

Biography of Sarojini Naidu

Sarojini Naidu also known by the sobriquet The Nightingale of India, was a child prodigy, Indian independence activist and poet. Naidu was the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress and the first woman to become the Governor of Uttar Pradesh state. She was a great patriot, politician, orator and administrator. Of all the famous women of India, Mrs. Sarojinidevi Naidu's name is at the top. Not only that, but she was truly one of the jewels of the world. Being one of the most famous heroines of the 20th century, her birthday is celebrated as "Women's Day"

Early Life

She was born in Hyderabad. Sarojini Chattopadhyay, later Naidu belonged to a Bengali family of Kulin Brahmins. But her father, Agorenath Chattopadhyay, after receiving a doctor of science degree from Edinburgh University, settled in Hyderabad State, where he founded and administered the Hyderabad College, which later became the Nizam's College in Hyderabad. Sarojini Naidu's mother Barada Sundari Devi was a poetess and used to write poetry in Bengali. Sarojini Naidu was the eldest among the eight siblings. One of her brothers Birendranath was a revolutionary and her other brother Harindranath was a poet, dramatist, and actor.

Sarojini Naidu was a brilliant student. She was proficient in Urdu, Telugu, English, Bengali, and Persian. At the age of twelve, Sarojini Naidu attained national fame when she topped the matriculation examination at Madras University. Her father wanted her to become a mathematician or scientist but Sarojini Naidu was interested in poetry. Once she was working on an algebra problem, and when she couldn't find the solution she decided to take a break, and in the same book she wrote her first inspired poetry. She got so enthused by this that she wrote "The Lady of the Lake", a poem 1300 lines long. When her father saw that she was more interested in poetry than mathematics or science, he decided to encourage her. With her father's support, she wrote the play "Maher Muneer" in the Persian language. Dr. Chattopadhyaya distributed some copies among his friends and sent one copy to the Nawab of Hyderabad. Reading a beautiful play written by a young girl, the Nizam was very impressed. The college gave her a scholarship to study abroad. At the age of 16 she got admitted to King's College of England.

England

At the age of 16, she traveled to England to study first at King's College London and later at Girton College, Cambridge. There she met famous laureates of her time such as Arthur Symonds and Edmond Gosse. It was Gosse who convinced Sarojini to stick to Indian themes—India's great mountains, rivers, temples, social milieu, to express her poetry. She depicted contemporary Indian life and events. Her collections "The golden threshold (1905)", "The bird of time (1912)", and "The broken wing (1912)" attracted huge Indian and English readership.

Love and Marry

During her stay in England, Sarojini met Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu, a non-Brahmin and a doctor

by profession, and fell in love with him. After finishing her studies at the age of 19, she got married to him during the time when inter-caste marriages were not allowed. Her father was a progressive thinking person, and he did not care what others said. Her marriage was a very happy one.

Works

Her major contribution was also in the field of poetry. Her poetry had beautiful words that could also be sung. Soon she got recognition as the "Bul Bule Hind" when her collection of poems was published in 1905 under the title Golden Threshold. After that, she published two other collections of poems--The Bird of Time and The Broken Wings. In 1918, Feast of Youth was published. Later, The Magic Tree, The Wizard Mask and A Treasury of Poems were published. Mahashree Arvind, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru were among the thousands of admirers of her work. Her poems had English words, but an Indian soul.

Politics

One day she met Shree Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He said to her to use her poetry and her beautiful words to rejuvenate the spirit of Independence in the hearts of villagers. He asked her to use her talent to free Mother India.

Then in 1916, she met Mahatma Gandhi, and she totally directed her energy to the fight for freedom. She would roam around the country like a general of the army and pour enthusiasm among the hearts of Indians. The independence of India became the heart and soul of her work.

She was responsible for awakening the women of India. She brought them out of the kitchen. She traveled from state to state, city after city and asked for the rights of the women. She re-established self-esteem within the women of India.

In 1925, she chaired the summit of Congress in Kanpur. In 1928, she came to the USA with the message of the non-violence movement from Gandhiji. When in 1930, Gandhiji was arrested for a protest, she took the helms of his movement. In 1931, she participated in the Round Table Summit, along with Gandhiji and Pundit Malaviyaji. In 1942, she was arrested during the "Quit India" protest and stayed in jail for 21 months with Gandhiji.

After independence she became the Governor of Uttar Pradesh. She was the first woman governor in India.

Sarojini Naidu's Works:

The Golden Threshold, published in the United Kingdom, 1905

The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death & the Spring, published in London, 1912

The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and the Spring, including "The Gift of India" (first read in public in 1915), 1917

Muhammad Jinnah: An Ambassador of Unity, 1916

The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India, Allahabad: Kitabistan, posthumously published, 1943
The Feather of the Dawn, posthumously published, edited by her daughter, Padmaja Naidu, 1961

Popular Poems

- [**A Love Song from the North**](#)
 - [**A Rajput Love Song**](#)

 - [**Alabaster**](#)
 - [**An Indian Love Song**](#)
 - [**Autumn Song**](#)
 - [**Corn Grinders**](#)
 - [**Coromandel Fishers**](#)
 - [**Cradle Song**](#)
 - [**Damayante To Nala In The Hour Of Exile**](#)
 - [**Ecstasy**](#)
 - [**Harvest Hymn**](#)
 - [**Humayun To Zobeida \(From the Urdu\)**](#)
 - [**In Praise Of Henna**](#)
 - [**In Salutation to the Eternal Peace**](#)
-

Biography of Kamala Das

Kamala Surayya / Suraiyya formerly known as Kamala Das , (also known as Kamala Madhavikutty, pen name was Madhavikutty) was a major Indian English poet and littérateur and at the same time a leading Malayalam author from Kerala, India. Her popularity in Kerala is based chiefly on her short stories and autobiography, while her oeuvre in English, written under the name Kamala Das, is noted for the fiery poems and explicit autobiography.

Her open and honest treatment of female sexuality, free from any sense of guilt, infused her writing with power, but also marked her as an iconoclast in her generation. On 31 May 2009, aged 75, she died at a hospital in Pune, but has earned considerable respect in recent years.

Early Life

Kamala Das was born in Punnayurkulam, Thrissur District in Kerala, on March 31, 1934, to V. M. Nair, a former managing editor of the widely-circulated Malayalam daily Mathrubhumi, and Nalappatt Balamani Amma, a renowned Malayali poetess.

She spent her childhood between Calcutta, where her father was employed as a senior officer in the Walford Transport Company that sold Bentley and Rolls Royce automobiles, and the Nalappatt ancestral home in Punnayurkulam.

Like her mother, Kamala Das also excelled in writing. Her love of poetry began at an early age through the influence of her great uncle, Nalappatt Narayana Menon, a prominent writer.

At the age of 15, she got married to bank officer Madhava Das, who encouraged her writing interests, and she started writing and publishing both in English and in Malayalam. Calcutta in the 1960s was a tumultuous time for the arts, and Kamala Das was one of the many voices that came up and started appearing in cult anthologies along with a generation of Indian English poets.

Literary Career

She was noted for her many Malayalam short stories as well as many poems written in English. Das was also a syndicated columnist. She once claimed that "poetry does not sell in this country [India]", but her forthright columns, which sounded off on everything from women's issues and child care to politics, were popular.

Das' first book of poetry, *Summer In Calcutta* was a breath of fresh air in Indian English poetry. She wrote chiefly of love, its betrayal, and the consequent anguish. Ms. Das abandoned the certainties offered by an archaic, and somewhat sterile, aestheticism for an independence of mind and body at a time when Indian poets were still governed by "19th-century diction, sentiment and romanticised love." Her second book of poetry, *The descendants* was even more explicit, urging women to:

"Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your
Endless female hungers ..." - The Looking Glass

This directness of her voice led to comparisons with Marguerite Duras and Sylvia Plath

At the age of 42, she published a daring autobiography, *My Story*; it was originally written in Malayalam and later she translated it into English. Later she admitted that much of the autobiography had fictional elements.

Kamala Das wrote on a diverse range of topics, often disparate- from the story of a poor old servant, about the sexual disposition of upper middle class women living near a metropolitan city or in the middle of the ghetto. Some of her better-known stories include *Pakshiyude Manam*, *Neypayasam*, *Thanuppu*, and *Chandana Marangal*. She wrote a few novels, out of which *Neermathalam Pootha Kalam*, which was received favourably by the reading public as well as the critics, stands out.

She travelled extensively to read poetry to Germany's University of Duisburg-Essen, University of Bonn and University of Duisburg universities, Adelaide Writer's Festival, Frankfurt Book Fair, University of Kingston, Jamaica, Singapore, and South Bank Festival (London), Concordia University (Montreal, Canada), etc. Her works are available in French, Spanish, Russian, German and Japanese.

She has also held positions as Vice chairperson in Kerala Sahitya Academy, chairperson in Kerala forestry Board, President of the Kerala Children's Film Society, editor of *Poet* magazine^[6] and Poetry editor of *Illustrated Weekly of India*.

Although occasionally seen as an attention-grabber in her early years, she is now seen as one of the most formative influences on Indian English poetry. In 2009, *The Times* called her "the mother of modern English Indian poetry".

Conversion to Islam

She was born in a conservative Hindu Nair (Nallappattu) family having royal ancestry, After being asked by her lover Sadiq Ali, an Islamic scholar and a Muslim League MP, she embraced Islam in 1999 at the age of 65 and assumed the name Kamala Surayya.

After converting, she wrote:

"Life has changed for me since Nov. 14 when a young man named Sadiq Ali walked in to meet me. He is 38 and has a beautiful smile. Afterwards he began to woo me on the phone from Abu Dhabi and Dubai, reciting Urdu couplets and telling me of what he would do to me after our marriage. I took my nurse Mini and went to his place in my car. I stayed with him for three days. There was a sunlit river, some trees, and a lot of laughter. He asked me to become a Muslim which I did on my return home."

Her conversion was rather controversial, among social and literary circles, with The Hindu calling it part of her "histrionics". She said she liked being behind the protective veil of the purdah. Later, she felt it was not worth it to change one's religion and said "I fell in love with a Muslim after my husband's death. He was kind and generous in the beginning. But I now feel one shouldn't change one's religion. It is not worth it."

