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Rabindranath Tagore

V. A. Sundaram

TO

USHA DEVI

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

A sunny day in early spring—
a smiling morn—Beautiful
children walking merrily under
the tall trees.—Some with
Krishnachura flowers in their
little ears.—Tiny heads crowned
with tender green leaves and
white jasmies. Sal groves
shining splendidly in the gentle
sunlight. Morning air resonant
with sweet voices—Birds com-
mingling with children—In-
comparable loveliness of nature.
In the midst of young radiant
faces, the Poet slowly and

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

majestically enters, dressed in a long loose orange-coloured gown. Children with garlands greet Gurudev. Tagore is passionately fond of flowers. He says :—

“Ah, these Jasmines, these white Jasmines !

I seem to remember the first day when I filled my hands with these Jasmines, these white Jasmines.

I have loved the sunlight, the sky and the green earth ; I have heard the liquid murmur of the river through the darkness of midnight ; Autumn

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

sunsets have come to me at the bend of a road in the lonely waste, like a bride raising her veil to accept her lover.

Yet my memory is still sweet with the first white Jasmines that I held in my hand when I was a child. Many a glad day has come in my life, and I have laughed with merry makers on festival nights.

On grey mornings of rain I have crooned many an idle song.

I have worn round my neck the evening wreath of bakulas woven by the hand of love.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Yet my heart is sweet with the memory of the first fresh jasmines that filled my hands when I was a child.”

Rabindranath blesses the assembly and sits Buddha—like amidst them with a face beaming with joy. The sun shines on his broad forehead. What a play of lights and shadows! A perfect picture of beauty. It is a delight to see Rabindranath under the large mango tree in Santiniketan.

“Oh the Santiniketan, the darling of our hearts

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Our dreams are rocked in her arms. Her face is fresh and fair to us for ever.

In the peace of her silent shadows we dwell, in the green of her fields. Her mornings come and her evenings bringing down the caress of the sky.

The stillness of her shady path is thrilled by the whisper of the wood.

Her amalaki groves tremble with the rapture of rustling leaves. She is within us and around however far we wander.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

The strings of our love
are strung in her own deep
tunes.

She weaves our hearts in
a song making us one in music.”

Lost in joy, the Poet caresses the children and hugs them to his heart overflowing with love for all the beautiful little ones of the world. After the children’s play, boys and girls salute the venerable bard. “Be blessed” he says.—Tagore talks to everyone around him. His voice is so shrill and musical. His words sweetly strange—a joy to listen to a Poet’s honeyed

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

words. Rabindranath speaks the golden language of harmony and of love.

The charming children begin to babble again—Boys and girls, sing, “Phagun, Legacha Bonay Bonay Pathai Pathai, Dalay, Dalay—Spring has kissed the boughs and branches and leaves of the trees.” Now all join in the bhajan. In one voice the many sing of the blessed one. The blue-winged birds cease their warblings. Human voices reach the heavens. Wonderful music. Divine ditties. Tagore opens his eyes

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

—Beholds the pageant around
him—Flower-decked boys and
girls, jasmine-garlanded little
children. "Jayahay Jayahay" they
shout. It is a joy to hear the
children sing the Poet's song.
Jana gana mana adhinayak Jaya
hay—

Bharata Bhagya bidhata !

Punjab, Sindhu, Guzrata, Mara-
tha,

Dravida, Utkala, Vanga,

Vindya, Himachala, Yamuna,
Ganga.

Ucchala Jaladhi taranga,

Taba Shuva namay Jagay !

1. Modern Review. Feb. 1918.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Taba Shuva Ashisha Magay
Gahay Taba Jaya Gatha !
Jana gana mangala dayaka

Jaya hay

Bharata Bhagya bidhata

Jaya hay, Jaya hay, Jaya,
Jaya, Jaya, Jaya hay.

Aharaha taba ahuvan pracharita
Shuni taba udara Vani
Hindu, Bouddha, Shikha, Jaina,
Parasika, Mussalmana, Khiristane
Poorava, Paschima Ashay,
Taba Singhasana Pashay,
Prema Hara haya gatha !
Jana gana aiykya bidayaka
Jaya hay

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Bharata Bhagya bidhata !
Jaya hay, Jaya hay,
Jaya, Jaya, Jaya hay !

Patana abhyudaya Bandura
Pantha
Yuga Yuga dhabita Yatray
Hay chira sarathi taba ratha
chakray
Mukarita patha dina ratray
Daruna biplava majhey
Taba Shanka dhvani bajay
Sankata dukkha thrata
Jana gana dukkha trayaka
Jaya hay
Bharata Bhagya bidhata,
Jaya hay, Jaya hay, Jaya,

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Jaya, Jaya, Jaya hay

Ghora timir ghana nivida
nishitha

Peeditha moorchhita deshay
Jagrita chhila taba abchala
Mangala natha nayanay
animeshay.

Dusvapnay atankay raksha
Karilay-ankay-snehamaye
tumi mata

Jana gana patha parichayaka
Jaya hay,

Bharata Bhagya bidhata.

