

Rabindranath Tagore  
*Portrayal of  
Memories*

Abhik Kumar Dey

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## FOREWORD

Rabindranath is the richest treasure I have inherited being born a Bengali. It is a gift I have earned without the least endeavour on my part. And he is there for me always and everywhere in my joy and ecstasy, in my depression and despair. He is an inexhaustible wonder, a never failing inspiration. However, nearly twenty-five years ago unexpectedly a new sapling of idea raised its head in me. I thought that to see him through his photographs and in his own words is yet another effort to discover him anew, to explore the eternal mystery that the Poet is through a new perspective.

The idea came from my teacher Sm Pranati Mukhopadhyay in 1986 and set my imagination ablaze. It gradually turned into an abiding passion. Photography has been my hobby and incidentally my professional responsibility too. I have always known that photographs speak beyond the mere visual.

Rabindranath had been an immensely interesting subject for many photographers. Leaving aside film personalities, perhaps only Udaysankar was the only Bengali to be photographed so often and in so many different moods and stages of life as was Rabindranath. But in spite of the wealth of extant photographs of Tagore, as we travel back in time into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, their number diminishes and the identity of the photographers is often lost to memory.

It is a difficult, if not an impossible task to piece together so vast, so complex and so rich a life as that of Rabindranath through photographs. My

own inadequacy and limited perspective are also hindrances. Still my efforts in preparing a pictorial biography of Tagore was so warmly welcomed and encouraged by so many scholars and critics that I shed my hesitations and started searching for and sorting out my materials—letters, notes, newspaper clippings, advertisements of some of his books at the time of publication, or some notification of his play when acted on public board. Of course *My Reminiscences* and *My Boyhood Days* are the storehouses, which provided me the illustrative texts to the visual representations of Tagore and the people and places, incidents and scenes, and artistic creations associated with him.

I remember with deep gratitude that late Rabindra Kumar Dasgupta drew my attention to the life of *Bertrand Russell in Pictures and His Own Words*, which served as a model for my book. And R. K. Dasgupta's lecture on the future of Tagore's studies spurred me on and thus I tried to proceed. After Russell's pictorial biography I saw all the pictorial biography available for me and I tried to find out my own way. Only I was inspired to use Rabindranath's own words when necessary. Thus throughout the book Rabindranath/the Poet himself speaks out as and when required.

But it has not been all roses all the way. Visva-Bharati went back on its assurance to publish this volume. And my high hopes of having accesses to Rabindra-Bhavan's (Santiniketan) rich collection of materials were blasted by the authority's written edict, "We will not allow you to use any material of and on Tagore." I was on the point of giving up my work in deep dejection. But there were others to buoy up my hopes. In this critical moment, words of encouragement from Sri Sankho Ghosh did a miracle. I consulted him time to time and when the volume with its arrangements seemed satisfactory for me he was kind enough to go through it. I tried my utmost to follow what he suggested or advised.

I searched for materials everywhere. However I should mention that extensive help came from so many quarters. Sm Indrani Ghosh, Curator of Rabindra-Bharati Museum and her colleagues Sm Tulsimanjari Gangopadhyay and Sri Chandrabhal Mukhopadhyay extended valuable help to me facilitating my access to the museum.

Difficulties and hindrances were there. However I do not want to remember them. At last the first volume of the proposed pictorial biography came out on January 2006. This volume, titled *Smritir Chhabi* deals with the first forty years of his life. These years saw him in the vortex of social and political turmoil as well as his own creative ferment.

Here now is the English version of that Volume which I present before the readers with humility and with high hopes as well. If the readers get a new glimpse of a great life in these pages, all my efforts will be amply rewarded.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Santa Bhattacharyya, formerly of Department of English, Visva-Bharati for her help in rendering my original Bengali book *Rabindranath Thakur: Smritir Chhabi* into English and for overseeing the whole publication. I must record my gratitude also to Sm Bandana Sanyal, formerly of Basanti Devi College and Sm Deepa Mukherjee; formerly of Muralidhar Girls' college for their help in translation. To express clearly what really I owe to Sm Santa Bhattacharyya is an impossible task. She is the real editor of this volume, my guide and mentor. But for her *Portrayal of Memories* had never been published.

Gratefully I thank Sri Sukanta Chaudhuri for his kind permission enabling me to use some translations of Tagore's poems from his collection: *Selected Poems Rabindranath Tagore*.

Sarbani, my wife, took upon herself all the trouble of running the household leaving me to pursue my work in peace. My daughter Swayamagata has learnt to forego much of her legitimate share of my time and attention and allowed me to be immersed in my work.

Sri Sandip Nayak, the owner of the publication house "Punascha" and Sri Romio Dey have always been extremely patient with the endless changes I introduced in different stages of the publication.

January, 2010

Abhik Kumar Dey



മൃതിനു നല്ല ദീവനുള്ള കൂടെ ഒരു ചിത്രം വെക്കണം. ചിത്രം വെക്കുന്നതിനു മുമ്പെ  
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I know not who paints the pictures on memory's canvas; but whoever he may be, what he is painting are pictures; by which I mean that he is not there with his brush simply to make a faithful copy of all that is happening. ...In short he is painting pictures, and not writing history.

This account is not a biography. It cannot be called a life-history. It is a portrayal of memories...



Dwarkanath Tagore  
Grandfather



Debendranath Tagore  
Father



Girindranath Tagore  
Uncle



Nagendranath Tagore  
Uncle

From an outside point of view many a foreign custom would appear to have gained entry into our family, but at its heart flames a national pride which has never flickered. The genuine regard which my father had for his country never forsook him through all the revolutionary vicissitudes of his life, and this in his descendants has taken shape as a strong patriotic feeling.



