

Bengalis have a reverential attitude towards Rabindranath Tagore. But even when he was alive he came under severe attacks of critics. Both love and scorns for Tagore swelled in course of time. On his death anniversary (August 7), we remember Tagore. Our remembrance is nurtured by the love and hatred of many that had established his niche as a poet, a novelist, a philosopher, and above all, a Bengali. We love him. We hate him. But we surely cannot do without him.

About Free Will

ALBERT EINSTEIN

If the moon, in the act of completing its eternal way round the earth, were gifted with self-consciousness, it would feel thoroughly convinced, that it would travel its way of its own accord on the strength of a resolution taken once for all.

So would a Being, endowed with higher insight and more perfect intelligence, watching man and his doings, smile about the illusion of his, that he was acting according to his own free will.

This is my conviction, although I know well that it is not fully demonstrable. If one thinks out to the very last consequence what one exactly knows and understands, there would hardly be any human being who would be impervious to this view, provided his self-love did not ruffle up against it. Man defends himself from being regarded as an impotent object in the course of the Universe. But should the lawfulness of happenings, such as unveils itself more or less clearly in inorganic nature, cease to function in front of the activities in our brain?

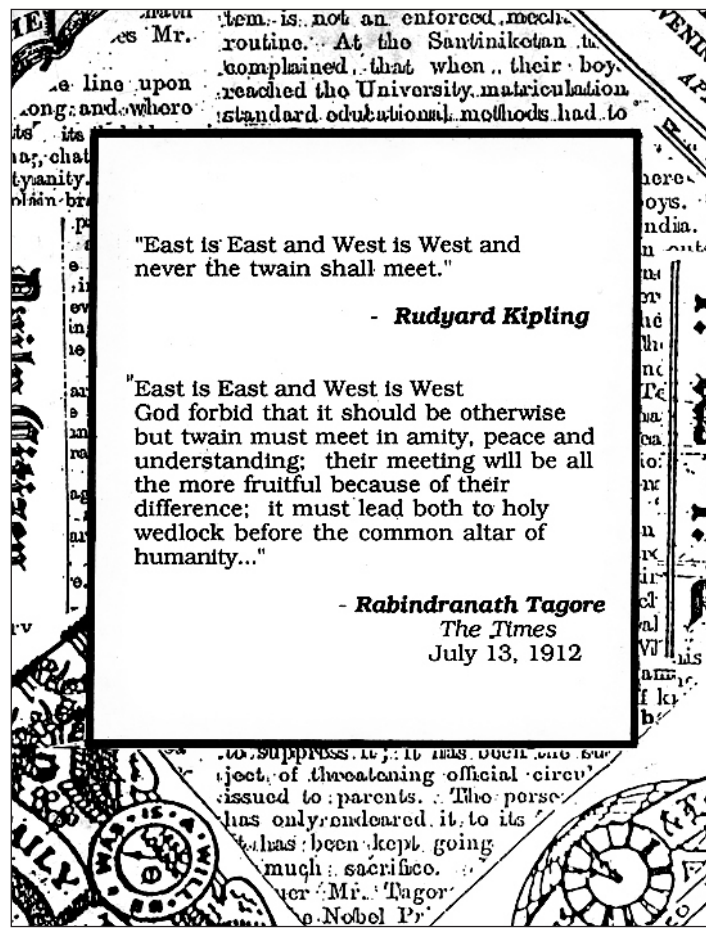
Leaving aside the inconsistency of such a view, the influence of alcohol and other sharply controllable factors on our thoughts, feelings, and activities, should show very distinctly that determinism does not stop before the majesty of our human will.

May be, that we and the human society require the illusion of the freedom of human activities!

The conviction about the law of necessity in human activities introduces into our conception of man and life a mildness, a reverence, and an excellence, such as would be unattainable without this conviction.

Thou sawest the fierce strife of creatures, a strife that wells forth from need and dark desire. Thou sawest the escape in calm meditation and in creations of beauty. Cherishing these, thou hast served mankind all through a long and fruitful life, spreading everywhere a gentle and a free thought in a manner such as the Seers of thy people have proclaimed as the ideal.