Politics

Though never politically active before, she launched a national political party, Lok Seva Party, aiming asylum to orphaned mothers and promotion of secularism. In 1984 she unsuccessfully contested in the Indian Parliament elections.

Personal Life

Kamala Das had three sons - M D Nalapat, Chinnen Das and Jayasurya Das. Madhav Das Nalapat, the eldest, is married to Princess Lakshmi Bayi (daughter of M.R.Ry. Sri Chembrol Raja Raja Varma Avargal) from the Travancore Royal House. He holds the UNESCO Peace Chair and Professor of geopolitics at the Manipal Academy of Higher Education. He was formerly a resident editor of the Times of India.

She had a sexual relationship with Sadiq Ali, an Islamic scholar who was much younger in age. She herself describes her visit to Sadiq Ali's home as follows:

"I was almost asleep when Sadiq Ali climbed in beside me, holding me, breathing softly, whispering endearments, kissing my face, breasts ... and when he entered me, it was the first time I had ever experienced what it was like to feel a man from the inside."

Womanhood in her Poetry

Das' uncanny honesty extends to her exploration of womanhood and love. In her poem "An Introduction" from *Summer in Calcutta*, the narrator says, "I am every/ Woman who seeks love" (de Souza 10). Though Amar Dwivedi criticizes Das for this "self imposed and not natural" universality, this feeling of oneness permeates her poetry (303). In Das' eyes, womanhood involves certain collective experiences. Indian women, however, do not discuss these experiences in deference to social mores. Das consistently refuses to accept their silence. Feelings of longing and loss are not confined to a private misery. They are invited into the public sphere and acknowledged. Das seems to insist they are normal and have been felt by women across time. In "The Maggots" from the collection, *The Descendants*, Das corroborates just how old the sufferings of women are. She frames the pain of lost love with ancient Hindu myths (de Souza 13). On their last night together, Krishna asks Radha if she is disturbed by his kisses. Radha says, "No, not at all, but thought, What is/ It to the corpse if the maggots nip?" (de Souza 6-7). Radha's pain is searing, and her silence is given voice by Das. Furthermore, by making a powerful goddess prey to such thoughts, it serves as a validation for ordinary women to have similar feelings.

Eroticism in her Poetry

Coupled with her exploration of women's needs is an attention to eroticism. The longing to lose one's self in passionate love is discussed in "The Looking Glass" from *The Descendants*. The narrator of the poem urges women to give their man "what makes you women" (de Souza 15). The things which society suggests are dirty or taboo are the very things which the women are supposed to give. The "musk of sweat between breasts/ The warm shock of menstrual blood" should not be hidden from one's beloved. In the narrator's eyes, love should be defined by this type of unconditional honesty. A woman should "Stand nude before the glass with him," and allow her lover to see her exactly as she is. Likewise, the woman should appreciate even the "fond details" of her lover, such as "the jerky way he/ Urinates". Even if the woman may have to live "Without him" someday, the narrator does not seem to favor bridling one's passions to protect one's self. A restrained love seems to be no love at all; only a total immersion in love can do justice to this experience. Much like the creators of ancient Tantric art, Das makes no attempt to hide the sensuality of the human form; her work seems to celebrate its joyous potential while acknowledging its concurrent dangers.

Feminism

Das once said, "I always wanted love, and if you don't get it within your home, you stray a little"(Warrior interview). Though some might label Das as "a feminist" for her candor in dealing with women's needs and desires, Das "has never tried to identify herself with any particular version of feminist activism" (Raveendran 52). Das' views can be characterized as "a gut response," a reaction that, like her poetry, is unfettered by other's notions of right and wrong. Nonetheless, poet Eunice de Souza claims that Das has "mapped out the terrain for post-colonial women in social and linguistic terms". Das has ventured into areas unclaimed by society and provided a point of reference for her colleagues. She has transcended the role of a poet and simply embraced the role of a very honest woman.

Death

On 31 May 2009, aged 75, she died at a hospital in Pune. Her body was flown to her home state of Kerala. She was buried at the Palayam Juma Masjid at Thiruvananthapuram with full state honour.

Awards and other Recognitions

Kamala Das has received many awards for her literary contribution, including:

Nominated and shortlisted for Nobel Prize in 1984.

Asian Poetry Prize-1998

Kent Award for English Writing from Asian Countries-1999

Asian World Prize-2000

Ezhuthachan Award-2009

Sahitya Academy Award-2003

Vayalar Award 2001

Kerala Sahitya Academy Award-2005

Muttathu Varkey Award

She was a longtime friend of Canadian writer Merrily Weisbord, who published a memoir of their friendship, *The Love Queen of Malabar*, in 2010.

Kamala Das's Works:

English

- 1964: *The Sirens* (Asian Poetry Prize winner)
- 1965: *Summer in Calcutta* (poetry; Kent's Award winner)
- 1967: *The Descendants* (poetry)
- 1973: *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (poetry)
- 1976: *My Story* (autobiography)
- 1977: *Alphabet of Lust* (novel)
- 1985: *The Anamalai Poems* (poetry)
- 1992: *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* (collection of short stories)
- 1996: *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (poetry)
- 2001: *Yaa Allah* (collection of poems)
- 1979: *Tonight, This Savage Rite* (with Pritish Nandy)
- 1999: *My Mother At Sixty-six* (Poem)

Malayalam

- 1964: *Pakshiyude Manam* (short stories)
- 1966: *Naricheerukal Parakkumbol* (short stories)
- 1968: *Thanuppu* (short story, Sahitya Academi award)
- 1982: *Ente Katha* (autobiography)
- 1987: *Balyakala Smaranakal* (Childhood Memories)
- 1989: *Varshangalkku Mumbu* (Years Before)
- 1990: *Palayan* (novel)
- 1991: *Neypayasam* (short story)
- 1992: *Dayarikkurippukal* (novel)
- 1994: *Neermathalam Pootha Kalam* (novel, Vayalar Award)
- 1996: *Chekkerunna Pakshikal* (short stories)
- 1998: *Nashtapetta Neelambari* (short stories)
- 2005: *Chandana Marangal* (Novel)
- 2005: *Madhavikkuttiyude Unmakkadhakal* (short stories)2x
- 2005: *Vandikkalakal* (novel)
- 1999: *My Mother At Sixty-six* (Poem)

Popular Poems

-
- [A Losing Battle](#)
 - [An Introduction](#)
-
- [Annette](#)
-

- [Forest Fire](#)
 - [In Love](#)
 - [Krishna](#)
 - [Love](#)
 - [My Grandmother's House](#)
 - [Punishment in Kindergarten](#)
 - [Relationship](#)
 - [Summer in Calcutta](#)
 - [The Dance of the Eunuchs](#)
 - [The Freaks](#)
 - [The Looking Glass](#)
-

Forest Fire

Of late I have begun to feel a hunger
 To take in with greed, like a forest fire that
 Consumes and with each killing gains a wilder,
 Brighter charm, all that comes my way. Bald child in
 Open pram, you think I only look, and you
 Too, slim lovers behind the tree and you, old
 Man with paper in your hand and sunlight in
 Your hair... My eyes lick at you like flames, my nerves
 Consume ; and, when I finish with you, in the
 Pram, near the tree and, on the park bench, I spit
 Out small heaps of ash, nothing else. But in me
 The sights and smells and sounds shall thrive and go on
 And on and on. In me shall sleep the baby
 That sat in prams and sleep and wake and smile its
 Toothless smile. In me shall walk the lovers hand
 In hand and in me, where else, the old shall sit
 And feel the touch of sun. In me, the street-lamps
 Shall glimmer, the cabaret girls cavort, the
 Wedding drums resound, the eunuchs swirl coloured
 Skirts and sing sad songs of love, the wounded moan,
 And in me the dying mother with hopeful
 Eyes shall gaze around, seeking her child, now grown
 And gone away to other towns, other arms."

Kamala Das

Biography of Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore (Bengali: রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর) sobriquet Gurudev, was a Bengali polymath who reshaped his region's literature and music. Author of *Gitanjali* and its "profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse", he became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. In translation his poetry was viewed as spiritual and mercurial; his seemingly mesmeric personality, flowing hair, and other-worldly dress earned him a prophet-like reputation in the West. His "elegant prose and magical poetry" remain largely unknown outside Bengal. Tagore introduced new prose and verse forms and the use of colloquial language into Bengali literature, thereby freeing it from traditional models based on classical Sanskrit. He was highly influential in introducing the best of Indian culture to the West and vice versa, and he is generally regarded as the outstanding creative artist of modern India.

A Pirali Brahmin from Calcutta, Tagore wrote poetry as an eight-year-old. At age sixteen, he released his first substantial poems under the pseudonym *Bhānusiṃha* ("Sun Lion"), which were seized upon by literary authorities as long-lost classics. He graduated to his first short stories and dramas—and the aegis of his birth name—by 1877. As a humanist, universalist internationalist, and strident anti-nationalist he denounced the 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 endures also in the institution he founded, *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: the Republic of India's *Jana Gana Mana* and Bangladesh's *Amar Shonar Bangla*. The composer of Sri Lanka's national anthem: *Sri Lanka Matha* was a student of Tagore, and the song is inspired by Tagore's style.

Early Life: 1861–1878

The youngest of thirteen surviving children, Tagore was born in the *Jorasanko* mansion in Calcutta, India to parents *Debendranath Tagore* (1817–1905) and *Sarada Devi* (1830–1875). Tagore family patriarchs were the Brahmo founders of the *Adi Dharm* faith. The loyalist "Prince" *Dwarkanath Tagore*, who employed European estate managers and visited with *Victoria* and other royalty, was his paternal grandfather. *Debendranath* had formulated the Brahmoist philosophies espoused by his friend *Ram Mohan Roy*, and became focal in Brahmo society after *Roy's* death.

