Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) is an iconic presence in Indian literature. International interest in his work soared after he received the Nobel Prize in 1913, declined thereafter, but has increased again in recent years. He practised all the major literary genres – poetry, drama, fiction, and a range of non-fictional writings. In addition, he was a song-writer, composer, painter, philosopher, educationist, social thinker, and public intellectual.

There is no one-volume guide to the range of achievements of this multi-faceted genius in English, or indeed in his own language, Bengali. The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore takes on that challenging task. It contains a series of critical surveys of the chief sectors of his artistic output and its reception, followed by a number of more specialized studies on particular topics and fields of activity. The authors are among the leading Tagore experts from India and abroad. They have drawn upon the entire body of relevant material in Bengali and English, besides other languages as appropriate. They have also woven into their accounts the historical and cultural background of Tagore's time, a period of exceptional ferment and creativity for Bengal and India.

This is the first major volume on Tagore in English to take full stock of the untranslated Bengali works that comprise the greater part of his oeuvre. It includes an index of the primary works used in this collection, with full details of their complex history of transmission, as well as a substantial reading list for Tagore studies in English. It will be an indispensable guide for all scholars, students, and general readers of Tagore and his times, even those who can access his works and related scholarship in Bengali.

Sukanta Chaudhuri is Professor Emeritus, Department of English, Jadavpur University, where he founded the School of Cultural Texts and Records. Besides his work on Shakespeare and other Renaissance literature, he was chief co-ordinator of the Tagore online variorum Bichitra, and general editor of the Oxford Tagore Translations.
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Saranindranath Tagore is Associate Professor of Philosophy, National University of Singapore, and an Editor-in-Chief of *Sophia: International Journal of Philosophy and Tradition*. His publications on Rabindranath include collaborative translations in *Rabindranath Tagore: Final Poems* (2001), and ‘Rabindranath Tagore’s Conception of Cosmopolitanism’, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 77 (2008).

Preface

Rabindranāth Thākur (Tagore) has been a recognized figure in world literature for a hundred years and more, but the language that unlocked his genius has also hampered his global reception. Bengali is the world's seventh most widely spoken language but not a 'world language' in its cultural reach. The extent of Rabindranath's output has also told against him. The standard edition of his Bengali works runs to thirty-three large volumes and is still incomplete; his English works to four yet larger volumes but is also incomplete. Only a fraction of the Bengali writings has been translated into English, often (starting with his own versions) with more than the inevitable loss in translating great literature. Renderings in other languages, including most Indian ones, have been made from these English versions more often than not.

Thus when Bengalis claim for Tagore a place beside Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe, their claim is predictably ascribed to cultural chauvinism, especially as shades of such chauvinism are sometimes quite apparent. His early international reputation subsided in a matter of decades. Even in India, his effective impact outside Bengal came to decline, despite the iconic status ensured by the Nobel Prize and continuing to this day. He has received some fresh attention since the late twentieth century, often for his writings and activities in other fields rather than his core literary output. However, the sweep and depth of his total achievement has scarcely been addressed – even across the entire body of scholarly work, let alone in a single exercise.

His non-literary enterprises, active and contemplative, would each have made the reputation of a lesser man: music, dance, and painting; social, historical, and political thought, with an impressive record of activism; radical thinking on education and rural development, embodied in an institution that started as a makeshift school with five students and is today a major university. Through his travels no less than his writings, he acquired standing as a global intellectual, if thereby often reducing himself to the figure of a spiritualist and 'oriental sage'. More lastingly and materially, his historic association has transformed a remote Bengal village into a thriving academic centre, tourist destination, and, yet more improbably, an economic and administrative hub. Even Shakespeare's impact on Stratford-upon-Avon has not been transformative in so many ways.

It is a fit time to present the full scope of Rabindranath's improbably manifold genius in a single integrated effort. There have been few if any such ventures even in Bengali, short of the multi-volume biographies by Prabhatkumar
Mukhopadhyay and Prashantakumar Pal. (The latter did not live to complete his work.) This book attempts the task in a single accessible volume.