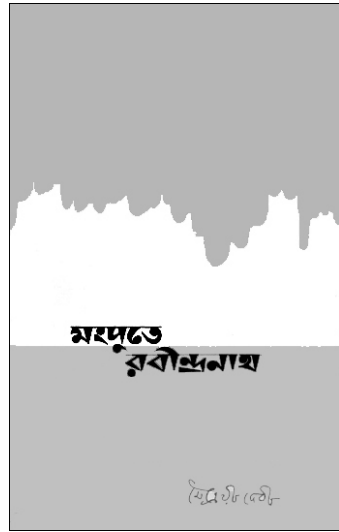
On Tagore's 70th Birthday



Rabindranath in Mangpu

KAZI ERSHADUR RASHID BONY

WE know the novelist-dramatist-composer-storyteller Rabindranath Tagore from his own writings and his critics. Maitrayee Devi discovers another Rabindranath in *Rabindranath in Mangpu* - somebody very near and dear yet an enchanting sage. Like the popular Rabindranath, the homely Rabindranath is also someone very unique. His presence is a touchstone that turns the Geographic Mangpu into a magical and mythical one. Maitrayee comments in the forward "what he said close in touch might have said differently if he had to have them printed... Yet I am going to publish this diary believing everybody's right to an intimate Rabindranath". Some excerpts from the diary might reveal the way she creates or looks at or get enchanted by the personality and words of the poet.



"This is not my memory - this is my life-flow. He came to our home four years before his death - those days of his visit have come back in the midst of my life. This is not only reminiscence; this is a joyful life-stream that even the death cannot stop."

On the eve of his birthday his bed was decorated with flowers. His witty comment comes, "What a mess! How gladness is escaping me - a flowerbed without bedmate!" The poet was often absent minded. Once Maitrayee's younger sister Chitrita lost her spectacle cover that was found in father's (the poet) pocket - an unintentional offence, however. "From then on we started searching in his pocket whenever we lost something".

Rabindranath's mental beauty and resource is not much greater to Maitrayee's eye than his god-like figure. "A light was there behind him where he sat. His silky hair was glowing in a white radiance. This beauty is beyond human expression - eye cannot help leave the sight. Darkness is there outside; the room is dimly lit, only before our eye the image of a great personality glowing, into the ear blowing his sweetest voice."

"The night was deepening, the chorus of the crickets was getting more louder I forget my duty as a hostess; his dinner-hour was over"

"I know the poet will remain true and immortal for the days to come. But I cannot get content with this gift only. Where this physique would go which the creator has created so beautiful! The immortality of poetry is incapable to meet this loss."

"What were you doing - he asked - gossiping or writing to your aunt?"

"Not at all. I was writing down your speeches. When I get chance, I always try to put into writing everything you say."

Maitrayee was always elated to have the poet in proximity. Their closeness never lost its magic to her; familiarity never faded the amazement of the closeness of his presence. "It is astonishing, you are here in our home. You would sing sitting here I never hoped for - sometimes I only imagined of, but who could have known that it would happen."

Such is Maitrayee's perception and revelation of the poet. *Rabindranath in Mangpu* is more the revelation of the amazed and bewildered mind at the intimacy of this great personality than of the quintessential poet. It is another Rabindranath than being Rabindranath himself. It is a diary describing the poet's several visits to Mangpu - mystified by the chronicler's vision and tempered by hyperbolic overtones of depiction.

