

Rabindranath Tagore was born on 7 May 1861 in a wealthy Brahmin family in Calcutta, India, and died in the year 1941. Tagore was an icon of Indian culture. He was a poet, musician and songwriter, playwright, novelist, painter, philosopher, and a teacher.

At the age of 17, he came to England to study Law but ended up quitting early and returning to India to continue studying home with his father and brothers and start composing his poetry. He returned to the UK at the age of fifty-one. On the slow journey by sea, he started translating selections of his poetry – Gitanjali or “Song Offerings” into English. W. B Yeats was a great admirer of these prose translations.

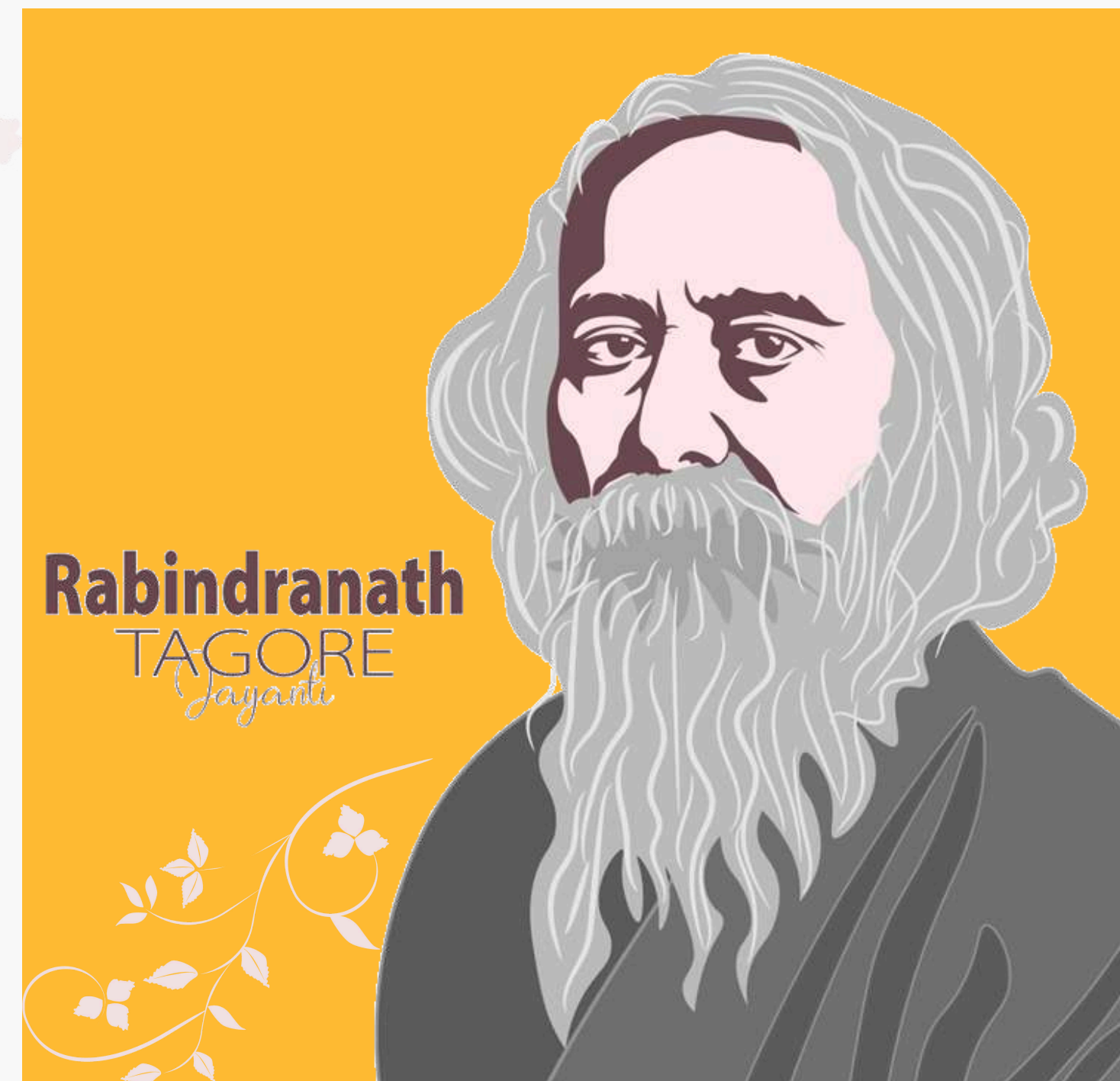
Throughout his life, he travelled the world and so was for many in the West an introduction to a more contemporary India. Tagore was inspired by Nature and a simplicity of life. In his various works he asked he asked of the world to look beyond the mundane and to recognise the treasures before us, in Nature and amongst our human community. As a master of his craft, Tagore combined the purity of poetry with a purpose for living. He emphasised the oneness of humanity and the paramount importance of freedom, justice, and peace.