Jaya hay, Jaya hay, Jaya,
Jaya, Jaya, Jaya hay.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Ratree prabhatila udila ravi-
chhavi; poorva udayagiri
bhalay !

Gahay vihangama punya same-
erane nava jeevana rasa dalay,

Taba karunaruna ragay,

Nidrita bharata jagay,

Taba charanay nata mata

Jaya, Jaya, Jaya hay !

Jaya rajeshwara bharata

bhagya bidhata

Jaya hay, Jaya hay, Jaya, Jaya,

Jaya, Jaya hay !

(TRANSLATION)

Victory to Thee, Builder of India's Destiny.

Ruler of People's minds

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

And Builder of India's Destiny
Thy name rises in the sky from
summits of the Himalayas
and Vindhya,
Flows in the stream of the
Ganges and is sung by the
surging sea.
In Thy name wake Punjab and
Sind, Maratha and Gujrat,
Dravid, Utkala and Vanga.
They gather at Thy feet asking
for Thy blessing and singing
Thy victory.
Victory to Thee, giver of good
to all People,
Victory to Thee, Builder of
India's Destiny.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

There sounds Thy call and
They come before Thy throne
 the Hindus and Buddhists,
 the Jains and Sikhs,
The Parsees, Mussalmans and
 Christians.

The East and the West meet
To unite their love at Thy shrine.
Victory to Thee who makest one
 the minds of all people
Victory to Thee, Builder of
 India's Destiny.

Pilgrims pass from age to age
On the road of time uneven
With the rise and fall of races.
It resounds with the thunder—
 roar

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

The children beseech the Poet to sing a song. Once again silence pervades the fragrant morning air. The Poet opens his lips. Swells forth the music which is heavenly.

“Tomari nam bolbo

Ami bolbo nana chhale

Bolbo bina bhashay

Bolbo bina ashay

Bolbo mookher hashi diye

Bolbo chokher jale

Bina proyojane naki

Dakbo Tomari nam

Sheyi dake mor shudu shudni

Poorbe manoshkar

Shishu jaman make

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Namer, neshay dake
Bolte pari sheyi shukhete
Mayer nam she bole.”

———
(TRANSLATION)

I shall utter Thy name
I shall utter it in various ways.
I shall sit under Thy shade alone
and shall utter it myself.
I shall utter it in no language
I shall utter with no hope
I shall utter Thy name with
loving face and tearful eyes.
I shall call Thee unnecessarily
That call will fulfil all my
wishes.
As the baby calls its mother

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Inspired by the very name it gets its pleasure by calling Ma I shall utter Thy name.

Tagore sings it in such a sweet tone—elevating—moving. Under the mango tree Rabindranath is lost in reverie. He is athirst for far-off things. That song is sung in a moment of realisation—in a blessed moment of union with the beloved. The song is over. The Santiniketan stillness fills the wondrous atmosphere again. The little birds sing from bakula boughs. It seems as though they too

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

know the timings—after the birds, the little children sing another song on the birth of spring. Children's voices once more. Who would not love birds and children, music and scent, colour and symphony? It is unbelievable—all these beautiful scenes, but there they are in Santiniketan, where dreams are woven day and night into music which has found its way through the world.

Time is past eleven. Tagore gets up from his lowly seat under the shady tree. The

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

whole assembly stands up and ring round the Poet. Flower-bedecked, crowned with silken leaves, the dear old Rabindranath walks slowly at the head of a colourful pageant. They march to the sacred spot where the Maharshi (the Poet's father) meditated under the Chatim trees. They bow gently, offer flowers, burn incense and return along the sunlit way—the shady way—the leafy way—the flower—fallen way. The gong strikes. The meeting disperses. The Poet goes into his retreat—“uttarayan.”

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

In the evening once again all the inmates of the *ashram* assemble in the prayer hall. The Poet delivers a sermon.—what a matchless oration!

For an hour Rabindranath pours his soul in ecstasy, inspires his disciples, and tells them that “man’s abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving himself up to what is greater than himself, to ideas which are larger than his individual life, the idea of his country, of humanity, of God. They make it easier for him to part with all that he has,

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

not excepting his life. His existence is miserable and sordid till he finds some great idea which can truly claim his all, which can release him from all attachment to his belongings. Buddha and Jesus and all our great prophets represent such great ideas. They hold before us opportunities for surrendering our all. When they bring forth their divine alms—bowl we feel we cannot help giving, and we find that in giving is our truest joy and liberation, for it is uniting ourselves to that extent with the Infinite.”

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Tagore speaks of the Rishis—the poet-prophets of the dawn, the ancient seers of wisdom, who have realised the Infinite. The Poet recites the *Gayatri*, and says that ¹“the mantra is the epitome of all the Vedas. By its help we try to realise the essential unity of the world with the conscious soul of man. We learn to perceive the unity held together by the one Eternal Spirit, whose power creates the earth, the sky and the stars, and at the same time irradiates our minds with the light of a consciousness that moves

1. Sadhana.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

and exists in unbroken continuity with the outer world." Every body is thrilled to hear his chant from the Upanishads. The Poet sings the song "From joy are born all creatures, by joy they are sustained, towards joy they progress and into joy they enter." He speaks of the Immortal Being manifesting himself in joy-form.