It is a formidable task, given the range of issues and sheer volume of material. Each major sector of Tagore's achievement had to be covered in a single article of limited size. Even so, it was agreed that the effort should not be diluted by limiting the material to what is available in English. Every contributor to this book has drawn on the full body of relevant Bengali material, for the benefit of readers who may not themselves have such access. An attempt has been made to link Tagore's work to his times and, more crucially, each aspect of that work to all others as appropriate. Readers will find how contributors on diverse subjects stress the total nature of the man's genius as reflected in their particular sphere of interest. He could work major innovations in music and painting, drama and dance, educational and ecological practice, and indeed literary genres like the short story and the novel, precisely because he was not a specialized practitioner in any one of these fields: they are diverse expressions of an endlessly versatile sensibility whose core expression, if anywhere, is in the poetry. It is to be hoped that the brevity of each study will be compensated by the chance to consider all of them side by side.

The book begins with two synoptic pieces by the doyens of Tagore studies in both realms of Bengal, Sankha Ghosh and Anisuzzaman. This is followed by a group of relatively long pieces, each offering a critical overview of a major area of Tagore's work or reception, and then by briefer, more focused studies of particular themes and concerns. With such a huge and intricate body of material, the sheer challenge of documentation was immense. We have tried to meet it productively in a cumulative bibliography-cum-index that, we hope, will benefit all Tagore scholars, not least as a template for a comprehensive exercise in the future.

I could not have carried out this daunting editorial task without the unstinted support and patience of a distinguished body of contributors: my sincerest thanks to them all. One of them did not live to see the volume in print, though he heroically met the deadline, like all his other commitments, during his last taxing illness. In grateful admiration, I offer this volume as a tribute to the memory of Sabyasachi Bhattacharya.

Sankha Ghosh was an unfailing source of information, guidance, and moral support. This would have been a different and poorer book without his sustained silent inputs, over and above his own essay. Thanks to Supriya Chaudhuri and Ananda Lal (again, for more than their signed contributions), to Amrit Sen and Ayanendranath Basu; to Rabindra-Bhavana, Santiniketan, for supplying the illustrations; and to the libraries of Visva-Bharati, Jadavpur University, and the Tagore Research Centre, Kolkata.

Sukanta Chaudhuri
Kolkata
April 2019
Note on Conventions and Practices

**SOURCES AND CITATIONS**

Tagore’s Bengali texts are usually cited from the Visva-Bharati *Rabindra-rachanābali*, and English texts from the Sahitya Akademi *English Writings* [details below]. The few works not included in these collections are cited from other sources.

The footnotes carry references to works quoted [in original or translation] or referred to closely, but not to works only cited by title. The latter are included in the List of Tagore’s Works Cited.

**ABBREVIATIONS AND SHORT TITLES**

- **RRVB** *Rabindra-rachanābali* [Bengali Collected Works] (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1939–); 33 + 2 vols, in progress. The two volumes of *Achalita sangraha* [early works ‘withdrawn from circulation’] are cited as A1 and A2.
- **RRGWB** *Rabindra-rachanābali* (Kolkata: Govt. of West Bengal, 1981–2004); 16 + 2 vols. Vol. 16 contains a detailed bibliography and publication history of the Bengali works.
- **GB** *Gitabītāni*, 3rd 1-vol. ed. (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1973): chiefly cited for songs not found in *RRVB*.
- **CPBLI** *Chhinnapatrābali*, 2nd ed. (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1993).
- **VBP** *Visva-bhāratī patrikā*. 

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VBQ  Visva-Bharati Quarterly.  
100 Years  Martin Kämpchen and Imre Bangha, eds, Rabindranath Tagore: One Hundred Years of Global Reception (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2014).

TRANSLATIONS OF TITLES

Tagore’s Bengali titles are translated at their first occurrence in each chapter. Where a single short piece is being cited, the title of the collection where it appears is generally not translated there but only in the List of Tagore’s Works Cited.

Titles from other writers are not translated except for special need.

Translated titles that have appeared formally in published form are printed, like original titles, in italics for volume-length works and in roman type within inverted commas for short works. Translated titles devised for this volume appear in roman type without inverted commas.

Titles that are proper names have, of course, been left untranslated, so have a few others involving a nuance or a play on words that seemed untranslatable.

DATES

Except for special reason, dates of composition and publication (usually the latter) are cited within the chapters by year only. Fuller dates – exact, approximate, or conjectural – can be found in the List of Tagore’s Works Cited.