From Rabindranath in Mangpu, by Maitrayee Devi Kolkata, 1943

Nobel Prize for Indian Poet

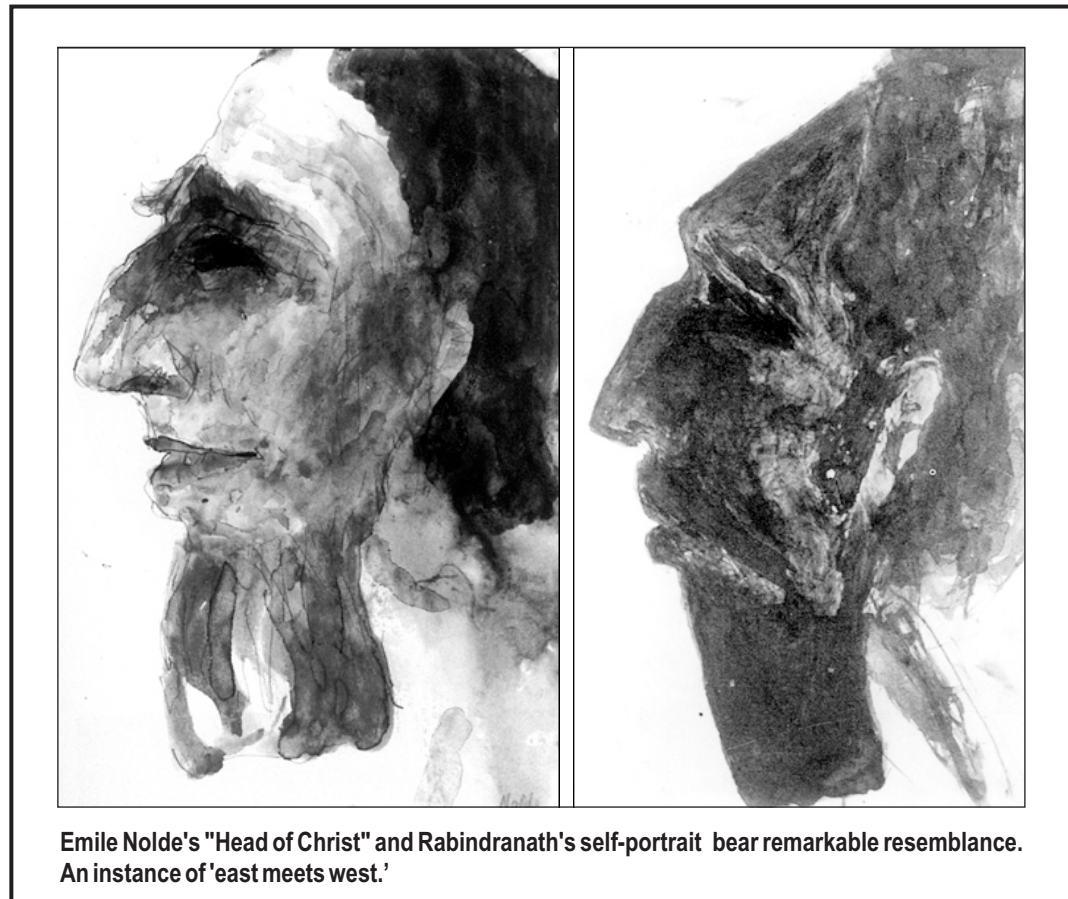
STOLKHOIM, THURSDAY

The Nobel Prize for literature for 1913 has been awarded to the Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore.

In awarding this year's Nobel Prize for literature to Mr. Tagore the Nobel Committee have established their reputation for catholicity, for the same body but a few years ago awarded the prize to Mr. Kipling. Mr. Kipling and Tagore are the only British subjects who have thus honoured. Both, by an odd chance, are intimately connected in life and work with India. But India could not very well express herself through men more different in spirit and craftsmanship than this rough rider of Imperialism and this delicate artist of the most intimate nationalism...

They (Nobel Committee) have shown that art knows no East and West for ever sundered by a mutual unintelligibility. The great themes are same for Orient as for Occident, because they are the humanity which in many essentials is the same everywhere.

The Daily News and Leaders, November 14, 1913



Emile Nolde's "Head of Christ" and Rabindranath's self-portrait bear remarkable resemblance. An instance of 'east meets west.'

Is Rabindranath a Mystic?

NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI

IN April 1941, I wrote an essay in *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*.

There I raised a question that, should Rabindranath Tagore be considered a mystic poet according to the European concept of mysticism. In Europe the way the very word 'mystic' is used in religious ideologies, Rabindranath is not a mystic in that sense. I did not get applause for such kind of opinion about Rabindranath, at least from Indira Devi. According to her, man can be equally witty in both lives! I do not disagree, but all I have to say is that, the person who cares and values his earthly existence and the unknown life after death, cannot to be considered a mystic, no matter how religious or faithful he is towards God.

In the meantime, I read a book of a French writer Abbe Bremond, titled 'Prayer & Poetry'. That piece created a lot of agitation among the French writers. There Bremond says, a poet can in fact never become a 'mystic'. He, however, agreed that poetry could be equally prodigious like mysticism. But the prodigy of poetry and that of mysticism depend on the different states of human mind. First of all, mysticism fuses human soul and God together, it denies the independent uniqueness of human existence and dissolves human soul with the spiritual oneness of God. But poetry does exactly the opposite thing. It differentiates human being from the spiritual powers and establishes the uniqueness of human being. Secondly, according to mysticism, this earthly existence is nothing but an illusion. This illusion is full of earthly temptations, which distracts human mind from the thoughts of God. On the other hand, poetry is based on this rocky earth. Although some poetry might reach to some phenomenal superiority, the base of poetry is deeply rooted on earth. Thirdly, the thoughts of mysticism can never be expressed through words. And if it does somehow, it turns to a sort of soliloquy. But a poet interacts with listener and reader. For these reasons Bremond comes to the conclusion that, if a poet is consid-

ered a 'mystic', he is actually a renegade-mystic, aberrated-mystic, or even a fake-mystic. So, there surely is a huge difference between poetry and mysticism and there is even a bigger problem, a conflict between these two.

