Welcome to Spotlight. I’m Liz Waid. And I’m Adam Navis. Spotlight uses a special English method of broadcasting. It is easier for people to understand, no matter where in the world they live. It is a hot day near Kolkata, India. The children are at school. They are learning poems and songs. But they are not inside a building. The students are sitting outside under large trees. Is this a good way to learn? Writer and activist Rabindranath Tagore believed that it was. Today’s Spotlight is on Tagore’s life and the school that he started in India. Tagore was born in 1861 in Kolkata, India. He was born into a wealthy and well-educated family. Tagore did many great things in his life time. He travelled around the world. He was friends with many famous people. He wrote the national song for both India and Bangladesh. Millions of people love his poems and music. More than 100 years later, his writing continues to influence Indian culture. However, as a boy he did not like school. He did not want to sit in a school building. So Tagore’s older brothers taught him many things at home. He learned about music and painting. But he enjoyed writing most of all. Tagore wrote his first poem when he was seven years old. His first book of poems was published when he was only 17. He wrote poems about many things including love, life, spiritual matters, and politics. Tagore also wrote about education. He believed that there are many different ways to learn. And each child must learn in his own way. In one of his poems, he said: ‘Do not limit a child to your own learning, for he was born in another time.’ In the early 1900s the government of Britain ruled the country of India. During this time very few Indian children went to school. All the schools were like the schools in Britain. Children were expected to sit inside a classroom. They had to listen to the teacher all day long. Then, they were tested on how much they could remember. Tagore remembered that he did not learn well in this kind of school. So he decided to create his own school. He wanted this school to be a different place for learning. Tagore’s school opened in 1901. He named it Santiniketan. This word means “house of peace” in the Bengali language. Santiniketan began with just five students. It also had five teachers! Tagore’s aim was to have a school where children enjoyed their learning. Rabindranath Tagore believed that the children should feel connected to nature. The students were encouraged to play and spend time in nature. Their classes met outside. This way they learned more than just information. They learned to live at peace with the world. Tagore also wanted the students to be connected to their local culture. Most other schools in India were taught in English. At Santiniketan, teachers used the local Bengali language. The students also learned songs and dances from their local area. They learned skills in arts and crafts such as making shoes and dyeing cloth. But Tagore also wanted his students to understand the world. They studied many other cultures. The school even had teachers from other countries. Students at Santiniketan were encouraged to spend time thinking about spiritual and religious issues. India is a nation with many different religions. Tagore believed in respecting all religions. He thought spirituality was an important part of searching for truth. During a speech in the United States he said: "The object of education is to give man the unity of truth. I believe in a spiritual world that is not separate from this world. It is the most important truth. With the breath of life we must always feel that we are living in God." Tagore wanted the children at his school to have the same goal. He was not concerned about tests and results. He believed that it was more important for the children to learn about the world around them. He believed that children needed freedom to think and explore. Tagore’s school was a success. The students there did not always get the best results on tests. But they studied many different subjects. They learned many important skills. And the school made them very creative. Many students from Tagore’s school become famous as adults. The former Prime Minister of India, Indhira Gandhi, went to Tagore’s school. So did economist and writer Amartya Sen. Sen received a Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998. Famous Indian film maker, Satyajit Ray also attended Tagore’s school. Ray even made a film about Rabindranath Tagore. He believed Tagore’s school had a big influence on his success. He told the Guardian newspaper: “The years I spent at Santiniketan were the most productive of my life… It was there that I first saw how wonderful Indian art was. Until then I was only influenced by western art, music and literature. Santiniketan made me the combined product of East and West that I am.” In 1913 Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Prize for Literature. He received the award for his book of poems called Gitanjali. He was the first non-European person to receive a Nobel Prize. This achievement was important to Tagore. But it was not the most important thing. The most important thing to Tagore was thinking. He believed all children should have the freedom to think. This idea was very new and different at that time. Even today, Tagore’s school is very different. In one of his poems from Gitanjali, Tagore explains his ideas for education. He wished these things for the people of his country: “Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free; Where the world has not been broken up into pieces by narrow walls… Where the clear river of reason has not lost its way into the desert sand; Into that heaven of freedom, My Father, let my country awake.” This dream of Rabindranath Tagore is still alive today. It lives on through Santiniketan school. What do you think about Tagore’s school? Do you think this different kind of education is good? Email us your thoughts at radio@radioenglish.net. The writer and producer of this program was Rena Dam. The voices you heard were from the United States. All quotes were adapted and voiced by Spotlight. You can find our programs on the internet at www.radioenglish.net. This program is called, ‘Freedom for Thinking’. You can leave your comments on our website. You can also find us on Facebook - just search for spotlightradio. We hope you can join us again for the next Spotlight program. Goodbye.