Dates usually follow the Common Era (CE); Bengali Era (BE) dates are cited only for special reason. However, in the List of Tagore’s Works Cited, journals are cited by Bengali date, which is often the only way to identify a particular issue.

The Bengali year runs from CE mid-April to mid-April: for example, BE 1268, the year of Tagore’s birth, covers CE mid-April 1861 to mid-April 1862. Where the precise CE year is not known, the earlier year is cited with an asterisk: for example, *1861 covers the span of BE 1268, mid-April 1861 to mid-April 1862.

Bengali months run from the middle of one CE month to the next: for example, Vaishākh is mid-April to mid-May. Again, if the precise CE equivalent is not known, the earlier month is cited with an asterisk: for example, *April 1861 for Vaishākh 1268, the month of Tagore’s birth.

TRANSLITERATION

No conversion of Bengali characters to Roman can be entirely consistent without using the phonetic alphabet or diacritical marks. This book uses only one such mark, the macron over a (ā) to indicate Bengali আ. Titles of works;
Note on Conventions and Practices  xvii

words, phrases, and excerpts from Bengali texts; and certain cultural terms (for example, ānanda) are rendered with macrons each time they occur. Proper names include the macron only at the point of first occurrence in each chapter. Bengali has no capital letters, and none has been used in transliterating Bengali titles, phrases, and excerpts, except for the initial letter of a title.

The following equivalents have been followed:

- अ = a, आ = ā, ए = ai, ऋ = o, ऊ = au
- श, ष = sh, स = s
- क्ष = ksh
- ज्ञ = jn
- ठ = r̥h
- ठ = r̥h
- य = j, but य-फला = y; hence र्य = r̥j, र्य = r̥jy. आचार्य/आचार्य, भक्ताचार्य/भक्ताचार्य are always spelt with ‘ry’.
- ब-फला = w
- nasal (chandrabindu): n following the consonant (thus कः = kna, ः = sna).

Words close to the original Sanskrit form and/or associations are rendered accordingly, for example, with v instead of b [Veda, Vidyāsāgar, Vivekānanda]. So are words of pan-Indian currency like the names of months or of Hindu gods and mythological characters. Va-phalā in Sanskrit words is rendered by v.


Certain place-names, notably ‘Kolkata’ (also ‘Mumbai’, ‘Chennai’, and so on), have been cited in their current versions irrespective of the date of reference or exact form in the source, except in direct quotation.

The system is not without anomalies, which could not be removed without creating other, arguably greater ones. We would request the indulgence of readers.

TRANSLATED PASSAGES

Authors were asked either to use Tagore’s own translations of his work or to make their own. Except in very rare cases, translations by other hands have not been used. Translations carrying references only to the Bengali source [usually RRVB] have been made for this volume by the author of the chapter concerned. Tagore’s own translations (and the few others cited) are documented in the notes.
BENGALI NAMES

Unavoidably, the familiar form ‘Tagore’ has been retained in place of ‘Thākur’. Other personal names have been consistently transliterated following the above conventions, irrespective of individual practice (which is often hard to ascertain and can itself be variable). In a few illustrious cases, where the person concerned used another spelling, the latter follows in parentheses: thus, Michael Madhusudan Datta (Dutt), Jagadishchandra Basu (Bose), Buddhadeb Basu (Buddhadeva Bose).

When directly citing an English work, the title and author’s name follow the title page even if it differs from the normal practice of this volume: thus, Bengali Gitānjjali but English Gitanjali; ‘Debabrata Mukhopādhyāy’ in the text but ‘Devabrata Mukerjea’ in the reference citing the title page. This divergence also applies to the use of macrons.

As a rule, authentic Bengali forms of names have been preferred to their anglicized versions: thus ‘Chattopādhyāy’ and ‘Mukhopādhyāy’ rather than ‘Chatterjee’ or ‘Mukherjee’. The latter forms are sometimes placed in parentheses at the point of first reference.

In accord with common practice, famous Bengalis are usually referred to by their first names: ‘Bankim(chandra)’, ‘Sharatchandra’, ‘Sudhindranath’. The outstanding and unavoidable exception is the free use of both ‘Rabindranath’ and ‘Tagore’. The latter form, familiar to most readers of this volume and current in many Indian languages, could not be dismissed.