We should keep in mind that Bremond was not the only person to say such things. The very moment when mysticism was introduced to Europe, the 'mystics' have been hindering with poet and poetry. Plato was a 'mystic', so he thought poets to be unworthy and inauspicious for human being and so he did not give any place to the poets in his *Republic*. I will not continue on Plato anymore, but I now shift on to some true mystics and to their thoughts on this earthly and mundane existence. I will start with famous Christian devote St. Augustine (354-430 AD). In his *Confessions* he wrote-

"My eyes are fond of the varieties of beauty, of bright and happy colours around me. But never let these things to capture my soul... Yet so long I am awake, these things influence me a lot, make me restless." (Vol. 10, Chap. 34)

So he prayed for God to let him see the true light which blind Tobais and almost blind Isaac and Jacob could sense through their inner senses. St. Augustine added ... which means, "the beauty on earth makes him speechless, creates huge waves inside his heart, casts spells on his soul."

But Rabindranath could have never written so. In fact, he has never done it in his entire life. He wrote-

"I don't want to die from this beautiful world, I want to stay alive inside the hearts of millions."

In 1886 he wrote this poem (*Morite Chahina Ami Shundor Bhubone*) and at the very matured stage of his life in April, 1940 he found few similar quotations in the verses of *Rig Veda*:-

"Owner of my heart give me a sight, give me a life, give me attitude once again. I want to enjoy the beauty of that glowing sun forever. Give me peace." Rabindranath expressed himself

this way-
"...it sounded to me like a friend. I liked what the friend said. What else can be more adulating than this? My heart can never quit to see how poetry can nourish the soul."

While writing this stuff Rabindranath was most probably forgotten that *Rig Veda* was deeply rooted on earth, earth which is purview of senses. That is why religion seemed more poetic in *Rig Veda*. In support of my argument I am quoting few lines again from *Rig Veda* located in 'The Praise of Dawn' (*Ushar Stuti*)-

"Immortal maiden? You who love my chaunt!

Who is the mortal, tell me, in which haunt

Enjoys you the man: for whom you, too fare

Like a red-roan, strawberry, dappled mare.

A dancer are you, in your dazzling weave;

As cows their cidder, so your breasts you give!"

(Part 1, Hymn 30, Hymn 92)

This faith was totally ignored in the *Upanishads* (Hindu religious book containing Vedantic Philosophy). It says, "there sun does not shine, nor the stars, let alone the light of fire; He is the only light there, everybody shines through His light." Indeed this 'light' is near to the light referred by St. Augustan and not that of *Rig Veda*. In that case, we can say that *Rig Veda* is no where mystical, but the 'lights' of the *Upanishads* are somewhat mystical.

Though it is said that Rabindranath had firm religious faith on the *Upanishads*, actually it is not true. He believed in both life on earth and the hereafter. No doubt that during his lifetime he suffered a lot, as drowned to the deepest portion of frustration, was affected by others - but no matter what, his firm faith in the hereafter was always intact. He believed that all sorrows would be healed and fulfilled in a more mature manner in the life after death. But surprisingly enough, he could not give up his hopes from this earthly life either. I suppose this is what Indira Devi wanted to say of being 'witty in both

of the lives." But it would not be enough to esteem Rabindranath as a "witty public on earth" (or the wittiest!). He could never forget the invisible existence of human being - the existence which stands between life and death. I remember my mother singing a song, which highlighted this 'invisible existence' of human being. The song went this way-

"...this life will never come back

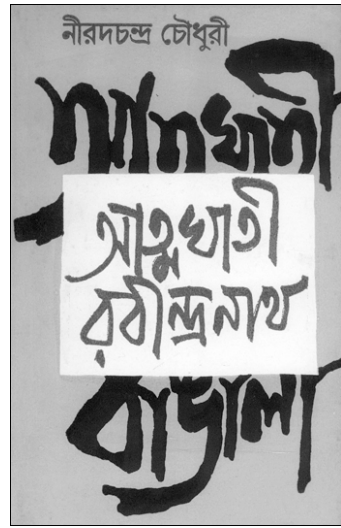
when head is crushed by a stone from the back!"