"Rabi" was raised mostly by servants; his mother had died in his early childhood and his father travelled widely. His home hosted the publication of literary magazines; theatre and recitals of both Bengali and Western classical music featured there regularly, as the Jorasanko Tagores were the center of a large and art-loving social group. Tagore's oldest brother Dwijendranath was a respected philosopher and poet. Another brother, Satyendranath, was the first Indian appointed to the elite and formerly all-European Indian Civil Service. Yet another brother, Jyotirindranath, was a musician, composer, and playwright. His sister Swarnakumari became a novelist. Jyotirindranath's wife Kadambari, slightly older than Tagore, was a dear friend and powerful influence. Her abrupt suicide in 1884 left him for years profoundly distraught. Tagore largely avoided classroom schooling and preferred to roam the manor or nearby Bolpur and Panihati, idylls 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 practicing judo and wrestling. He learned drawing, anatomy, geography and history, literature, mathematics, Sanskrit, and English—his least favorite 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:

“[It] knock[s] at the doors of the mind. If any boy is asked to give an account of what is awakened in him by such knocking, he will probably say something silly. For what happens within is much bigger than what comes out in words. Those who pin their faith on university examinations as the test of education take no account of this.”

After he underwent an upanayan initiation at age eleven, he and his father left Calcutta in February 1873 for a months-long tour of the Raj. They visited his father's Santiniketan estate and rested in Amritsar en route to the Himalayan Dhauladhars, their destination being the remote hill station at Dalhousie. Along the way, Tagore read biographies; his father tutored him in history, astronomy, and Sanskrit declensions. He read biographies of Benjamin Franklin among other figures; they discussed [Edward Gibbon's](#) *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; and they examined the poetry of [Kālidāsa](#). In mid-April they reached the station, and at 2,300 metres (7,546 ft) they settled into a house that sat atop Bakrota Hill. Tagore was taken aback by the region's deep green gorges, alpine forests, and mossy streams and waterfalls. They stayed there for several months and adopted a regime of study and privation that included daily twilight baths taken in icy water.

He returned to Jorasanko and completed a set of major works by 1877, one of them a long poem in the Maithili style of Vidyapati; they were published pseudonymously. Regional experts accepted them as the lost works of Bhānusiṃha, a newly discovered 17th-century Vaishnava poet. He debuted the short-story genre in Bengali with "Bhikharini" ("The Beggar Woman"), and his *Sandhya Sangit* (1882) includes the famous poem "Nirjharer Swapnabhanga" ("The Rousing of the Waterfall"). Servants subjected him to an almost ludicrous regimentation in a phase he dryly reviled as the "servocracy". His head was water-dunked—to quiet him. He irked his servants by refusing food; he was confined to chalk circles in parody of Sita's forest trial in the Ramayana; and he was regaled with the heroic criminal exploits of Bengal's outlaw-dacoits. Because the Jorasanko manor was in an area of north Calcutta rife with poverty and prostitution, [35] he was forbidden to leave it for any purpose other than traveling to school. He thus became

preoccupied with the world outside and with nature. Of his 1873 visit to Santiniketan, he wrote:

“What I could not see did not take me long to get over—what I did see was quite enough. There was no servant rule, and the only ring which encircled me was the blue of the horizon, drawn around these solitudes by their presiding goddess. Within this I was free to move about as I chose.”

Shelaidaha: 1878–1901

Because Debendranath wanted his son to become a barrister, Tagore enrolled at a public school in Brighton, East Sussex, England in 1878. He stayed for several months at a house that the Tagore family owned near Brighton and Hove, in Medina Villas; in 1877 his nephew and niece—Suren and Indira Devi, the children of Tagore's brother Satyendranath—were sent together with their mother, Tagore's sister-in-law, to live with him. He briefly read law at University College London, but again left school. He opted instead for independent study of [Shakespeare](#), *Religio Medici*, Coriolanus, and Antony and Cleopatra. Lively English, Irish, and Scottish folk tunes impressed Tagore, whose own tradition of Nidhubabu-authored kirtans and tappas and Brahma hymnody was subdued. In 1880 he returned to Bengal degree-less, resolving to reconcile European novelty with Brahma traditions, taking the best from each. In 1883 he married Mrinalini Devi, born Bhabatarini, 1873–1902; they had five children, two of whom died in childhood.

In 1890 Tagore began managing his vast ancestral estates in Shelaidaha (today a region of Bangladesh); he was joined by his wife and children in 1898. Tagore released his *Manasi* poems (1890), among his best-known work. As Zamindar Babu, Tagore criss-crossed the riverine holdings in command of the Padma, the luxurious family barge. He collected mostly token rents and blessed villagers who in turn honoured him with banquets—occasionally of dried rice and sour milk. He met Gagan Harkara, through whom he became familiar with Baul Lalou Shah, whose folk songs greatly influenced Tagore. Tagore worked to popularise Lalou's songs. The period 1891–1895, Tagore's *Sadhana* period, named after one of Tagore's magazines, was his most productive; in these years he wrote more than half the stories of the three-volume, 84-story *Galpaguchchha*. Its ironic and grave tales examined the voluptuous poverty of an idealised rural Bengal.

Santiniketan: 1901–1932

In 1901 Tagore moved to Santiniketan to found an ashram with a marble-floored prayer hall—The Mandir—an experimental school, groves of trees, gardens, a library. There his wife and two of his children died. His father died in 1905. He received monthly payments as part of his inheritance and income from the Maharaja of Tripura, sales of his family's jewelry, his seaside bungalow in Puri, and a derisory 2,000 rupees in book royalties. He gained Bengali and foreign readers alike; he published *Naivedya* (1901) and *Kheya* (1906) and translated poems into free verse. In November 1913, Tagore learned he had won that year's Nobel Prize in Literature: the Swedish Academy appreciated the idealistic—and for Westerners—accessible nature of a small body of his translated material focussed on the 1912 *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*. In 1915, the British Crown granted Tagore a knighthood. He renounced it after the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh

massacre.

In 1921, Tagore and agricultural economist Leonard Elmhirst set up the "Institute for Rural Reconstruction", later renamed Shriniketan or "Abode of Welfare", in Surul, a village near the ashram. With it, Tagore sought to moderate Gandhi's Swaraj protests, which he occasionally blamed for British India's perceived mental—and thus ultimately colonial—decline.[48] He sought aid from donors, officials, and scholars worldwide to "free village[s] from the shackles of helplessness and ignorance" by "vitalis[ing] knowledge". In the early 1930s he targeted ambient "abnormal caste consciousness" and untouchability. He lectured against these, he penned Dalit heroes for his poems and his dramas, and he campaigned—successfully—to open Guruvayoor Temple to Dalits.

Twilight years: 1932–1941

Tagore's life as a "peripatetic litterateur" affirmed his opinion that human divisions were shallow. During a May 1932 visit to a Bedouin encampment in the Iraqi desert, the tribal chief told him that "Our prophet has said that a true Muslim is he by whose words and deeds not the least of his brother-men may ever come to any harm ..."

Tagore confided in his diary: "I was startled into recognizing in his words the voice of essential humanity."

To the end Tagore scrutinised orthodoxy—and in 1934, he struck. That year, an earthquake hit Bihar and killed thousands. Gandhi hailed it as seismic karma, as divine retribution avenging the oppression of Dalits. Tagore rebuked him for his seemingly ignominious inferences. He mourned the perennial poverty of Calcutta and the socioeconomic decline of Bengal. He detailed these newly plebeian aesthetics in an unrhymed hundred-line poem whose technique of searing double-vision foreshadowed Satyajit Ray's film *Apur Sansar*. Fifteen new volumes appeared, among them prose-poem works *Punashcha* (1932), *Shes Saptak* (1935), and *Patraput* (1936). Experimentation continued in his prose-songs and dance-dramas: *Chitra* (1914), *Shyama* (1939), and *Chandalika* (1938); and in his novels: *Dui Bon* (1933), *Malancha* (1934), and *Char Adhyay* (1934).

Tagore's remit expanded to science in his last years, as hinted in *Visva-Parichay*, 1937 collection of essays. His respect for scientific laws and his exploration of biology, physics, and astronomy informed his poetry, which exhibited extensive naturalism and verisimilitude. He wove the process of science, the narratives of scientists, into stories in *Se* (1937), *Tin Sangi* (1940), and *Galpasalpa* (1941). His last five years were marked by chronic pain and two long periods of illness. These began when Tagore lost consciousness in late 1937; he remained comatose and near death for a time. This was followed in late 1940 by a similar spell. He never recovered. Poetry from these valetudinary years is among his finest. A period of prolonged agony ended with Tagore's death on 7 August 1941, aged eighty; he was in an upstairs room of the Jorasanko mansion he was raised in. The date is still mourned. A. K. Sen, brother of the first chief election commissioner, received dictation from Tagore on 30 July 1941, a day prior to a scheduled operation: his last poem.

“I'm lost in the middle of my birthday. I want my friends, their touch, with the earth's last love. I will take life's final offering, I will take the human's last blessing. Today my sack is empty. I have given completely whatever I had to give. In return if I receive anything—some love, some forgiveness—then I will take it with me when I step on the boat that crosses to the festival of the wordless end.”

Travels

Between 1878 and 1932, Tagore set foot in more than thirty countries on five continents. In 1912, he took a sheaf of his translated works to England, where they gained attention from missionary and [Gandhi](#) protégé Charles F. Andrews, Irish poet William Butler Yeats, [Ezra Pound](#), [Robert Bridges](#), Ernest Rhys, [Thomas Sturge Moore](#), and others. Yeats wrote the preface to the English translation of *Gitanjali*; Andrews joined Tagore at Santiniketan. In November 1912 Tagore began touring the United States and the United Kingdom, staying in Butterton, Staffordshire with Andrews's clergymen friends. From May 1916 until April 1917, he lectured in Japan and the United States. He denounced nationalism. His essay "Nationalism in India" was scorned and praised; it was admired by Romain Rolland and other pacifists.

Shortly after returning home the 63-year-old Tagore accepted an invitation from the Peruvian government. He travelled to Mexico. Each government pledged US\$100,000 to his school to commemorate the visits. A week after his 6 November 1924 arrival in Buenos Aires, an ill Tagore shifted to the Villa Miralrío at the behest of Victoria Ocampo. He left for home in January 1925. In May 1926 Tagore reached Naples; the next day he met [Mussolini](#) in Rome. Their warm rapport ended when Tagore pronounced upon Il Duce's fascist finesse. He had earlier enthused:

"without any doubt he is a great personality. There is such a massive vigour in that head that it reminds one of Michael Angelo's chisel." A "fire-bath" of fascism was to have educated "the immortal soul of Italy ... clothed in quenchless light".