"Anandarūpam amritam
yad vibhāti."

The golden sun sets on the boundless horizon of Santiniketan. The stars come one by one and haply the queen

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

moon is on her throne, clustered round by all her starry Fays. Rabindranath comes out from "uttarayan" and sits on the verandah in Pearson's house. The children gather around him.

The Poet tells them how to build their houses with sand and play with empty shells. He sings to make them dance. He talks to them of paper boats, of clouds and waves, of the Champa, Shiuli and Malati flowers, of fairyland, where the walls of king's palace are of white silver and the roof of shining gold, where the Queen

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

lives in a palace with seven courtyards and wears a jewel that cost all the wealth of seven kingdoms and of the magic wand.

The Santiniketan children are enthralled on listening to the Poet's talk. "Can you reach me" he asks, and one after another the joy-filled children cling to him, saying, "I can reach you, I can reach you, Gurudev."

What wonderful love. Tagore believes "that children should be surrounded with the things of Nature which have

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

their own educational value. Their minds should be allowed to stumble on and be surprised at everything that happens in the life of to-day. The new to-morrow will stimulate their attention with new facts of life. This is the best method for the child.”

Then Rabindranath begins reading his drama—“The Cycle of Spring.” Now and then he laughs aloud—His acting is superb. More than others the children enjoy the drama and the music.

Tagore has entered myster-

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

iously into the hearts of the young. He is pre-eminently the poet of spring time—the prophet of liberty. He is the singer of a new-world—Tagore tells us “that a poet’s mission is to attract the voice which is yet inaudible in the air; to inspire faith in the dream which is unfulfilled; to bring the earliest tidings of the unborn flower to a sceptic world.

So many are there to-day who do not believe. They do not know that faith in a great future itself creates that future; that without faith you cannot

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

re-cognise your opportunities, which come again and again, but depart unheeded. Prudent men and unbelievers have created dissensions, but it is the eternal child, the dreamer, the man of simple faith, who has built up great civilisations.”

It is a wonder how Tagore's songs and lyrics are read by children in Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Russia, and other western countries. Great is his achievement. Greater is his sovereignty over the hearts of people in east and west.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

There have been Nobel Laureates in all great countries, but none like Tagore. He towers above all the Poets of his age by his many-sided genius—by his universalism.

His songs to Light, Freedom and the Motherland will live for ever. Everyone will chant the poet's glorious canticle to Light.

¹“Light, my light, the world filling light, the eye-kissing light, heart—sweetening light!

Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the centre of my life; the light strikes my dar-

1. Gitanjali.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

ling, the chords of my love;
the sky opens, the wind runs
wild, laughter passes over the
earth.

The butterflies spread their
sails on the sea of light.

Lilies and jasmines surge
up on the crest of the waves
of light.

The light is shattered into
gold on every cloud, my dar-
ling, and it scatters gems in
profusion.

Mirth spreads from leaf
to leaf, my darling, and glad-
ness without measure. The
heaven's river has drowned its

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

banks and the flood of joy is abroad.”

Well-known are his lines to Freedom.

1“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 depth of truth ;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection ;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way

1. Gitanjali.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

into the dreary desert sand of
dead habit ;

Where the mind is led
forward by thee into ever-
widening thought and action—

Into that heaven of free-
dom ;

My Father, let my country
awake.



RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Who will not sing

¹“Blessed is my birth, because
I was born in this country,
Blessed is my life, mother,
because I have loved thee.

I do not know if thou hast
wealth and riches to be a
queen. I know this much that
my limbs are cooled as soon
as I stand in thy shade.

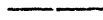
I know not in what grove
blossom flowers that madden the
soul with such sweet scents. I
know not the sky where the moon
rises with such sweet smiles.

My eyes were first opened
in thy light and they will be

1. Modern Review 1917.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

closed finally upon that very light.”



What a lovely day in the ethereal company of Rabindranath Tagore. I shall ever remember the sweet fragrance of these long sun-shiny hours, so full of light, love and jasmine odour. The Poet is still with us, sitting at the head of the table. Andrews, Pearson and I gaze on the beauty of his face. The time is past ten in the night.

Two more hours of poetry and song and the company of the English Romantics and the

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Greek tragedians. To hear Rabindranath read Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats is a unique experience. "I admire Wordsworth's shorter poems" he says and reads the sonnet on Westminster Bridge. Then he reads Shelley's Ode—"To the west wind" and his "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" "ah how grand" remarks Tagore. Of Shelley he speaks a good deal.

After a little while, the Poet, closing his eyes recites Keats' Odes to a "Grecian urn and to a Nightingale." The

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Ode to a Grecian urn—"It is perfect"—says Tagore. The clock strikes 12. It is midnight now. There is a holy calm all around, when the Poet begins those famous lines. "Thou was not born for death Immortal Bird." And the voice within me tells. Nor art thou born for death Immortal Singer. O! Rabindranath Tagore!