Rabindranath was addicted to life. This addiction was at first like a child-mother relationship. He thought that this earth will care for him just like a mother cares for her child. But still there is something more to say. Rabindranath could not be satisfied merely with the motherly metaphor of earth. A child must sooner or later split-up from the mother. He wanted a more closer and inseparable relation with earth. In a letter dated 20 August, 1892 (5th of *Vadra*, 1299) he wrote-

"...once upon a time, I was part of this soil. I was covered with a green carpet of grass. The sweet light of autumn sparkled on me. Sun shined and the fragrance of youth spread out from every part of my body. I slept quietly under the vast bright sky and I tried to spread myself as far as possible. I can still recall how the autumn-sun shined on me and made a flow of uncountable energy inside me."

But still Rabindranath was not satisfied. He felt that in this letter he could not express exactly what he meant to express. Here he described the oneness between him and earth. Unless there is some kind of duality between the person and action, love cannot be achieved. That is why 110 days later after his first letter, he wrote another one, dated on 9 December, 1892, where he showed a different relation between him and earth. There he says-

"...I can still recall many-many years ago when this young earth was worshipping the newly risen young sun after having a fresh bath in the crystal clear sea, I started my life as a sapling in the



young nourished soil of earth... I spread all my roots inside the soil and sucked her like a baby. Out of a bewildered happiness I felt to grow higher, be stronger."

If this statement is considered a poetic imagination, then it is surely a very wrong thing to do. Actually a plant or a tree or a sapling anything from vegetation kingdom is mute and concrete. So the idea of trees wanting to have close terms with earth is totally absurd, though it was indeed a very 'bewildered' try. And I can prove it. Few years ago, while staying at Oxford, I planted a creeper in my garden, which can climb about 20 feet high. I tied it with pieces of thread so that it can creep-on the way I want. The next day I was surprised to see that creeper creeping through a nearby bamboo tree. This is may be because it wants to make a closer contact with earth. I tied it with the thread once again. But again it went to that bamboo tree. This happened even on the next day. Then I stopped interfering and let the creeper enjoy the 'bewildered happiness'.

Rabindranath is more or less like that creeper. In the poem '*Basundhara*' (26 Kartik, 1300) he said-

"Take me back oh dear earth Take me to your arms like your baby."

A mystic cannot say these kinds of things, at least comparing it with

that of St. Augustan, whom I referred earlier. Now I would like to quote from two European mystics. One of them is famous Spaniard St. Teresa (from Avila), who could not figure out for about 15 years where to concentrate - to God or the loving faces around. But when he reached to his forties (1555AD), one day while praying under the image of Christ (with a golden crown), he felt that he is having an intercourse with God. He began to dissolve himself with in more powerful and highly spiritual something. The next thing he did is, he wrote

"As I am still alive, I can feel the pangs of death."

The second quotation is almost 100 years later. British Physician named Sir Robert Brown wrote - "And if any have been so happy as truly to understand Christian annihilation, ecstasies, exolution, liquefaction, transformation, the kiss of the spouse, gustation of God, and ingestion into the divine shadow, they have already had a handsome anticipation of heaven; the glory of the world is surely over, and earth is as ashes into them."

But Rabindranath never felt this way. To him life was something special and it never turns to be 'ashes'. The even concentrated more on bodily existence than in soul. And this body became happy-rejoicing immortal institution to him. But this was not was not at all what the 'mystics' wanted to say. Not even the ancient pagan Greek mystics. Talking about famous ancient 'mystic' Plotinus, his biographer Porferri said-

"Our contemporary philosopher Plotinus felt sad of being a corporal. His feelings were so deep that he could never pronounce the names of his parents, offspring's, not even his birth place."

I could have brought a larger pack of examples of mystics and their ideologies on life. But the few, which I referred here, are quite enough to come to this conclusion that Rabindranath Tagore was actually no way a 'mystic.'