On 14 July 1927 Tagore and two companions began a four-month tour of Southeast Asia. They visited Bali, Java, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Penang, Siam, and Singapore. The resultant travelogues compose *Jatri* (1929). In early 1930 he left Bengal for a nearly year-long tour of Europe and the United States. Upon returning to Britain—and as his paintings exhibited in Paris and London—he lodged at a Birmingham Quaker settlement. He wrote his Oxford Hibbert Lectures and spoke at the annual London Quaker meet. There, addressing relations between the British and the Indians—a topic he would tackle repeatedly over the next two years—Tagore spoke of a "dark chasm of aloofness". He visited Aga Khan III, stayed at Dartington Hall, toured Denmark, Switzerland, and Germany from June to mid-September 1930, then went on into the Soviet Union. In April 1932 Tagore, intrigued by the Persian mystic [Hafez](#), was hosted by Reza Shah Pahlavi. In his other travels, Tagore interacted with [Henri Bergson](#), [Albert Einstein](#), [Robert Frost](#), [Thomas Mann](#), [H.G. Wells](#) and Romain Rolland. Visits to Persia and Iraq (in 1932) and Sri Lanka (in 1933) composed Tagore's final foreign tour, and his dislike of communalism and nationalism only deepened. Vice President of India M. Hamid Ansari has said that Rabindranath Tagore heralded the cultural rapprochement between communities, societies and nations much before it became the liberal norm of conduct. Tagore was a man ahead of his time. He wrote in 1932, while on a visit to Iran, that "each country of Asia will solve its own historical problems

according to its strength, nature and needs, but the lamp they will each carry on their path to progress will converge to illuminate the common ray of knowledge." His ideas on culture, gender, poverty, education, freedom, and a resurgent Asia remain relevant today.

Works

Known mostly for his poetry, Tagore wrote novels, essays, short stories, travelogues, dramas, and thousands of songs. Of Tagore's prose, his short stories are perhaps most highly regarded; he is indeed 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 deceptively simple subject matter: commoners. Tagore's non-fiction grappled with history, linguistics, and spirituality. He wrote autobiographies. His travelogues, essays, and lectures were compiled into several volumes, including *Europe Jatrir Patro* (Letters from Europe) and *Manusher Dhormo* (The Religion of Man). His brief chat with [Einstein](#), "Note on the Nature of Reality", is included as an appendix to the latter. On the occasion of Tagore's 150th birthday an anthology (titled *Kalanukromik Rabindra Rachanabali*) of the total body of his works is currently being published in Bengali in chronological order. This includes all versions of each work and fills about eighty volumes. In 2011, Harvard University Press collaborated with Visva-Bharati University to publish *The Essential Tagore*, the largest anthology of Tagore's works available in English; it was edited by Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakravarty and marks the 150th anniversary of Tagore's birth.

Music and Art

Tagore composed 2,230 songs and was a prolific painter. His songs compose *rabindrasangit* ("Tagore Song"), which merges fluidly into his literature, most of which—poems or parts of novels, stories, or plays alike—were lyricised. Influenced by the *thumri* style of Hindustani music, they ran the entire gamut of human emotion, ranging from his early dirge-like Brahmo devotional hymns to quasi-erotic compositions.[90] They emulated the tonal color of classical ragas to varying extents. Some songs mimicked a given raga's melody and rhythm faithfully; others newly blended elements of different ragas. Yet about nine-tenths of his work was not *bhanga gaan*, the body of tunes revamped with "fresh value" from select Western, Hindustani, Bengali folk and other regional flavours "external" to Tagore's own ancestral culture. Scholars have attempted to gauge the emotive force and range of Hindustani ragas:

“...the pathos of the purabi raga reminded Tagore of the evening tears of a lonely widow, while *kanara* was the confused realization of a nocturnal wanderer who had lost his way. In *bhupali* he seemed to hear a voice in the wind saying 'stop and come hither'. *Paraj* conveyed to him the deep slumber that overtook one at night's end.”

—Reba Som, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Singer and His Song*.

Tagore influenced sitar maestro Vilayat Khan and sarodiyas Buddhadev Dasgupta and Amjad Ali Khan. His songs are widely popular and undergird the Bengali ethos to an extent perhaps rivaling Shakespeare's impact on the English-speaking world. It is said that his songs are the outcome of five centuries of Bengali literary churning and communal yearning. Dhan Gopal Mukerji has said

that these songs transcend the mundane to the aesthetic and express all ranges and categories of human emotion. The poet gave voice to all—big or small, rich or poor. The poor Ganges boatman and the rich landlord air their emotions in them. They birthed a distinctive school of music whose practitioners can be fiercely traditional: novel interpretations have drawn severe censure in both West Bengal and Bangladesh.

For Bengalis, the songs' appeal, stemming from the combination of emotive strength and beauty described as surpassing even Tagore's poetry, was such that the *Modern Review* observed that "there is in Bengal no cultured home where Rabindranath's songs are not sung or at least attempted to be sung ... Even illiterate villagers sing his songs". Arthur Strangways of *The Observer* introduced non-Bengalis to rabindrasangit in *The Music of Hindostan*, calling it a "vehicle of a personality ... [that] go behind this or that system of music to that beauty of sound which all systems put out their hands to seize."

In 1971, *Amar Shonar Bangla* became the national anthem of Bangladesh. It was written—ironically—to protest the 1905 Partition of Bengal along communal lines: lopping Muslim-majority East Bengal from Hindu-dominated West Bengal was to avert a regional bloodbath. Tagore saw the partition as a ploy to upend the independence movement, and he aimed to rekindle Bengali unity and tar communalism. *Jana Gana Mana* was written in *shadhu-bhasha*, a Sanskritised register of Bengali, and is the first of five stanzas of a Brahmo hymn that Tagore composed. It was first sung in 1911 at a Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress and was adopted in 1950 by the Constituent Assembly of the Republic of India as its national anthem.

At sixty, Tagore took up drawing and painting; successful exhibitions of his many works—which made a debut appearance in Paris upon encouragement by artists he met in the south of France^[95]—were held throughout Europe. He was likely red-green color blind, resulting in works that exhibited strange colour schemes and off-beat aesthetics. Tagore was influenced by scrimshaw from northern New Ireland, Haida carvings from British Columbia, and woodcuts by Max Pechstein. His artist's eye for his handwriting were revealed in the simple artistic and rhythmic leitmotifs embellishing the scribbles, cross-outs, and word layouts of his manuscripts. Some of Tagore's lyrics corresponded in a synesthetic sense with particular paintings.

Theatre

At sixteen, Tagore led his brother Jyotirindranath's adaptation of [Molière's](#) *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. At twenty he wrote his first drama-opera: *Valmiki Pratibha* (The Genius of Valmiki). In it the pandit [Valmiki](#) overcomes his sins, is blessed by Saraswati, and compiles the *Rāmāyana*. Through it Tagore explores a wide range of dramatic styles and emotions, including usage of revamped kirtans and adaptation of traditional English and Irish folk melodies as drinking songs. Another play, *Dak Ghar* (The Post Office), describes the child Amal defying his stuffy and puerile confines by ultimately "fall[ing] asleep", hinting his physical death. A story with borderless appeal—gleaning rave reviews in Europe—*Dak Ghar* dealt with death as, in Tagore's words, "spiritual freedom" from "the world of hoarded wealth and certified creeds". In the Nazi-besieged Warsaw Ghetto, Polish doctor-educator Janusz Korczak had orphans in his care stage *The Post Office* in July 1942. In *The King of Children*, biographer Betty Jean Lifton

suspected that Korczak, agonising over whether one should determine when and how to die, was easing the children into accepting death. In mid-October, the Nazis sent them to Treblinka.

“[...] but the meaning is less intellectual, more emotional and simple. The deliverance sought and won by the dying child is the same deliverance which rose before his imagination, [...] when once in the early dawn he heard, amid the noise of a crowd returning from some festival, this line out of an old village song, "Ferryman, take me to the other shore of the river." It may come at any moment of life, though the child discovers it in death, for it always comes at the moment when the "I", seeking no longer for gains that cannot be "assimilated with its spirit", is able to say, "All my work is thine" [...].”

—W. B. Yeats, Preface, *The Post Office*, 1914.

His other works fuse lyrical flow and emotional rhythm into a tight focus on a core idea, a break from prior Bengali drama. Tagore sought "the play of feeling and not of action". In 1890 he released what is regarded as his finest drama: *Visarjan* (Sacrifice). It is an adaptation of *Rajarshi*, an earlier novella of his. "A forthright denunciation of a meaningless [and] cruel superstitious rite[s]", the Bengali originals feature intricate subplots and prolonged monologues that give play to historical events in seventeenth-century Udaipur. The devout Maharaja of Tripura is pitted against the wicked head priest Raghupati. His latter dramas were more philosophical and allegorical in nature; these included *Dak Ghar*. Another is Tagore's *Chandalika* (Untouchable Girl), which was modeled on an ancient Buddhist legend describing how Ananda, the Gautama Buddha's disciple, asks a tribal girl for water.

In *Raktakarabi* ("Red" or "Blood Oleanders"), a kleptocrat rules over the residents of Yakshapuri. He and his retainers exploits his subjects—who are benumbed by alcohol and numbered like inventory—by forcing them to mine gold for him. The naive maiden-heroine Nandini rallies her subject-compatriots to defeat the greed of the realm's sardar class—with the morally roused king's belated help. Skirting the "good-vs-evil" trope, the work pits a vital and joyous *lèse majesté* against the monotonous fealty of the king's varletry, giving rise to an allegorical struggle akin to that found in *Animal Farm* or *Gulliver's Travels*. The original, though prized in Bengal, long failed to spawn a "free and comprehensible" translation, and its archaic and sonorous didacticism failed to attract interest from abroad. *Chitrangada*, *Chandalika*, and *Shyama* are other key plays that have dance-drama adaptations, which together are known as *Rabindra Nritya Natya*.

