

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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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Edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri
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Jadavpur University



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Notes on Contributors

Fakrul Alam is UGC Professor, Department of English, Dhaka University. He has authored *Rabindranath Tagore and National Identity Formation in Bangladesh* (2012), edited *South Asian Writers in English* (2006), and co-edited *The Essential Tagore* (2011). In 2013, he received the Translation Award of the Bangla Academy, Dhaka.

Anisuzzaman is a National Professor of Bangladesh, after retiring from Dhaka University as Professor of Bengali. His publications on Tagore include *Rabindranāth: ekāler chokhe* (2011), *Tnār srishtir path* (2016), and the edited volumes *Rabindranāth* (1968) and *Sārdhashatabarshe rabindranāth: bānglādesher shraddhānjali* (2012).

Sibaji Bandyopadhyay was Professor of Cultural Studies at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. Besides essays, he writes poems, stories, plays, novels and film scripts. His two recent English publications are *Tagores Before Tagore: A Screenplay* (2018) and *Three Essays on the Mahābhārata* (2015).

Himani Bannerji is Emeritus Professor of Sociology, York University, Canada. Her publications include *Inventing Subjects: Studies in Hegemony, Patriarchy and Colonialism* (2001), *Demography and Democracy* (2011), and 'Beyond the Binaries: Notes on Karl Marx and Rabindranath Tagore's Ideas on Human Capacities and Alienation' in *Marxism: With and Beyond Marx* (2014).

France Bhattacharya is Emeritus Professor of Bengali language, literature, and social and religious history at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales, Paris. She has translated several works by Rabindranath, Bibhutibhusan Bandyopādhyāy and Tārāshankar Bandyopādhyāy, as well as Bipradās's *Manasāmangal*, into French and Bhāratchandra Rāy's *Annadāmangal* into English.

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (1938–2019) was Professor of Indian History, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi; Vice-Chancellor, Visva-Bharati; and Chairman, Indian Council of Historical Research. His last books were *Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation* (2017) and *Archiving the British Raj, 1858–1947* (2018). He received the Rabindra Puraskar of the West Bengal Government and the Tagore Birth Centenary Award of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata.

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Sourin Bhattacharya retired as Professor of Economics, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Among his many writings on Rabindranath, the book *Keno āmrā rabindranāthke chāi ebang kibhābe* (2007) received the Sahitya Akademi Award. Five volumes of his collected works have appeared so far.

Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta was Professor of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. She has published many essays on Tagore, co-edited a collection of Tagore material from the journal *Sāhitya*, and contributed to the online Tagore variorum *Bichitra*. Most recently, she has co-edited the volume *Figures of Transcontinental Multilingualism* (2017).

Nirmalya Narayan Chakraborty is Professor of Philosophy and Dean of Arts, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata. His recent writings include 'Tagore and the Problem of Evil' in *The Idea of Surplus* (2016) and 'Methodology in Indian Philosophy' in *The Routledge History of Indian Philosophy* (2018).

Swapan Chakravorty held the Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore Distinguished Chair in the Humanities, Presidency University, Kolkata. He has edited *Rabindranāth: shilparup, pāthrup, grantharup* (2011) and *Nameless Recognition: Rabindranath Tagore and Other Indian Literatures* (2011), and translated Tagore's essays on literature for the Oxford Tagore Translations (2010).

Jayanti Chattopadhyay was Professor of Modern Indian Languages at the University of Delhi. She has authored a number of articles on Rabindranath in English and Bengali. She has also worked on linguistics and women's studies.

Sukanta Chaudhuri is Professor Emeritus, Department of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, 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.

Supriya Chaudhuri is Professor Emerita, Department of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. She has translated Tagore's poetry and fiction, including the novel *Jogājog*, for the Oxford Tagore Translations, and published critical essays on Tagore. Her chapter on 'The Bengali Novel' appears in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Indian Culture* (2012).

Sobhanlal Datta Gupta retired as Surendra Nath Banerjee Professor of Political Science, University of Calcutta. He has previously been attached to Presidency College, Kolkata, the University of Burdwan, and the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. His works include *Marxism in Dark Times* (2012).

Partha Ghose retired as Professor, S.N. Bose National Centre for Basic Sciences, Kolkata. His many publications, scientific and other, include the edited volumes

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Einstein, Tagore and the Nature of Reality (2017) and *Tagore, Einstein and the Nature of Reality: Literary and Philosophical Reflections* (2019).

Sankha Ghosh is a major poet and essayist in Bengali, and an eminent Tagore scholar. He retired as Professor of Bengali, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Some of his noted Tagore titles are *Kāler mātrā o rabindranātak* (1978), *E āmir ābaran* (1980), and *Nirmān ār srishhti* (1982). His many honours include the Sahitya Akademi Award, Rabindra Puraskar, and Jnanpith Award.