In 1913, Tagore become the first non- European to win a Nobel Prize for Literature, awarded after the publication of his acclaimed collection of poems Geetanjali.

Tagore wrote the national anthems of India and Bangladesh – ‘Jana Gana Mana’ and ‘Amar Sonar Bangla’ respectively.

Tagore has composed more than two thousand songs. His songs known as Rabindrasangeet have become a symbol of cultural ethos of both India and Bangladesh.

Jayanti - 8th May



Rabindranath Tagore

Tagore says

“Civility is beauty of behaviour. It requires for its perfection patience, self-control, and an environment of leisure. For genuine courtesy is a creation, like, like pictures, like music. It is harmonious blending of voice, gesture and movement, words and actions, in which generosity of conduct is expressed. It reveals the man himself and has no ulterior purpose.”

Tagore was friends with many contemporaries of his time, including Mahatma Gandhi and the physicists Heisenberg and Einstein. . It was Tagore who conferred the title of ‘Mahatma’ on Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in the year 1915.

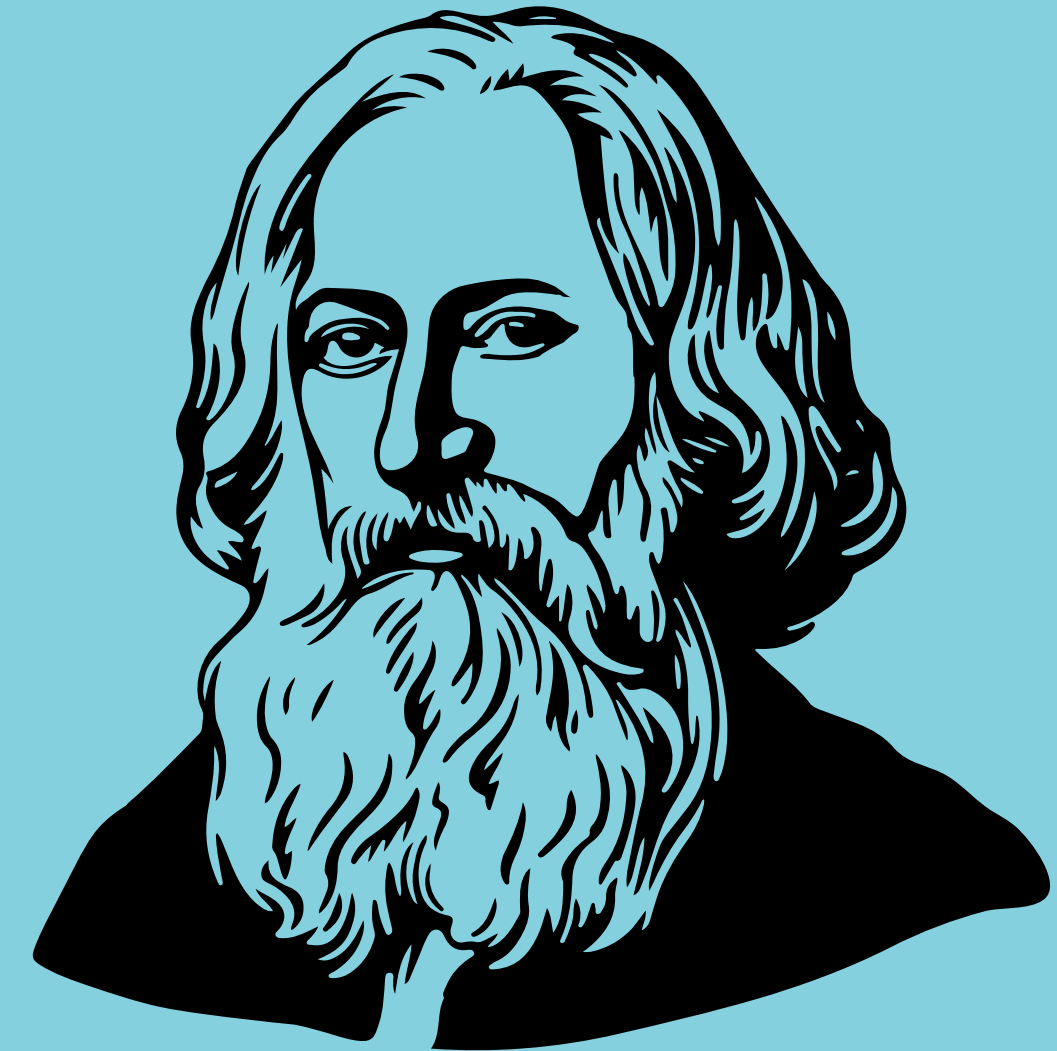
Tagore met Albert Einstein four times between 1930 and 1931. It is said that their conversations were marked ‘by their curiosity about the other’s contributions, their pursuit of truth and their love of music’.

Satish Kumar on Tagore

“In Tagore’s vision, growth in science, technology and material wellbeing should go hand in hand with spiritual growth. One without the other is like walking on one leg. This balanced and holistic worldview is needed now more than ever, as it is a prerequisite for a sustainable and resilient future for us and for coming generations. Pure reason and pure materialism are as doomed as the pursuit of purely personal salvation. The worldview of Tagore is seeing the unity of reason and religion, spirit and matter and letting them dance together. This is the big vision where science complements spirituality, art complements ecology and freedom complements equality.”