Novels

Tagore wrote eight novels and four novellas, among them *Chaturanga*, *Shesher Kobita*, *Char Odhay*, and *Noukadubi*. *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World)—through the lens of the idealistic zamindar protagonist Nikhil—repudiates the frog-march of nativism, terrorism, and religious querulousness popular among segments of the Swadeshi movement. A frank expression of Tagore's conflicted sentiments, it was conceived of during a 1914 bout of depression. The novel ends in grody Hindu-Muslim interplay and Nikhil's likely death from a head wound. *Gora*, nominated by many Bengali critics as his finest tale, raises controversies regarding connate identity and its ultimate fungibility. As with *Ghare Baire* matters of self-identity (*jāti*), personal freedom, and religion are vividly vivisected in a context of family and romance. In it an Irish boy

orphaned in the Sepoy Mutiny is raised by Hindus as the titular gora—"whitey". Ignorant of his foreign origins, he chastises Hindu religious backsliders out of love for the indigenous Indians and solidarity with them against his hegemon-compatriots. He falls for a Brahmo girl, compelling his worried foster father to reveal his lost past and cease his nativist zeal. As a "true dialectic" advancing "arguments for and against strict traditionalism", it tackles the colonial conundrum by "portray[ing] the value of all positions within a particular frame [...] not only syncretism, not only liberal orthodoxy, but the extremest reactionary traditionalism he defends by an appeal to what humans share." Among these Tagore highlights "identity [...] conceived of as dharma."

In *Jogajog* (Relationships), the heroine Kumudini—bound by the ideals of Śiva-Sati, exemplified by Dākshāyani—is torn between her pity for the sinking fortunes of her progressive and compassionate elder brother and his foil: her roue of a husband. Tagore flaunts his feminist leanings; pathos depicts the plight and ultimate demise of women trapped by pregnancy, duty, and family honour; he simultaneously trucks with Bengal's putrescent landed gentry. The story revolves around the underlying rivalry between two families—the Chatterjees, aristocrats now on the decline (Biprodas) and the Ghosals (Madhusudan), representing new money and new arrogance. Kumudini, Biprodas' sister, is caught between the two as she is married off to Madhusudan. She had risen in an observant and sheltered traditional home, as had all her female relations.

Others were uplifting: *Shesher Kobita*—translated twice as *Last Poem* and *Farewell Song*—is his most lyrical novel, with poems and rhythmic passages written by a poet protagonist. It contains elements of satire and postmodernism and has stock characters who gleefully attack the reputation of an old, outmoded, oppressively renowned poet who, incidentally, goes by a familiar name: "Rabindranath Tagore". Though his novels remain among the least-appreciated of his works, they have been given renewed attention via film adaptations by Ray and others: *Chokher Bali* and *Ghare Baire* are exemplary. In the first, Tagore inscribes Bengali society via its heroine: a rebellious widow who would live for herself alone. He pillories the custom of perpetual mourning on the part of widows, who were not allowed to remarry, who were consigned to seclusion and loneliness. Tagore wrote of it: "I have always regretted the ending".

Stories

Tagore's three-volume *Galpaguchchha* comprises eighty-four stories that reflect upon the author's surroundings, on modern and fashionable ideas, and on mind puzzles. Tagore associated his earliest stories, such as those of the "Sadhana" period, with an exuberance of vitality and spontaneity; these traits were cultivated by zamindar Tagore's life in Patisar, Shajadpur, Shelaidaha, and other villages. Seeing the common and the poor, he examined their lives with a depth and feeling singular in Indian literature up to that point. In "The Fruitseller from Kabul", Tagore speaks in first person as a town dweller and novelist imputing exotic perquisites to an Afghan seller. He channels the lucubrate lust of those mired in the blasé, nidorous, and sudorific morass of subcontinental city life: for distant vistas. "There were autumn mornings, the time of year when kings of old went forth to conquest; and I, never stirring from my little corner in Calcutta, would let my mind wander over the whole world. At the very name of another country, my heart would go out to it [...] I would fall to weaving a network of dreams: the

mountains, the glens, the forest [...]."

The Golpoguchchho (Bunch of Stories) was written in Tagore's Sabuj Patra period, which lasted from 1914 to 1917 and was named for another of his magazines. These yarns are celebrated fare in Bengali fiction and are commonly used as plot fodder by Bengali film and theatre. The Ray film Charulata echoed the controversial Tagore novella Nastanirh (The Broken Nest). In Atithi, which was made into another film, the little Brahmin boy Tarapada shares a boat ride with a village zamindar. The boy relates his flight from home and his subsequent wanderings. Taking pity, the elder adopts him; he fixes the boy to marry his own daughter. The night before his wedding, Tarapada runs off—again. Strir Patra (The Wife's Letter) is an early treatise in female emancipation. Mrinal is wife to a Bengali middle class man: prissy, preening, and patriarchal. Travelling alone she writes a letter, which comprehends the story. She details the pettiness of a life spent entreating his viraginous virility; she ultimately gives up married life, proclaiming, Amio bachbo. Ei bachlum: "And I shall live. Here, I live."

Haimanti assails Hindu arranged marriage and spotlights their often dismal domesticity, the hypocrisies plaguing the Indian middle classes, and how Haimanti, a young woman, due to her insufferable sensitivity and free spirit, foredid herself. In the last passage Tagore blasts the reification of Sita's self-immolation attempt; she had meant to appease her consort Rama's doubts of her chastity. Musalmani Didi eyes recrudescient Hindu-Muslim tensions and, in many ways, embodies the essence of Tagore's humanism. The somewhat auto-referential Darpaharan describes a fey young man who harbours literary ambitions. Though he loves his wife, he wishes to stifle her literary career, deeming it unfeminine. In youth Tagore likely agreed with him. Darpaharan depicts the final humbling of the man as he ultimately acknowledges his wife's talents. As do many other Tagore stories, Jibito o Mrito equips Bengalis with a ubiquitous epigram: Kadombini moriya proman korilo she more nai—"Kadombini died, thereby proving that she hadn't."

Poetry

Tagore's poetic style, which proceeds from a lineage established by 15th- and 16th-century Vaishnava poets, ranges from classical formalism to the comic, visionary, and ecstatic. He was influenced by the atavistic mysticism of [Vyasa](#) and other rishi-authors of the Upanishads, the Bhakti-Sufi mystic [Kabir](#), and [Ramprasad Sen](#). Tagore's most innovative and mature poetry embodies his exposure to Bengali rural folk music, which included mystic Baul ballads such as those of the bard Lalou. These, rediscovered and repopularised by Tagore, resemble 19th-century Kartābhajā hymns that emphasise inward divinity and rebellion against bourgeois bhadrālok religious and social orthodoxy. During his Shelaidaha years, his poems took on a lyrical voice of the moner manush, the Bāuls' "man within the heart" and Tagore's "life force of his deep recesses", or meditating upon the jeevan devata—the demiurge or the "living God within". This figure connected with divinity through appeal to nature and the emotional interplay of human drama. Such tools saw use in his Bhānusimha poems chronicling the Radha-Krishna romance, which were repeatedly revised over the course of seventy years.

Tagore reacted to the halfhearted uptake of modernist and realist techniques in Bengali literature by writing matching experimental works in the 1930s. These include Africa and Camalia, among

the better known of his latter poems. He occasionally wrote poems using Shadhu Bhasha, a Sanskritised dialect of Bengali; he later adopted a more popular dialect known as Cholti Bhasha. Other works include Manasi, Sonar Tori (Golden Boat), Balaka (Wild Geese, a name redolent of migrating souls), and Purobi. Sonar Tori's most famous poem, dealing with the fleeting endurance of life and achievement, goes by the same name; hauntingly it ends: Shunno nodir tire rohinu porï / Jaha chhilo loe gêlo shonar tori—"all I had achieved was carried off on the golden boat—only I was left behind." Gitanjali (গীতাঞ্জলি) is Tagore's best-known collection internationally, earning him his Nobel.

Song VII of Gitanjali:

আমার এ গান ছেড়েছে তার
সকল অলংকার
তোমার কাছে রাখে নি আর
সাজের অহংকার।
অলংকার যে মাঝে প'ড়ে
মিলনেতে আড়াল করে,
তোমার কথা ঢাকে যে তার
মুখর ঝংকার।

তোমার কাছে খাটে না মোর
কবির গরব করা-
মহাকবি, তোমার পায়ে
দিতে চাই যে ধরা।
জীবন লয়ে যতন করি
যদি সরল বাঁশি গড়ি,
আপন সুরে দিবে ভরি
সকল ছিদ্র তার।

"Amar e gan chhêrechhe tar shôkol ôlongkar
Tomar kachhe rakhe ni ar shajer ôhongkar
Ôlongkar je majhe pôre milônete aṛal kôre,
Tomar kôtha dhake je tar mukhoro jhôngkar.

Tomar kachhe khaṭe na mor kobir gôrbo kôra,
Môhakobi, tomar pae dite chai je dhôra.
Jibon loe jôton kori jodi shôrol bāshi goṛi,
Apon shure dibe bhorî sôkol chhidro tar."

Tagore's free-verse translation:

“My song has put off her adornments.
She has no pride of dress and decoration.
Ornaments would mar our union; they would come
between thee and me; their jingling would drown thy whispers.
My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight.

O master poet, I have sat down at thy feet.
Only let me make my life simple and straight,
like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music.”

"Klanti" (ক্লান্তি; "Weariness"):

ক্লান্তি আমার ক্ষমা করো প্রভু,
পথে যদি পিছিয়ে পড়ি কভু॥
এই-যে হিয়া থরোথরো কাঁপে আজি এমনতরো
এই বেদনা ক্ষমা করো, ক্ষমা করো, ক্ষমা করো প্রভু॥
এই দীনতা ক্ষমা করো প্রভু,
পিছন-পানে তাকাই যদি কভু।
দিনের তাপে বৌদ্রজালায় শুকায় মালা পূজার থালায়,
সেই ম্লানতা ক্ষমা করো, ক্ষমা করো, ক্ষমা করো প্রভু॥

"Klanti amar khôma kôro probhu,
Pôthe jodi pichhie poṛi kobhu.
Ei je hia thôro thôro kâpe aji êmontôro,
Ei bedona khôma kôro khôma kôro probhu.

