jewellery. In the earlier years of the institution, he took classes in many subjects, lived with the boys in their rooms, entertained them in the evenings by story-telling, recitations of his poems, games of his own invention, methods of sense-training of his own devising, etc. Even recently he has been known to take some classes. And he continues to keep himself in touch with the institution in various ways.

Rabindranath has been a journalist from his teens. He has often written with terrible truthfulness—I can bear witness to the fact from personal knowledge. In years past the Poet successfully edited several monthlies and contributed, and still contributes, to numerous more. He has written for many weeklies, too. He is the only man in Bengal I know who was and still is capable of filling a magazine from the first page to the last with excellent reading in prose and verse of every description required.

I have been privileged to publish perhaps a larger number of poems, stories, novels, articles, etc., from Rabindranath's pen, in Bengali and English, than any other editor. It has been a privilege without any penalty attached to it, as he is regular, punctual and methodical, and as it is easy and pleasant to read his beautiful handwriting. As an editor, he was the making of many authors, who subsequently became well known, by the thorough revision to which he subjected their work.

His beautiful handwriting has been copied by so many persons in Bengal that even I who have had occasion to see it so often cannot always distinguish the genuine thing from the imitation.

There is an impression abroad that no English translation by Rabindranath of any of his Bengali poems was published anywhere before the Gitanjali poems. That is a mistake. As far as I can now trace, the first English translations by himself of his poems appeared in the February, April and September numbers of The Modern Review in 1912. So far as my knowledge goes, this is how he came to write in English for publication. Sometime in 1911 I suggested that his Bengali poems should appear in English garb. So he gave me translations of two of his poems by the late Mr. Lokendranath Palit. Of these Fruitless Cry appeared in May and The Death of the Star in September, 1911, in The Modern Review. When I asked him by letter to do some translations himself, he expressed diffidence and unwillingness and tried to put me off by playfully reproducing two lines from one of his poems of which the purport was, 'On what pretext shall I now call back her to whom I bade adieu in tears?', the humorous reference being to the fact that he did not, as a schoolboy, take kindly to school education and its concomitant exercises. But his genius and the English muse would not let him off so easily. So a short while afterwards, he showed me some of his translations, asking me playfully whether as a quondam school-master I would pass them. These appeared in my Review. These are, to my knowledge, his earliest published English compositions. Their manuscripts are with me now.

I have referred to his beautiful hand. All calligraphists cannot and do not become painters; though, as Rabindranath burst into fame as a painter when almost seventy, the passage from calligraphy to painting might seem natural. I do not intend, nor am I competent, to discourse on his paintings. They are neither what is known as Indian art, nor are they any mere imitation of any ancient or modern European paintings. One thing which may perhaps stand in the way of the

commonalty understanding and appreciating them is that they tell no story. They express in line and colour what even the rich vocabulary and consummate literary art and craftsmanship of Rabindranath could not or did not say. He never went to any school of art or took lessons from any artist at home. Nor did he want to imitate anybody. So, he is literally an original artist. If there be any resemblance in his style to that of any other schools of painters, it is entirely accidental and unintentional. Over seventy now, he has often expressed a desire to practise the plastic arts. He may have begun already. In this connection I call to mind one interesting fact. In the Bengali Santiniketan Patra ("Santiniketan Magazine") of Jyaistha, 1333 B.E., published more than five years ago, Dr. Abanindranath Tagore, the famous artist, describes (pp. 100-101) how his uncle Rabindranath was instrumental in leading him to evolve his own style of indigenous art. Summing up, Abanindranath writes:

"বাংগলার কবি আর্টের স্ত্রপাত কলেন, বাংগলার আর্টিষ্ট সেই স্ত্র ধরে একলা একলা কান্ধ করে চল্লো কত দিন—"

"Bengal's poet suggested the lines of art, Bengal's artist (i.e., Abanindranath himself) continued to work alone along those lines for many a day—"

It has been my happy privilege to live at Santiniketan as the poet-seer's neighbour for long periods at a stretch. During one such period, my working room and sleeping room combined commanded an uninterrupted view of the small two-storied cottage in which he then lived—only a field intervened between. During that period I could never catch the poet going to sleep earlier than myself. And when early in the morning I used to go out for a stroll, if by chance it was very early I found him engaged in his daily devotions in the open upper storey verandah facing the East, but usually I found that his devotions were already over and he was busy with some of his usual work. At midday, far from enjoying a nap, he did not even recline. During the whole day and night, he spent only a few hours in sleep and bath and meals, and devoted all the remaining hours to work. During that period, I never found that he used a hand-fan or allowed anybody to fan him in summer. And the sultry summer days of Santiniketan are unforgettable.

The infirmities of age may have now necessitated slight changes in his habits. But even now he works harder than most young workers.

I have all along looked upon him as an earnest Sadhah. He is not, however, an ascetic, as his ideal of life is different.

''বৈরাগ্য সাধনে মুক্তি সে আমার নয়,"

"Liberation by detachment from the world is not mine," he has said in one of his poems.

One object of the sadhana of all believers in God, is to be somewhat godlike. As God's universe, which is both His garment and self-expression, is not a dreary desert, the life and externals of godlike men need not always be imitations of a desert. As bare deserts are, however, a phase of God's creation, asceticism may be a stage, a phase, of God-seeking and self-realization, but not the whole of it. Genuine asceticism for finding one's own soul and the Oversoul and for the good of man is worthy of reverence. Equally worthy of reverence, if not more, is the treading of the fuller and more difficult path of sadhana of those who are in the world without being of it.

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New York, U.S.A.

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Kaethe Kollwitz, Artist, Bad Tolz, Bavaria, Germany.

Sten Konow, Orientalist, Ethnographic Museum, Oslo, Norway.

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MURIEL LESTER, Kingsley Hall, East End, London.

SYLVAN LEVI, President, Société Asiatique and Professer, Collège de France,

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[The contributions have not been printed in the sequence given above—only a rough alphabetical order has been followed in the two sections—Greetings and Appreciations and Offerings. The Editor begs to apologise for this. Some of the contributions arrived late, after a considerable part of the book was in print.]

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