Now more than ever we need to live creatively and lightly on the Earth, so that future generations can enjoy the beauty and bounty of life. Tagore vision and values can help us to meet the challenges of our time.

On the next page I share some of my favourite Tagore Poems and quotes



BY KISHOR B SHAH



GO NOT TO THE TEMPLE

Go not to the temple to put flowers upon the feet of God, First fill your own house with the Fragrance of love and kindness.

Go not to the temple to light candles before the altar of God, First remove the darkness of sin, pride and ego, from your heart...

Go not to the temple to bow down your head in prayer, First learn to bow in humility before your fellowmen. And apologise to those you have wronged.

Go not to the temple to pray on bended knees, First bend down to lift someone who is downtrodden. And strengthen the young ones. Not crush them.

Go not to the temple to ask for forgiveness for your sins, First forgive from your heart those who have hurt you!



GITANJALI

“This is my prayer to thee, my lord - strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart. Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service. Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might.

Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles. And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love.”

“You can't cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water.”

“Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark.”

“Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but to add colour to my sunset sky.”

I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.

“The butterfly counts not months but moments, and has time enough.”

“The one who plants trees, knowing that he will never sit in their shade, has at least started to understand the meaning of life.”

“The fish in the water is silent, the animals on the earth is noisy, the bird in the air is singing. But man has in him the silence of the sea, the noise of the earth and the music of the air.”