Ei dinota khôma kôro probhu,
Pichhon-pane takai jodi kobhu.
Diner tape roudrojalee shukae mala puja thalae,
Shei mlanota khôma kôro khôma kôro, probhu."

Gloss by Tagore scholar Reba Som:

“Forgive me my weariness O Lord
Should I ever lag behind
For this heart that this day trembles so
And for this pain, forgive me, forgive me, O Lord
For this weakness, forgive me O Lord,
If perchance I cast a look behind
And in the day's heat and under the burning sun
The garland on the platter of offering wilts,
For its dull pallor, forgive me, forgive me O Lord.”

Tagore's poetry has been set to music by composers: Arthur Shepherd's triptych for soprano and string quartet, Alexander Zemlinsky's famous Lyric Symphony, Josef Bohuslav Foerster's cycle of love songs, Leoš Janáček's famous chorus "Potulný šílenec" ("The Wandering Madman") for soprano, tenor, baritone, and male chorus—JW 4/43—inspired by Tagore's 1922 lecture in Czechoslovakia which Janáček attended, and Garry Schyman's "Praan", an adaptation of Tagore's poem "Stream of Life" from Gitanjali. The latter was composed and recorded with vocals by Palbasha Siddique to accompany Internet celebrity Matt Harding's 2008 viral video. In 1917 his words were translated adeptly and set to music by Anglo-Dutch composer Richard Hageman to produce a highly regarded art song: "Do Not Go, My Love". The second movement of Jonathan

Harvey's "One Evening" (1994) sets an excerpt beginning "As I was watching the sunrise ..." from a letter of Tagore's, this composer having previously chosen a text by the poet for his piece "Song Offerings" (1985).

Politics

Tagore's political thought was tortuous. He opposed imperialism and supported Indian nationalists, and these views were first revealed in *Manast*, which was mostly composed in his twenties. Evidence produced during the Hindu–German Conspiracy Trial and latter accounts affirm his awareness of the Ghadarites, and stated that he sought the support of Japanese Prime Minister Terauchi Masatake and former Premier Ōkuma Shigenobu. Yet he lampooned the Swadeshi movement; he rebuked it in "The Cult of the Charka", an acrid 1925 essay. He urged the masses to avoid victimology and instead seek self-help and education, and he saw the presence of British administration as a "political symptom of our social disease". He maintained that, even for those at the extremes of poverty, "there can be no question of blind revolution"; preferable to it was a "steady and purposeful education".

Such views enraged many. He escaped assassination—and only narrowly—by Indian expatriates during his stay in a San Francisco hotel in late 1916; the plot failed when his would-be assassins fell into argument. Yet Tagore wrote songs lionising the Indian independence movement Two of Tagore's more politically charged compositions, "Chitto Jetha Bhayshunyo" ("Where the Mind is Without Fear") and "Ekla Chalo Re" ("If They Answer Not to Thy Call, Walk Alone"), gained mass appeal, with the latter favoured by Gandhi. Though somewhat critical of Gandhian activism, Tagore was key in resolving a [Gandhi](#)–Ambedkar dispute involving separate electorates for untouchables, thereby mooting at least one of Gandhi's fasts "unto death".

Repudiation of Knighthood

Tagore renounced his knighthood, in response to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919. In the repudiation letter to the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, he wrote:

“The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in the incongruous context of humiliation, and I for my part, wish to stand, shorn, of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen who, for their so called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings.”

Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati

Tagore despised rote classroom schooling: in "The Parrot's Training", a bird is caged and forced textbook pages—to death. Tagore, visiting Santa Barbara in 1917, conceived a new type of university: he sought to "make Santiniketan the connecting thread between India and the world [and] a world center for the study of humanity somewhere beyond the limits of nation and geography." The school, which he named Visva-Bharati, had its foundation stone laid on 24 December 1918 and was inaugurated precisely three years later. Tagore employed a brahmacharya system: gurus gave pupils personal guidance—emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. Teaching was often done under trees. He staffed the school, he contributed his Nobel

Prize monies, and his duties as steward-mentor at Santiniketan kept him busy: mornings he taught classes; afternoons and evenings he wrote the students' textbooks. He fundraised widely for the school in Europe and the United States between 1919 and 1921.

Impact

Every year, many events pay tribute to Tagore: Kabipranam, his birth anniversary, is celebrated by groups scattered across the globe; the annual Tagore Festival held in Urbana, Illinois; Rabindra Path Parikrama walking pilgrimages from Calcutta to Santiniketan; and recitals of his poetry, which are held on important anniversaries. Bengali culture is fraught with this legacy: from language and arts to history and politics. Amartya Sen scantily deemed Tagore a "towering figure", a "deeply relevant and many-sided contemporary thinker". Tagore's Bengali originals—the 1939 Rabīndra Rachanāvalī—is canonised as one of his nation's greatest cultural treasures, and he was roped into a reasonably humble role: "the greatest poet India has produced".

Tagore was renowned throughout much of Europe, North America, and East Asia. He co-founded Dartington Hall School, a progressive coeducational institution; in Japan, he influenced such figures as Nobel laureate Yasunari Kawabata. Tagore's works were widely translated into English, Dutch, German, Spanish, and other European languages by Czech indologist Vincenc Lesný, French Nobel laureate [André Gide](#), Russian poet [Anna Akhmatova](#), former Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, and others. In the United States, Tagore's lecturing circuits, particularly those of 1916–1917, were widely attended and wildly acclaimed. Some controversies involving Tagore, possibly fictive, trashed his popularity and sales in Japan and North America after the late 1920s, concluding with his "near total eclipse" outside Bengal. Yet a latent reverence of Tagore was discovered by an astonished [Salman Rushdie](#) during a trip to Nicaragua.

By way of translations, Tagore influenced [Chileans Pablo Neruda](#) and [Gabriela Mistral](#); Mexican writer [Octavio Paz](#); and Spaniards [José Ortega y Gasset](#), Zenobia Camprubí, and Juan Ramón Jiménez. In the period 1914–1922, the Jiménez-Camprubí pair produced twenty-two Spanish translations of Tagore's English corpus; they heavily revised the *The Crescent Moon* and other key titles. In these years, Jiménez developed "naked poetry". Ortega y Gasset wrote that "Tagore's wide appeal [owes to how] he speaks of longings for perfection that we all have [...] Tagore awakens a dormant sense of childish wonder, and he saturates the air with all kinds of enchanting promises for the reader, who [...] pays little attention to the deeper import of Oriental mysticism". Tagore's works circulated in free editions around 1920—alongside those of [Plato](#), [Dante](#), [Cervantes](#), [Goethe](#), and Tolstoy.

Tagore was deemed overrated by some. [Graham Greene](#) doubted that "anyone but Mr. Yeats can still take his poems very seriously." Several prominent Western admirers—including Pound and, to a lesser extent, even Yeats—criticised Tagore's work. Yeats, unimpressed with his English translations, railed against that "Damn Tagore [...] We got out three good books, [Sturge Moore](#) and I, and then, because he thought it more important to know English than to be a great poet, he brought out sentimental rubbish and wrecked his reputation. Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English." William Radice, who "English[ed]" his poems, asked: "What is their place in world literature?" He saw him as "kind of counter-cultural," bearing "a new kind of classicism" that would heal the "collapsed romantic confusion and chaos of the 20th century."

The translated Tagore was "almost nonsensical", and subpar English offerings reduced his transnational appeal:

“[...] anyone who knows Tagore's poems in their original Bengali cannot feel satisfied with any of the translations (made with or without Yeats's help). Even the translations of his prose works suffer, to some extent, from distortion. E.M. Forster noted [of] *The Home and the World* [that] "the theme is so beautiful," but the charms have "vanished in translation," or perhaps "in an experiment that has not quite come off."
—Amartya Sen, "Tagore and His India".

Rabindranath Tagore's Works:

Original

Bengali

Poetry

- * ভানুসিংহ ঠাকুরের পদাবলী *Bhānusimha Ṭhākurer Paḍ āvalī* (Songs of Bhānusimha Ṭhākur) 1884
- * মানসী *Manasi* (The Ideal One) 1890
- * সোনার তরী *Sonar Tari* (The Golden Boat) 1894
- * গীতাঞ্জলি *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings) 1910
- * গীতিমাল্য *Gitimalya* (Wreath of Songs) 1914
- * বলাকা *Balaka* (The Flight of Cranes) 1916

Dramas

- * বাস্মিকী প্রতিভা *Valmiki-Pratibha* (The Genius of Valmiki) 1881
- * বিসর্জন *Visarjan* (The Sacrifice) 1890
- * রাজা *Raja* (The King of the Dark Chamber) 1910
- * ডাকঘর *Dak Ghar* (The Post Office) 1912
- * অচলায়তন *Achalayatan* (The Immovable) 1912
- * মুক্তধারা *Muktadhara* (The Waterfall) 1922
- * রক্তকরবী *Raktakaravi* (Red Oleanders) 1926

Fiction

- * নষ্টনীড় *Nastanirh* (The Broken Nest) 1901
- * গোরা *Gora* (Fair-Faced) 1910
- * ঘরে বাইরে *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World) 1916
- * যোগাযোগ *Yogayog* (Crosscurrents) 1929

Memoirs

- * জীবনস্মৃতি *Jivansmriti* (My Reminiscences) 1912
- * ছেলেবেলা *Chhelebelā* (My Boyhood Days) 1940

English

- * *Thought Relics*-1921

Translated

English

- * Chitra-1914
- * Creative Unity-1922
- * The Crescent Moon-1913
- * The Cycle of Spring-1919
- * Fireflies-1928
- * Fruit-Gathering-1916
- * The Fugitive-1921
- * The Gardener-1913
- * Gitanjali: Song Offerings-1912
- * Glimpses of Bengal-1991
- * The Home and the World-1985
- * The Hungry Stones-1916
- * I Won't Let you Go: Selected Poems-1991
- * The King of the Dark Chamber-1914
- * The Lover of God-2003
- * Mashi-1918
- * My Boyhood Days-1943
- * My Reminiscences -1991
- * Nationalism-1991
- * The Post Office-1914
- * Sadhana: The Realisation of Life-1913
- * Selected Letters-1997
- * Selected Poems-1994
- * Selected Short Stories-1991
- * Songs of Kabir-1915
- * The Spirit of Japan-1916
- * Stories from Tagore-1918
- * Stray Birds-1916
- * Vocation-1913

