

Special Event  
**Rabindra Sangeet**  
**Lund International Tagore Choir**  
Bangladesh Embassy  
13 Nov 2023

**Remarks**

Ambassador Tanmaya Lal

Ambassador Mehdi Hasan

Excellencies, Guests,

May I begin by **complimenting** Ambassador Mehdi Hasan for this wonderful initiative.

And **Thank you for inviting me**

This is a **tribute to the enduring legacy** of Rabindranath Tagore, **an international icon**. He was a man of several **talents and accomplishments**. He remains an **inspirational figure**.

He is widely known as a sensitive and visionary poet who became a **Nobel Laureate for literature** for his book of poems **Gitanjali**. But he was also a **versatile and prolific author, artist, philosopher, reformer and thinker**.

Above all he was a **humanist** and a **universalist**.

Many of his ideas **remain relevant** today and continue to **inspire**.

Rabindranath Tagore lived in **turbulent times**. 1861-1941. **He lived in undivided India** that was **under British rule**.

He was born a few years after India's first War of Independence of **1857**. He passed away a few years before India achieved independence, although at a great cost in **1947**.

**During his time European powers were in conflict with each other**. There was deep economic & social flux. **Large parts of the world were subjugated by European colonial powers**, and were witnessing **social reform and freedom struggles**.

**India** too was witnessing **social reform & national freedom struggle** and also **literary revolution**.

Tagore drew **inspiration** from **classical & folk music heritage** and the **works of devotional poets**. His writings have allusions to **Upanishads, Buddhism**, songs of **Baul folk singers** and many other elements.

He was **influenced by his times** and **went on to make an impact on leading thinkers and common folk alike**.

Tagore was vehemently against the **first Partition of Bengal** done by the British in **1905**.

**Although not a political activist, he interacted with prominent Indian leaders of the time**.

**Their ideas and visions did not always match but their mutual respect did**. It is said that Tagore was the first to address Gandhiji as **Mahatma**. And Gandhiji addressed **Tagore as Gurudev**, a highly respectful term.

The award of **Nobel prize** to Tagore in **1913** was against the **backdrop of War clouds** gathering over Europe.

When he passed away in 1941, the world was again in turmoil and Second World War was under way.

Tagore was a visionary with an abiding faith on **individual freedom** and **self-empowerment**. His stories were about **individual choice in specific circumstances and settings**. Especially of **women**. He strongly believed that **individual freedom and expression were drivers of change**.

Tagore focused on **Education** – a new **open all-round education** based on **curiosity**. Although Tagore was often admired for his **idealism** and a certain **mysticism**, he laid equal emphasis on **science**.

He started **Visva Bharati University** at Shantiniketan in **1921**. **Visva** means the World and **Bharati** referred to India. He wanted a communion of the World with India, a blend of the East & West.

Tagore **travelled the world** and **engaged with iconic figures across continents**.

From Japan to South America . . . While preparing for my remarks I realised that Tagore had visited several of the places that we have served in, showing that he had travelled extensively. For instance – **Germany** (1921), **Iran** (1932, 34), **USA** (1912, 1916), **Siam** or Thailand (1927), **Austria** (1926) and of course **Sweden**. He also wrote about **Africa**.

During his travels, he interacted political leaders, reformers, scientists, poets - **Einstein, Romain Rolland, Bernard Shaw**

An interesting anecdote is how another Nobel Laureate from Bengal **Amartya Sen** was named by Rabindranath Tagore. Amartya Sen studied at Shantiniketan.

Tagore wrote in **Bengali** and came to the attention of Nobel Committee through **English translation**. A peculiar thing about the **Nobel prize for Literature** is its **Eurocentrism**. The **next Asian to receive this award was only in 1968** ! More than 55 years later. No one from **Africa** received this award until mid-1980s !

Rabindranath Tagore is a **very unique and special bond between the peoples of India and Bangladesh**. He is the only person whose compositions have been adopted as their **National Anthems** by two countries.

**It says a lot and speaks to our shared long history and heritage.**

Tagore could only visit **Sweden in 1921 after the War ended**. He reached Stockholm by **train** from Copenhagen via Malmö. He gave his acceptance speech in **Stockholm** and also visited **Uppsala**. He visited Sweden once more in **1926**.

Sweden issued a **Postage Stamp** to commemorate Tagore's Nobel Prize 50 years ago in **1973**. A **bust** of Rabindranath Tagore was installed at Uppsala University in **2014**.

One of the enduring legacies of Tagore is **Rabindra Sangeet**, a special music genre. It is wonderful to see this tradition being carried forward by **Lund International Tagore Choir** and other groups such as **Tagore Dance & Music Group** in Stockholm.

I once again thank Ambassador Mehdi Hasan and look forward to the special choral recital by the Lund Tagore Choir.