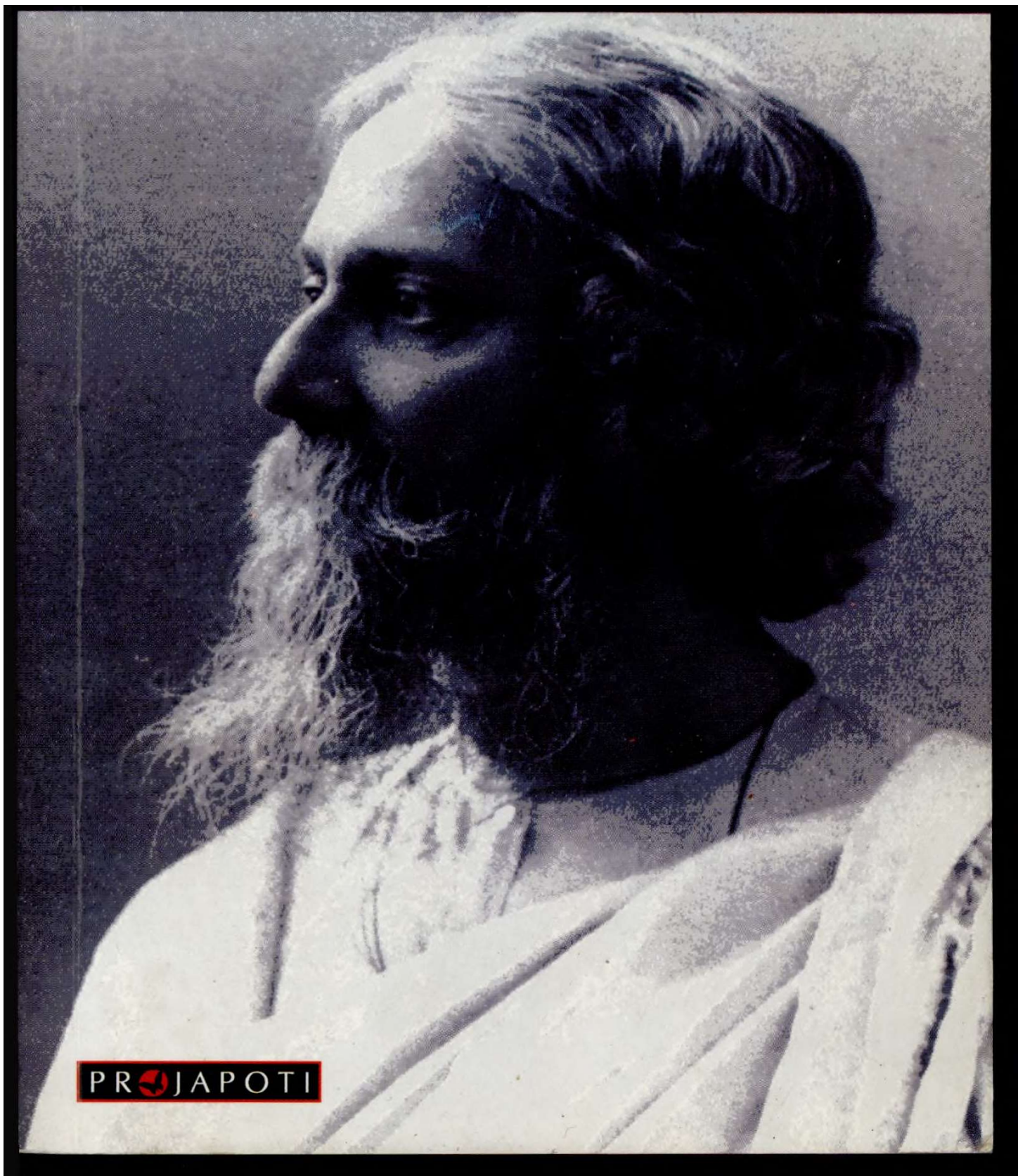


Rabindranath Tagore¹ Collected Stories¹



PRJAPOTI



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COLLECTED STORIES

Rabindranath Tagore

PR[^]J A P O T I

INTRODUCTION

The Tagores were pioneers of Bengal Renaissance and tried to combine traditional Indian culture with and Western ideas. Rabindranath Tagore, the youngest, influenced deeply Indian Literature, and he was the first Indian to bring an element of psychological realism to his stories.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is the greatest writer in modern Indian literature. He was a poet, novelist, educator, painter, reformer. He won the *Nobel Prize* for Literature in 1913.

Tagore was born in Kolkata in a wealthy and prominent family. His father, Maharishi Debendranath Tagore, was a religious reformer. Tagore received his early education from tutors and then at different schools. He studied Law in University College, London but left after a year without completing his studies. In 1883, Tagore married Mrinalini Devi Raichaudhuri, with whom he had two sons and three daughters.

His first book, a collection of poems, appeared when he was 17. In East Bengal (now Bangladesh), he collected local legends and folklore and wrote seven volumes of poetry between 1893 and 1900.

In 1901 Tagore founded a school outside Kolkata, Visva-Bharati, which was dedicated to emerging Western and Indian philosophy and education. It became a university in 1921.

Tagore's reputation as a writer was established in the United States and in England after the publication of *Gitanjalil: Song Offerings*. The poems were translated into English by Tagore himself. The poems appeared in 1912 with an introduction by *William Butler Yates*, who wrote "*These lyrics - which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention - display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long.*" His poems were praised by Ezra Pound, and drew the attention of the Nobel Prize committee. "*There is in him the stillness*

of nature. The poems do not seem to have been produced by storm or by ignition, but seem to show the normal habit of his mind. He is at one with nature, and finds no contradictions. And this is in sharp contrast with the Western mode, where man must be shown attempting to master nature if we are to have "great drama" (Ezra Pound in Fortnightly Review, 1 March 1913). However, Tagore also experimented with poetic forms and these works have lost much in translations into other languages.