Dijendranath Tagore  
Badodada



Satyendranath Tagore  
Mejudada



Ganendranath Tagore  
Ganadada



Hemendranath Tagore  
Sejudada



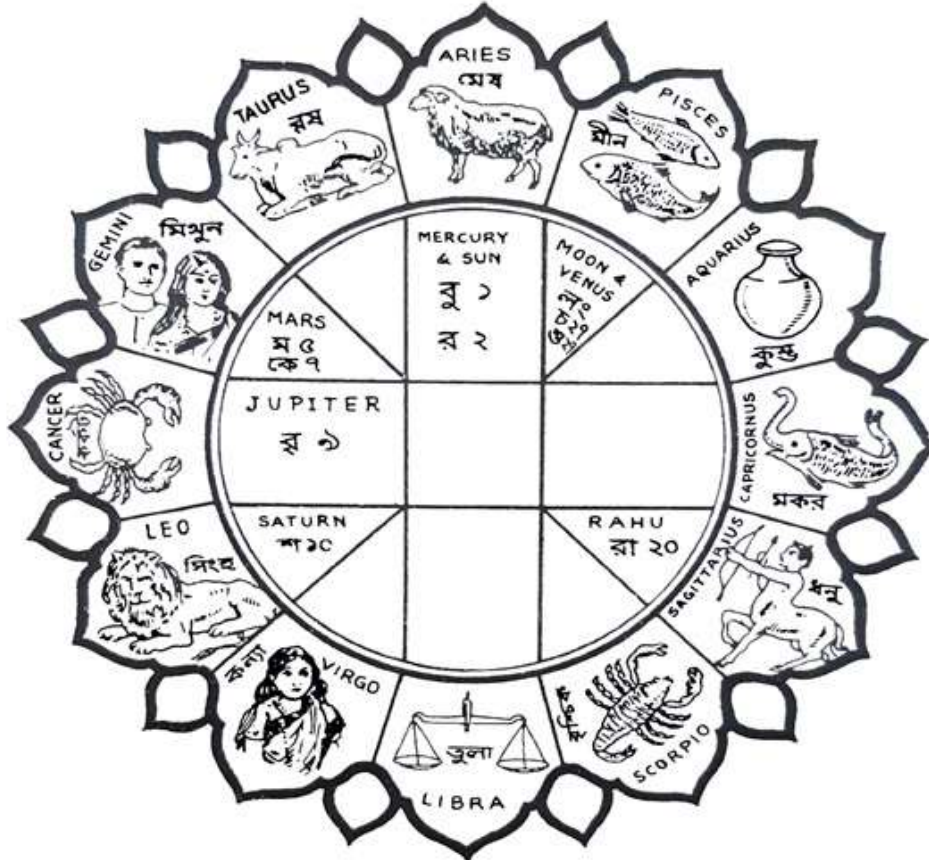
Gunendranath Tagore  
Gunadada



Jyotirindranath Tagore  
Jyotidada

My elder brothers had always cultivated Bengali literature... And ever since the days of my grandfather the symptoms of greed for government titles have not been seen in our family.

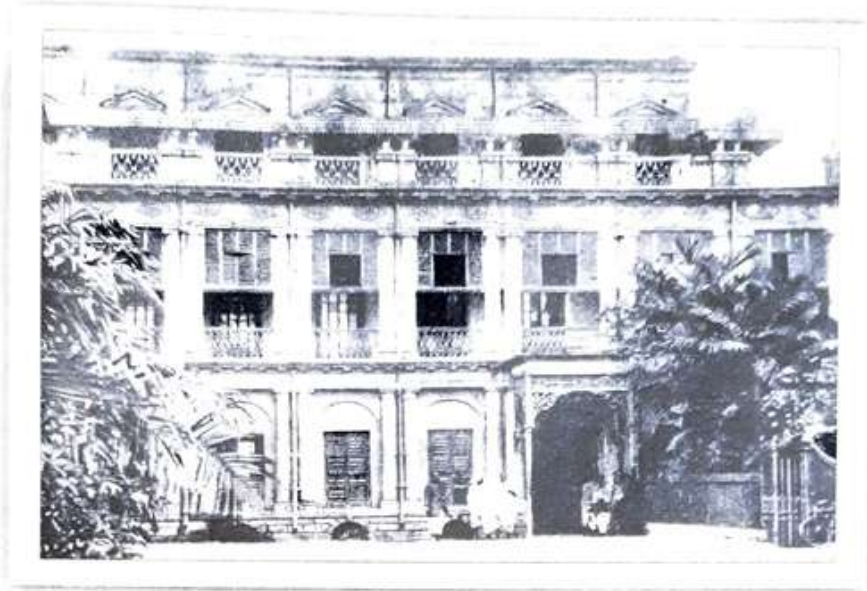
শকাব্দ ১৭৮৩/০/২৪/৫৩/০/০  
 সন ১২৬৮/২৫শে বৈশাখ—জন্মসময় — সোমবার। রাত্রি ২/৩৭ গতে।।



The Zodiac Chart

I was born on the 25th of Baishakh, May 6th of the English calendar. But due to the strange custom of the English to change the date after midnight, I was born on the 7th. But the debate does not end here. Due to the conspiracy of the stars and planets the Bengali almanac does not keep pace with the English one. They are a progressive nation and leave the 25th of Baishakh behind. For a few years it was the 7th and now it has become May 8.





Jorasanko Tagore House



The household where I first opened my eyes was marked by extreme privacy. Like a suburb beyond the city, its sky was not tightly constricted by neighbouring houses and noise. Even before my birth our family had cut its moorings in the society and anchored far away from its safe landing place. Rituals, edicts and customs all were rare there... It was only natural that this family acquired a distinctive character in its quiet isolation.