Translated by Sanjay Sattar

POEM

Cornet Music

(Banshi)

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Kinu the milkman's lane is where I live. I have a ground floor room in a two-storey house Separated from the lane by iron bars. Damp patches on the wall And peeling plaster decorate it. Painted on a cotton scroll, Ganesh, the god of success, hangs on my door. My room-mate is a house lizard, But I am the one who pays the rent! What distinguishes him from me? He doesn't worry about going hungry!

I get twenty-five rupees a month as my salary, Being the juniormost clerk in a trading office. The Dattas feed me for tutoring their son. I go to Sealdah Station To spend my evenings So that I don't have to buy oil to light lamps. There I watch engines puffing, And hear their horns shrieking. Passenger's rush about frantically. I stay there till half past ten at night Then return to my lonely room and silence.

It was arranged that my unfortunate self's wife would be My aunt's brother-in-law's niece Who lives like her in a village on the banks of the Dhaleswari. The day chosen for our marriage was apparently auspicious, That much had been decided. But I managed to run away from the event. Giving myself as well as the girl a new lease on life! But what if she didn't become part of my home? She would move in and out of my mind Dressed in a Dhakai sari, vermilion on her forehead.

Monsoon rain falls fast and thick, Tram fares increase all the time. Preventing me from attending office regularly My pay thus gets cut every now and then. All corners of the lane fill up With rotting mango skins and jackfruit pulp, Fish scales, dead kittens And all sorts of rubbish.

My umbrella is all tattered and torn And full of holes Like my pay. The clothes I wear to work drip Like the mind of a Vaishnava guru Oozing religious sentiments. Entering my damp room Under the dark monsoon sky, I am an animal caught in a trap. I lie down lifelessly Night and day. I feel stuck In a moribund world.

At the lane's ends lives Mr. Kanta His long hair is parted in the middle, But he has wide open eyes. He is also quite chic. His hobby is playing the cornet.

Sometimes the tune he plays, Drifts in that lane's stinking breeze Sometimes in the middle of night, Or dawn's half-light Or in the flickering late afternoon light Or suddenly when it's dusk. You can hear him play the Sindhu Baroga Till the whole world aches With the pain of eternal separation.

Then, in a flash, it becomes clear This lane is a horrible delusion, Intolerable, like the ravings of a drunkard. Suddenly I realize There is no difference between Emperor Akbar and Haripada the clerk. The melancholy music of the cornet Lifts all up towards heaven, A tattered umbrella as well as a king's scepter.

The tune sounds true there In the eternal twilight Where the Dhaleswari flows Banks shrouded by dark *tamal* trees Where in a courtyard sits a woman, Dressed in a Dhakai sari, vermilion on her forehead!

Translated by Fakrul Alam

in history

THIS WEEK

August 3

1887: English wartime poet, Rupert Brooke, is born in Rugby, Warwickshire.
1920: British mystery novelist P. D. (Phyllis Dorothy) James (Innocent Blood) is born in Oxford.
1924: Joseph Conrad, 66, dies suddenly of a heart attack in Bishopsbourne, near Canterbury.

August 4

1792: Percy Bysshe Shelley is born at Warnham, near Horsham in Sussex.
1839: Walter Pater, English critic, essayist, and humanist whose advocacy of "art for art's sake" will become a cardinal doctrine of the movement known as Aestheticism, is born in Shadwell, London.
1859: Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun, who will win the 1920 Nobel Prize for Literature, is born in Lom.
1873: The author of 168 fairy tales, Hans Christian Andersen, dies in Copenhagen at 68.

August 5

1850: Guy de Maupassant (Mademoiselle Fifi and Other Stories) is born at Chateau de Miromesnil, France.

August 6

1637: Ben Jonson, dramatist, dies in London at the age of 65. He is buried in Westminster Abbey with the epitaph: "O rare Ben Jonson."
1809: Alfred Lord Tennyson is born in Somersby, Lincolnshire.

August 7

1941: The winner of the 1913 Nobel Prize for Literature, Indian author, poet, composer, and painter, Rabindranath Tagore Sadhana, *The Realization of Life, Gitanjali* dies in Calcutta, India.

August 8

1896: Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings is born in Washington, D. C. Her novel *The Yearling* will win the Pulitzer Prize in 1938.

August 9

1631: Poet and critic John Dryden is born at the vicarage of Aldwinkle All Saints, Northamptonshire.
1871: Argentine poet, novelist, and outspoken critic of Argentine politics, José Mármol, dies in Buenos Aires.

Source: Internet