Politically active in India, Tagore was a supporter of Gandhi, but warned of the dangers of nationalistic thought. Unable to gain ideological support to his views, he retired into relative solitude. Between the years 1916 and 1934 he travelled widely, attempting to spread the ideal of uniting East and West. Only hours before he died on August 7, in 1941, Tagore dictated his last poem.

Tagore wrote his most important works in Bengali, but he translated his poems into English, forming new collections. Many of his poems are actually songs, and inseparable from their music. His written production, still not completely collected, fill 26 substantial volumes. At the age of 70 Tagore took up painting. He was also a composer, settings hundreds of poems to music. Tagore's song "Our Golden Bengal" became the national anathema of Bangladesh.

Tagore was awarded the knighthood in 1915, but he surrendered it in 1919 as a protest against the Massacre of Amritsar, where British troops killed some 400 Indian demonstrators protesting colonial laws.

Further reading:

Rabindranath Tagore by Krishna Kripalani (1962);

Rabindranath Tagore by H. Bancroft (1971);

Rabindranath Tagore by B. C. Chakravorty (1971);

An Introduction to Rabindranath Tagore by V. S. Narayana (1977);

The Humanism of Rabindranath Tagore by M. R. Anand (1979);

Rabindranath Tagore by S. Chose (1986);

The Universal Man by S. Chattopadhyay (1987);

Sir Rabindranath Tagore by K. S. Ramaswami Sastri (1988);

Gandhi and Tagore by D. W. Atkinson (1989);

Rabindranath Tagore by K. Basak (1991);

Rabindranath Tagore by E. J. Thompson (1991)

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THE VICTORY

She was the Princess Ajita. And the court poet of King Narayan had never seen her. On the day he recited a new poem to the king he would raise his voice just to that pitch which could be heard by unseen hearers in the screened balcony high above the hall. He sent up his song towards the star-land out of his reach, where, circled with light, the planet who ruled his destiny shone unknown and out of ken.

He would espy some shadow moving behind the veil. A tinkling sound would come to his ear from afar, and would set him dreaming of the ankles whose tiny golden bells sang at each step. Ah, the rosy red tender feet that walked the dust of the earth like God's mercy on the fallen! The poet had placed them on the altar of his heart, where he wove his songs to the tune of those golden bells. Doubt never arose in his mind as to whose shadow it was that moved behind the screen, and whose anklets they were that sang to the time of his beating heart. Manjari, the maid of the princess, passed by the poet's house on her way to the river, and she never missed a day to have a few words with him on the sly. When she found the road deserted, and the shadow of dusk on the land, she would boldly enter his room, and sit at the corner of his carpet. There

was a suspicion of an added care in the choice of the colour of her veil, in the setting of the flower in her hair.

People smiled and whispered at this, and they were not to blame. For Shekhar the poet never took the trouble to hide the fact that these meetings were a pure joy to him.

The meaning of her name was the spray of flowers. One must confess that for an ordinary mortal it was sufficient in its sweetness. But Shekhar made his own addition to this name, and called her the Spray of Spring Flowers. And ordinary mortals shook their heads and said, Ah, me!

In the spring songs that the poet sang the praise of the spray of spring flowers was conspicuously reiterated; and the king winked and smiled at him when he heard it, and the poet smiled in answer. The king would put him the question:

Is it the business of the bee merely to hum in the court of the spring?⁷

The poet would answer: 'No, but also to sip the honey of the spray of spring flowers.'

And they all laughed in the king's hall. And it was rumoured that the Princess Ajita also laughed at her maid's accepting the poet's name for her, and Manjari felt glad in her heart.

Thus truth and falsehood mingle in life —and to what God builds man adds his own decoration.

Only those were pure truths which were sung by the poet. The theme was Krishna, the lover god, and Radha, the beloved, the Eternal Man and the Eternal Woman, the sorrow that comes from the beginning of time, and the joy without end. The truth of these songs was tested in his inmost heart by everybody from the beggar to the king

himself. The poet's songs were on the lips of all. At the merest glimmer of the moon and the faintest whisper of the summer breeze his songs would break forth in the land from windows and courtyards, from sailing-boats, from shadows of the wayside trees, in numberless voices.

Thus passed the days happily. The poet recited, the king listened, the hearers applauded, Manjari passed and repassed by the poet's room on her way to the river — the shadow flitted behind the screened balcony, and the tiny golden bells tinkled from afar.

Just then set forth from his home in the south a poet on his path of conquest. He came to King Narayan, in the kingdom of Amarapur. He stood before the throne, and uttered a verse in praise of the king. He had challenged all the court poets on his way, and his career of victory had been unbroken.

The king received him with honour, and said:

'Poet, I offer you welcome.'

Pundarik, the poet, proudly replied: 'Sire, I ask for war.'

Shekhar, the court poet of the king did not know how the battle of the muse was to be waged. He had no sleep at night. The mighty figure of the famous Pundarik, his sharp nose curved like a scimitar, and his proud head tilted on one side, haunted the poet's vision in the dark.

With a trembling heart Shekhar entered the arena in the morning. The theatre was filled with the crowd.

The poet greeted his rival with a smile and a bow. Pundarik returned it with a slight toss of his head, and turned his face towards his circle of adoring followers with a meaning smile.