

Tagore speaks

Rabindranath Tagore was one of the rarest personalities who ever lived. As a poet, dramatist, artist, educator, philosopher and statesman he helped India to recapture and to develop its richest traditions and to improve the conditions of its underprivileged masses. As an internationalist he helped to bridge the gulf between East and West.

Born on May 7, 1861, he was reared in a family of culture and distinction. His education was carried on with tutors, but even more by association with the large and talented Tagore family. At an early age he began to write, and at sixteen helped his brother to edit a literary magazine. From then on he produced an astounding amount of the finest in world literature—hundreds of songs, several novels, scores of short stories, numerous plays. His writings are delicate and sensitive, deep and penetrating. His religious writings read like the Psalms.

Appalled by the human, spiritual, and economic erosion of Indian rural life and the ineffectiveness of education, he founded a school at Santiniketan and a rural reconstruction center at nearby Sriniketan. Later he developed a world university at the former place to foster Indian, Oriental, and Occidental culture.

The last twenty years he travelled the globe, lecturing, reading his poetry and plays, and interpreting the East to the West and the West to the East. On August 7, 1941, he died, leaving the world a rich legacy in his life and writings.

ON RELIGION . . .

"My religion is in the reconciliation of the superpersonal Man, the universal human spirit, in my individual being."

ON GOD'S PRESENCE . . .

"They who are near to me do not know that you are nearer to me than they are.

They who speak to me do not know that my heart is full with your unspoken words.

They who crowd in my path do not know that I am walking alone with you.

They who love me do not know that their love brings you to my heart."

ON THE INNER LIFE AND SOLITUDE . . .

"There are things that we get from outside and take to ourselves as possessions. But with meditation, it is just the opposite. It is entering into the very midst of some great truth, so that, in the end, we are possessed by it."

"Our true life lies at a great depth within us. Our restlessness and weaknesses are in reality merely stirring on the surface. That is why we must daily retire in silence far into the quiet depths of our spirits, and experience the real life within us. If we do this, our words and actions will come to be real also."

ON SIMPLICITY AND HAPPINESS . . .

"But deep in my heart I know that simplicity of life and endeavor make for real happiness."

ON BEAUTY AND LOVE . . .

"Beauty is the harmony realized in things which are bound by law. Love is the harmony realized in wills which are free."

ON VISTAS NEAR AT HAND . . .

"God, the Great Giver, can open the whole universe to our gaze in the narrow space of a single lane."

ON NATURE . . .

"Dawn sleeps on the shadowy hills,
The stars hold their breath counting the hours."

"There comes the morning with the golden basket in her right hand, bearing the wreath of beauty, silently to crown the earth."

"God grows weary of great kingdoms, but never of little flowers."

"Bees sip honey from flowers and hum their thanks when they leave. The gaudy butterfly is sure that the flowers owe thanks to him."

"Be still, my heart, these great trees are prayers."

"The hills are like shouts of children who raise their arms, trying to catch stars."

"The prelude of the night is commenced in the music of the sunset, in its solemn hymn to the ineffable dark."

"The evening sky to me is like a window, and a lighted lamp, and a waiting behind it."

"The silent night has the beauty of the mother and the clamorous day of the child."

ON CHILDHOOD . . .

"Child, how happy you are, sitting in the dust, playing with a broken twig all the morning.

I smile at your play with that little bit of a broken twig . . .

Child, I have forgotten the art of being absorbed in sticks and mud-pies.

I seek costly playthings, and gather lumps of gold and silver.

With whatever you find, create glad games;
I spend both my time and my strength
over things I never can obtain."

"Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man."

"Let me not shame thee, Father, who displayeth thy glory in thy children."

ON GROWTH . . .

"Man is a born child; his power is the power of growth."

ON EDUCATION . . .

"The only hope of saving civilization is through enlightened education."

ON LOVE . . .

"You smiled and talked to me of nothing and I felt that for this I had been waiting long."

"Let me feel this world as thy love taking form, then my love will help it."

"Power said to the world, 'You are mine',
The world kept it prisoner on her throne.
Love said to the world, 'I am thine',
The world gave it the freedom of her house."

ON PRAYER . . .

"This is my prayer to Thee, my Lord—
Strike, strike at the root of penury in my
heart.

Give me the strength lightly to bear my
joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength to make my love fruit-
ful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the
poor or bend my knees before insolent
might.

Give me the strength to raise my mind above
daily trifles.

And give me the strength to surrender my
strength to Thy will with love."

"Make me thy cup and let my fulness be for
thee and thine."

"I have scaled the peak and found no
shelter in fame's bleak and barren height.
Lead me, my Guide, before the light fades,
into the valley of quiet, where life's harvest
mellows into golden wisdom."

"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 of
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, know-
ing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost
shrine of my heart.

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

ON WORK . . .

“ . . . work expresses your life so long as it flows with it, but when it clings, then it impedes, and shows, not the life, but itself.”

ON WOMAN'S WORK IN THE WORLD . . .

“Woman, in your laughter, you have the music of the fountain of life.”

“At the present stage of history, civilization is almost exclusively masculine, a civilization of power, in which woman has been thrust aside in the shade. Therefore it has lost its balance and is moving by hopping from war to war. Its motive forces are the forces of destruction, and its ceremonials are carried through by an appalling number of human sacrifices. This one-sided civilization is crashing along a series of catastrophes at a tremendous speed because of its one-sidedness. And at last the time has arrived when woman must step in and impart her life rhythm to this reckless movement of power.”

“Wherever there is something which is concretely personal and human, there is woman's world. The domestic world is the world where every individual finds his worth as an individual, therefore his value is not the market-value, but the value of love; that is to say, the value God in his infinite mercy has set upon all creatures. This domestic world has been the gift of God to woman. She can extend her radiance of love beyond its boundaries on all sides, and even leave it to prove her woman's nature when the call comes to her. But this is a truth which cannot be ignored, that the moment she is born in her mother's arms, she is born in the center of her own true world, the world of human relationships.

ON NATIONALISM . . .

"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 fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depths of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sands of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-widening thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake."

ON A WORLD POINT OF VIEW . . .

"The most important single fact in the world today is that East and West have met."

"The best and noblest gifts of humanity cannot be the monopoly of a particular race or country. . . ."

"It is a moral duty for every race to cultivate strength, so as to be able to help the world's balance of power to remain even."

"The greatness and beauty of Oriental art . . . consists in this, that there the artists have seen this soul of things and they believe in it. The West may believe in the soul of Man, but she does not really believe that the universe has a soul. Yet this is the belief of the East, and the whole mental contribution of the East to mankind is filled with this idea. So we, in the East, need not go into details and emphasize them; for the most important thing is the universal soul, for which the Eastern sages have sat in meditation, and Eastern artists have joined in artistic realization."

ON DEATH AND IMMORTALITY . . .

"I came to this shore as a stranger, I lived
in your house as a guest, I leave your door
as a friend, my earth."

"Ask not what I have to take there. I start
on my journey with empty hands and expect-
ant heart."

"I have learnt the simple meaning of thy
whispers in flowers and sunshine; teach me
to know thy plain words in pain and death."

"Put out the lamp when thou wishest, I
shall know thy darkness and shall love it."

"In front lies the ocean of peace,
Launch the boat, helmsman . . .
May the mortal bands perish,
May the vast universe take him in its arms,
And may he know in his fearless heart
The Great Unknown."

"Let this be my last word, that I trust in
thy love."

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