Ashish Lahiri is Adjunct Professor, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Kolkata, and a writer, translator, lexicographer and historian of science. On Tagore, he has published *Rabindranāth: mānusher dharma, mānusher bijñān* (2013) and *Rabindrasangit theke rabindranāth: byaktigata ek abhijātrā* (2014).

Ananda Lal retired as Professor of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. He has translated six Tagore plays and about fifty Tagore poems. His other Tagoreana include *The Voice of Rabindranath Tagore* (CD, 1997) and a teleplay of *Shesher Kabitā* (2007). He has directed *Arup ratan* and *Tapati* on stage.

Shefali Moitra retired as Professor of Philosophy, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Besides her work in philosophy and women's studies, she has published widely on Rabindranath in English and Bengali, most recently *Rabindra-nrityanātya: ekti nāribādi pāth* (2019), a feminist reading of the dance dramas.

Kathleen M. O'Connell retired as Lecturer, University of Toronto. She has published *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator* (2012), and co-edited *Rabindranath Tagore: Claiming a Cultural Icon* (2009) and the Tagore issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly* (2008).

Biswajit Ray is Associate Professor of Bengali, Visva-Bharati. His publications on Rabindranath include *Rabindranāth o bibekānanda: swadeshe samakāle* (2017) and *Sachalatār gān* (2019). A well-known columnist, he writes regularly for the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* about various socio-cultural aspects of Bengali life.

Aseem Shrivastava has taught economics and philosophy at various institutions in India, Norway, and the United States. He currently teaches ecosophy at Ashoka University, Delhi, and is working on the philosophical dimensions of Rabindranath's ecological vision. He is co-author of *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India* (2012).

R. Siva Kumar is Professor of Art History at Visva Bharati, an author, and curator. His books include *Rabindra Chitravali* (2011), a four-volume compilation of Rabindranath's paintings. His curated exhibitions include *The Last Harvest: Paintings of Rabindranath Tagore*, which travelled to nine museums across the world and four in India.

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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).

Harish Trivedi retired as Professor of English, University of Delhi. He has authored *Colonial Transactions* (1995), an Introduction (1991) to Edward Thompson's *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist*, and essays on Tagore and the West, Tagore and Premchand, and Tagore's view of contemporaneity.

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

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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.
- EW* *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, vols 1–3 ed. Sisir Kumar Das, vol. 4 ed. Nityapriya Ghosh (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994–2007).
- GB* *Gitabitān*, 3rd 1-vol. ed. (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1973): chiefly cited for songs not found in *RRVB*.
- CP* *Chithipatra* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1942–); 19 vols, in progress.
- CPBLI* *Chhinnapatrābali*, 2nd ed. (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1993).
- Centenary* *Rabindranath Tagore 1861–1961: A Centenary Volume* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1961).
- RJPM* Prabhātkumār Mukhopādhyāy, *Rabindra-jibani* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati): vol. 1, 4th ed., 1970 rpt. 1994; vol. 2, 4th ed., 1976 rpt. 1999; vol. 3, 3rd ed., 1990 rpt. 1999; vol. 4, 3rd ed., 1994 rpt. 2004.
- RJPP* Prashāntakumār Pāl, *Rabi-jibani*, 9 vols (Kolkata: vol. 1, Bhurjapatra, vols 2–9, Ānanda Publishers, 1982–2001).
- SL* Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, eds, *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- VBP* *Visva-bhārati 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 ঐ. 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:

- অ = a, আ = ā, ঐ = ai, ও = o, ঔ = au
- শ, ষ = sh, স = s
- ক্ষ = ksh
- জ্ঞ = jn
- ড় = rh
- ঢ় = rhh
- য = j, but য-ফলা = y; hence র্য = rj, র্য্য = rjy. আচার্য/আচার্য্য, ভট্টাচার্য/ভট্টাচার্য্য are always spelt with 'ry'.
- ব-ফলা = w
- nasal (chandrabinu): *n* following the consonant (thus কঁ = kna, সঁ = 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', 'Jorasanko', 'Santiniketan', and 'Sriniketan', and the institutional names 'Visva-Bharati', 'Brahmo Samaj', 'Sahitya Akademi', and 'University of Calcutta' are so spelt, following the standard official forms. But book titles like *Shāntiniketan* and *Bishwabhārati* are transliterated in the usual way.

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.

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BENGALI NAMES

Unavoidably, the familiar form ‘Tagore’ has been retained in place of ‘Thākūr’. 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 *Gitanjali* 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.