Adaptations of Novels and Short Stories in Cinema

Hindi

- Sacrifice - 1927 (Balidaan) - Nanand Bhojai and Naval Gandhi
- Milan - 1947 (Nauka Dubi) - Nitin Bose
- Kabuliwala - 1961 (Kabuliwala) - Bimal Roy
- Uphaar - 1971 (Samapti) - Sudhendu Roy
- Lekin... - 1991 (Kshudhit Pashaan) - Gulzar
- Char Adhyay - 1997 (Char Adhyay) - Kumar Shahani
- Kashmakash - 2011 ((Nauka Dubi) - Rituparno Ghosh

Bengali

- Natir Puja - 1932 - The only film directed by Rabindranath Tagore
- Naukadubi - 1947 (Noukadubi) - Nitin Bose

Kabuliwala - 1957 (Kabuliwala) - Tapan Sinha
Kshudhita Pashaan - 1960 (Kshudhita Pashan) - Tapan Sinha
Teen Kanya - 1961 (Teen Kanya) - Satyajit Ray
Charulata - 1964 (Nastanirh) - Satyajit Ray
Ghare Baire - 1985 (Ghare Baire) - Satyajit Ray
Chokher Bali - 2003 (Chokher Bali) - Rituparno Ghosh
Chaturanga - 2008 (Chaturanga) - Suman Mukhopadhyay
Elar Char Adhyay - 2012 (Char Adhyay) - Bappaditya Bandyopadhyay

Popular Poems

- [A Moments Indulgence](#)
 - [At The Last Watch](#)

 - [Authorship](#)
 - [Baby's Way](#)
 - [Baby's World](#)
 - [Beggarly Heart](#)
 - [Benediction](#)
 - [Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva](#)
 - [Brink Of Eternity](#)
 - [Broken Song](#)
 - [Chain Of Pearls](#)
 - [Closed Path](#)
 - [Clouds and Waves](#)
 - [Colored Toys](#)
-

Gitanjali

1.

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.

2.

When thou commandest me to sing it seems that my heart would break with pride;
and I look to thy face, and tears come to my eyes.

All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony - and my
adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea.

I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come
before thy presence.

I touch by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could
never aspire to reach.

Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friend who art my
lord.

3.

I know not how thou singest, my master! I ever listen in silent amazement.

The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from
sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and
rushes on.

My heart longs to join in thy song, but vainly struggles for a voice. I would speak,
but speech breaks not into song, and I cry out baffled. Ah, thou hast made my
heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master!

4.

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living
touch is upon all my limbs.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that thou art
that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.

I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower,
knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.

And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act.

5.

I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side. The works that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.

Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest nor respite, and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil.

Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and the bees are plying their minstrelsy at the court of the flowering grove.

Now it is time to sit quite, face to face with thee, and to sing dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure.

6.

Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not! I fear lest it droop and drop into the dust.

I may not find a place in thy garland, but honour it with a touch of pain from thy hand and pluck it. I fear lest the day end before I am aware, and the time of offering go by.

Though its colour be not deep and its smell be faint, use this flower in thy service and pluck it while there is time.

7.

My song has put off her adornments. She has no pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our union; they would come between thee and me; their jingling would drown thy whispers.

My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight. O master poet, I have sat down at thy feet. Only let me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music.

8.

The child who is decked with prince's robes and who has jewelled chains round his neck loses all pleasure in his play; his dress hampers him at every step.

In fear that it may be frayed, or stained with dust he keeps himself from the world, and is afraid even to move.

Mother, it is no gain, thy bondage of finery, if it keeps one shut off from the healthful dust of the earth, if it rob one of the right of entrance to the great fair of common human life.

9.

O Fool, try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders! O beggar, to come beg at thy own door!

Leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear all, and never look behind in regret.

Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath. It is unholy - take not thy gifts through its unclean hands. Accept only what is offered by sacred love.

10.

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

When I try to bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

Pride can never approach to where thou walkest in the clothes of the humble among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

My heart can never find its way to where thou keepest company with the companionless among the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost.

Biography of Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo was an Indian nationalist and freedom fighter, major Indian English poet, philosopher, and yogi. He joined the movement for India's freedom from British rule and for a duration (1905–1910) became one of its most important leaders, before turning to developing his own vision and philosophy of human progress and spiritual evolution. He was also one of the famous Radical leaders of India during the Indian National Movement.

The central theme of Sri Aurobindo's vision is the evolution of life into a "life divine". In his own words: "Man is a transitional being. He is not final. The step from man to superman is the next approaching achievement in the earth evolution. It is inevitable because it is at once the intention of the inner spirit and the logic of Nature's process".

The principal writings of Sri Aurobindo include, in prose, *The Life Divine*, considered his single great work of metaphysics, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Secrets of the Vedas*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *Renaissance in India* and other essays, *Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, *The Future Poetry*, *Thoughts and Aphorisms* and several volumes of letters. In poetry, his principal work is "Savitri - a Legend and a Symbol" in blank verse.

Sri Aurobindo, not only expressed his spiritual thought and vision in intricate metaphysical reasoning and in phenomenological terms, but also in poetry. He started writing poetry as a young student, and continued until late in his life. The theme of his poetry changed with the projects that he undertook. It ranged from revolutionary homages to mystic philosophy. Sri Aurobindo wrote in classical style.

Aurobindo's writings synthesized Eastern and Western philosophy, religion, literature, and psychology. Aurobindo was the first Indian to create a major literary corpus in English. His works include philosophy; poetry; translations of and commentaries on the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Gita; plays; literary, social, political, and historical criticism; devotional works; spiritual journals and three volumes of letters. His principal philosophical writings are *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, while his principal poetic work is *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*.

Early Life

Aurobindo Ghosh was born in Calcutta, India. His father, Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghose, was District

Surgeon of Rangapur, Bengal. His mother, Swarnalata Devi, was the daughter of Brahmo religious and social reformer, Rajnarayan Basu. Aravinda means "lotus" in Sanskrit. Aurobindo spelled his name Aravinda while in England, as Aravind or Arvind while in Baroda, and as Aurobindo when he moved to Bengal. The surname Ghose is pronounced, and usually written in English, as "Ghosh", and Aurobindo's name often appears as "Arabindo Ghosh" in English academic sources. Dr. Ghose chose the middle name Akroyd to honour his friend Annette Akroyd.

Aurobindo spent his first five years at Rangapur, where his father had been posted since October 1871. Dr. Ghose, who had previously lived in Britain and studied medicine at King's College, Aberdeen, was determined that his children should have an English education and upbringing free of any Indian influences. In 1877, he therefore sent the young Aurobindo and two elder siblings - Manmohan Ghose and Benoybhusan Ghose - to the Loreto Convent school in Darjeeling.

England

Aurobindo spent two years at Loreto convent. In 1879, Aurobindo and his two elder brothers were taken to Manchester, England for a European education. The brothers were placed in the care of a Rev. and Mrs. Drewett. Rev. Drewett was an Anglican clergyman whom Dr. Ghose knew through his British friends at Rangapur. The Drewetts tutored the Ghose brothers privately. The Drewetts had been asked to keep the tuitions completely secular and to make no mention of India or its culture.

In 1884, Aurobindo joined St Paul's School. Here he learned Greek and Latin, spending the last three years reading literature, especially English poetry. Dr. K.D. Ghose had aspired that his sons should pass the prestigious Indian Civil Service, but in 1889 it appeared that of the three brothers, only young Aurobindo had the chance of fulfilling his father's aspirations, his brothers having already decided their future careers. To become an ICS official, students were required to pass the difficult competitive examination, as well as study at an English university for two years under probation. With his limited financial resources, the only option Aurobindo had was to secure a scholarship at an English university, which he did by passing the scholarship examinations of King's College, Cambridge University. He stood first at the examination. He also passed the written examination of ICS after a few months, where he was ranked 11th out of 250 competitors. He spent the next two years at the King's College.

By the end of two years of probation, Aurobindo became convinced that he did not want to serve the British, he therefore failed to present himself at the horse riding examination for ICS, and was disqualified for the Service. At this time, the Maharaja of Baroda, Sayajirao Gaekwad III was travelling England. James Cotton, brother of Sir Henry Cotton, for some time Lt. Governor of Bengal and Secretary of the South Kensington Liberal Club, who knew Aurobindo and his father secured for him a service in Baroda State Service and arranged a meeting between him and the prince. He left England for India, arriving there in February, 1893. In India Aurobindo's

father who was waiting to receive his son was misinformed by his agents from Bombay (now Mumbai) that the ship on which Aurobindo had been travelling had sunk off the coast of Portugal. Dr. Ghose who was by this time frail due to ill-health could not bear this shock and died.

Baroda

In Baroda, Aurobindo joined the state service, working first in the Survey and Settlements department, later moving to the Department of Revenue and then to the Secretariat, writing speeches for the Gaekwad. At Baroda, Aurobindo engaged in a deep study of Indian culture, teaching himself Sanskrit, Hindi and Bengali, all things that his education in England had withheld from him. Because of the lack of punctuality at work resulting from his preoccupation with these other pursuits, Aurobindo was transferred to the Baroda College as a teacher of French, where he became popular because of his unconventional teaching style. He was later promoted to the post of Vice-Principal. He published the first of his collections of poetry, *The Rishi* from Baroda. He also started taking active interest in the politics of India's freedom struggle against British rule, working behind the scenes as his position at the Baroda State barred him from overt political activity. He linked up with resistance groups in Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, while travelling to these states. He established contact with Lokmanya Tilak and Sister Nivedita. He also arranged for the military training of Jatindra Nath Banerjee (Niralamba Swami) in the Baroda army and then dispatched him to organise the resistance groups in Bengal. He was invited by K.G. Deshpande who was in charge of the weekly *Induprakash* and a friend from his days in Cambridge to write about the political situation. Aurobindo started writing a series of impassioned articles under the title *New Lamps for the Old* pouring vitriol on the Congress for its moderate policy. He wrote:

"Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism"

further adding:

"I say, of the Congress, then, this, - that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts, not the right sort of men to be leaders; - in brief, that we are at present the blind led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed."

The Congress which practised more mild and moderate criticism itself, reacted in a way which frightened the editors of the paper who asked Aurobindo to write about cultural themes instead of Politics. Aurobindo lost interest in these writings and the series was discontinued. Aurobindo's activities in Baroda also included a regimen of yogic exercises and meditation, but these were minor in comparison to the work he would take up in his later life. By 1904 he was doing yogic practices for five-six hours everyday. He stated that after performing pranayama, he was able to

memorize and reproduce 200 lines of poetry in half an hour, while earlier he was not even able to memorize a dozen lines. After the practice of pranayama, he was able to compose 200 lines worth of poetry in half an hour, while earlier he was only able to compose 200 lines in a month.

Calcutta

Aurobindo used to take many excursions to Bengal, at first in a bid to re-establish links with his parents' families and his other Bengali relatives, including his cousin Sarojini and brother Barin, and later increasingly in a bid to establish resistance groups across Bengal. But he formally shifted to Calcutta (now Kolkata) only in 1906 after the announcement of Partition of Bengal. During his visit to Calcutta in 1901 he married Mrinalini, daughter of Bhupal Chandra Bose, a senior official in Government service. Aurobindo Ghose was then 28; the bride Mrinalini, 14. Marrying off daughters at a very young age was very common in 19th century Bengali families.

In Bengal with Barin's help he established contacts with revolutionaries, inspiring radicals like Bagha Jatin, Jatin Banerjee, Surendranath Tagore. He helped establish a series of youth clubs with the aim of imparting a martial and spiritual training to the youth of Bengal. He helped found the Anushilan Samiti of Calcutta in 1902. When the Partition of Bengal was announced, there was a public outpouring against the British rule in India. Aurobindo attended the Benares session of Congress in December 1905 as an observer, and witnessing the intensity of people's feelings decided to throw himself into the thick of politics. He joined the National Council of Education and met Subodh Chandra Mullick who quickly became a supporter of Aurobindo's views. Mullick donated a large sum to found a National College and stipulated that Aurobindo should become its first principal. Aurobindo also started writing for *Bande Mataram*, as a consequence of which, his popularity as a leading voice of the hardline group soared. His arrest and acquittal for printing seditious material in *Bande Mataram* consolidated his position as the leader of aggressive nationalists. His call for complete political independence was considered extremely radical at the time and frequently caused friction in Congress. In 1907 at Surat session of Congress where moderates and hardliners had a major showdown, he led the hardliners along with Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The Congress split after this session. In 1907–1908 Aurobindo travelled extensively to Pune, Bombay and Baroda to firm up support for the nationalist cause, giving speeches and meeting various groups. He was arrested again in May 1908 in connection with the Alipore Bomb Case. He was acquitted in the ensuing trial and released after a year of isolated incarceration. Once out of the prison he started two new publications, *Karmayogin* in English and *Dharma* in Bengali. He also delivered the *Uttarpara Speech* hinting at the transformation of his focus to spiritual matters. The British persecution continued because of his writings in his new journals and in April 1910 Aurobindo, signalling his retirement from politics, moved to Pondicherry, where Britain's secret police monitored his apolitical activities.

Conversion from Politics to Spirituality

Aurobindo's conversion from political action to spirituality occurred gradually. Aurobindo had

been influenced by Bankim's Anandamath. In this novel, the story follows a monk who fights the soldiers of the British East India Company. When in Baroda, Aurobindo and Barin had considered the plan of a national uprising of nationalist sannyasis against the empire. Later when Aurobindo got involved with Congress and Bande Mataram, Barin had continued to meet patriotic youngsters for recruitment for such a plan. In 1907, Barin introduced Aurobindo to Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, a Maharashtrian yogi.

Aurobindo had been engaged in yogic discipline for years, but disturbances to his progress following the recent events surrounding the Congress had put him in the need of consulting a yogi. After attending the Surat session of the Congress in 1907, Aurobindo met Lele in Baroda. This meeting led him to retire for three days in seclusion where, following Lele's instruction, Aurobindo had his first major experience, called nirvana - a state of complete mental silence free of any thought or mental activity. Later, while awaiting trial as a prisoner in Alipore Central Jail in Calcutta Aurobindo had a number of mystical experiences. In his letters, Sri Aurobindo mentions that while in jail as under-trial, spirit of Swami Vivekananda visited him for two weeks and spoke about the higher planes of consciousness leading to supermind. Sri Aurobindo later said that while imprisoned he saw the convicts, jailers, policemen, the prison bars, the trees, the judge, the lawyers as different forms of one godhead, Krishna.

The trial ("Alipore Bomb Case, 1908") lasted for one full year, but eventually Sri Aurobindo was acquitted. His Defence Counsel was Chiitarnjan Das. On acquittal, Sri Aurobindo was invited to deliver a speech at Uttarpara where he first spoke of some of his experiences in jail. Afterwards Aurobindo started two new weekly papers: the Karmayogin in English and the Dharma in Bengali. However, it appeared that the British government would not tolerate his nationalist program as then Viceroy and Governor-General of India Lord Minto wrote about him: "I can only repeat that he is the most dangerous man we have to reckon with." The British considered the possibilities of a retrial or deportation, but objections from Lord Minto, or the Bengal government at different instances prevented immediate execution of such plans.

When informed that he was sought again by the police, he was guided by an inner voice to the then French territory Chandernagore where he halted for a few days and later On April 4, 1910, to Pondicherry.

Pondicherry

In Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo completely dedicated himself to his spiritual and philosophical pursuits. In 1914, after four years of concentrated yoga, Sri Aurobindo was proposed to express his vision in intellectual terms. This resulted in the launch of Arya, a 64 page monthly review. For the next six and a half years this became the vehicle for most of his most important writings, which appeared in serialised form. These included The Life Divine, The Synthesis of Yoga, Essays on The Gita, The Secret of The Veda, Hymns to the Mystic Fire, The Upanishads, The Renaissance in India, War and Self-determination, The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, and The Future Poetry. Many years later, Sri Aurobindo revised some of these works before they

were published in book form. It was about his prose writing of this period that Times Literary Supplement, London wrote on 8 July 1944, "Sri Aurobindo is the most significant and perhaps the most interesting.... He is a new type of thinker, one who combines in his vision the alacrity of the West with the illumination of the East. He is a yogi who writes as though he were standing among the stars, with the constellations for his companions. Pondicherry is prayerpalace of Aurobindo Ghosh.

For some time afterwards, Sri Aurobindo's main literary output was his voluminous correspondence with his disciples. His letters, most of which were written in the 1930s, numbered in the several thousands. Many were brief comments made in the margins of his disciple's notebooks in answer to their questions and reports of their spiritual practice—others extended to several pages of carefully composed explanations of practical aspects of his teachings. These were later collected and published in book form in three volumes of Letters on Yoga. In the late 1930s, Sri Aurobindo resumed work on a poem he had started earlier—he continued to expand and revise this poem for the rest of his life. It became perhaps his greatest literary achievement, *Savitri*, an epic spiritual poem in blank verse of approximately 24,000 lines. During World War II, he supported the allies, even donating money to the British Government, describing Hitler as a dark and oppressive force.

On August 15, 1947, on his 75th birthday, when India achieved political independence, a message was asked from Sri Aurobindo. In his message, which was read out on the All India Radio, Sri Aurobindo dwelt briefly on the five dreams he has cherished all his life and which, he noted, were on the way to being fulfilled. Sri Aurobindo died on December 5, 1950, after a short illness.

Poetry

Sri Aurobindo not only expressed his spiritual thought and vision in intricate metaphysical reasoning and in phenomenological terms, but also in poetry. He started writing poetry as a young student, and continued until late in his life. The theme of his poetry changed with the projects that he undertook. It ranged from revolutionary homages to mystic philosophy. Sri Aurobindo wrote in classical style.

Savitri

Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol is Sri Aurobindo's epic poem in 12 books, 24,000 lines about an individual who overcomes the ignorance, suffering, and death in the world through Her spiritual quest, setting the stage for the emergence of a new, Divine life on earth. It is loosely based on the ancient Indian tale of 'Savitri and Satyavan' from the Mahabharata.

The Future Poetry

In Sri Aurobindo's theory of poetry, written under the title *The Future Poetry*, he writes about the

significance that art and culture have for the spiritual evolution of mankind. He believed that a new, deep, and intuitive poetry could be a powerful aid to the change of consciousness and the life required to achieve the spiritual destiny of mankind which he envisioned. Unlike philosophy or psychology, poetry could make the reality of the Spirit living to the imagination and reveal its beauty and delight and captivate the deeper soul of humanity to its acceptance. It is perhaps in Sri Aurobindo's own poetry, particularly in his epic poem Savitri, that we find the fullest and most powerful statement of his spiritual thought and vision.

Sri Aurobindo's Works:

Bases of Yoga, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
Bhagavad Gita and Its Message, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
Dictionary of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, (compiled by M.P. Pandit), Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
Essays on the Gita, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
The Future Evolution of Man, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
The Human Cycle: The Psychology of Social Development, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
Hymns to the Mystic Fire, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
The Ideal of Human Unity, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
The Integral Yoga: Sri Aurobindo's Teaching and Method of Practice, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
The Life Divine, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
The Mind of Light, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
The Mother, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
Rebirth and Karma, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
Secret of the Veda, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
Sri Aurobindo Primary Works Set 12 vol. US Edition, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
Sri Aurobindo Selected Writings Software CD ROM, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
The Synthesis of Yoga, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
The Upanishads, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
Vedic Symbolism, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin
The Essential Aurobindo - Writings of Sri Aurobindo
The Powers Within, Lotus Press.
Human Cycle, Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self Determination by Aurobindo, Lotus Press.
Hour of God by Sri Aurobindo, Lotus Press.