

## Rabindranath Tagore (Thakur)



Born: May 7, 1861, Calcutta (Kolkata)  
Died: Aug 7, 1941, Calcutta (Kolkata)

- The foremost Bengali poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist, dramatist, music composer and lyricist, activist, social and education reformer.
- The first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for his book of poetry *Gitanjali* (translated by W B Yeats).
- Was awarded the Knighthood by the British Crown in 1915 for his global accomplishments in literature and philosophy.
- Was often called as the “Bard of Bengal” by the western society. He is called “Kobiguru” (meaning “the great poet and teacher”) and “Biswakobi” (meaning “poet of the world”).
- In 1919, he gave up the knighthood in protest when British troops

killed 400 Indian demonstrators.

- He composed more than 50 volumes of poetry, approximately 2,230 songs, 8 novels and 4 novellas, almost 100 short stories, and more than 50 works in the dramatic mode.
- In 1901 Tagore founded an experimental school in rural West Bengal at Shantiniketan (“Abode of Peace”), where he sought to blend the best in the Indian and Western traditions. He settled permanently at the school, which became Visva-Bharati University in 1921.
- Tagore dreamt of unity of humanity to overcome religious, regional and cultural bondage, barrier and boundaries “It is India's mission to realize the truth of the human soul in Supreme Soul through its union with the soul of the world”.

### “Where the Mind Is without Fear”

- The original poem was published in 1910 and was included in the 1910 collection, *Gitanjali* and, in Tagore's own translation (collaboration with Yeats) in its 1912 English edition. It is the 35<sup>th</sup> poem in *Gitanjali*.
- During the time in which this poem was written India was still under the control of the British Empire. Through this poem, Tagore urged the Indian people to awaken and

fulfil the dream of making India the great independent nation which is founded upon the ideas of a Utopia.

### **Toru Dutt (Torulata Datta)**



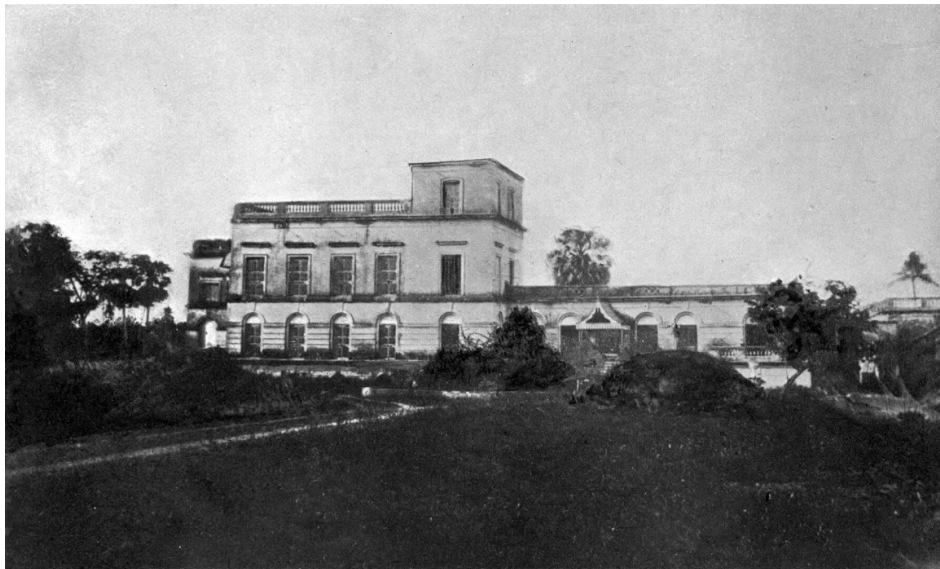
Born: March 4, 1856,  
Calcutta  
Died: August 30, 1877,  
at the age of twenty-  
one.

- She was a translator, poet, novelist and essayist.
- She wrote *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* (Didier, 1879), the first novel written by an Indian writer in French.

- A prolific translator, she published *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1877), a book of over three hundred French poems translated into English.
- She contributed regularly to the 'Poet's Corner' of *The Bengal Magazine* and *The Calcutta Review*, publishing a series of English translations of French poetry between March 1874 and March 1877.

### **“Our Casuarina Tree”**

- The poem was first published in Dutt's poetry collection, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (ed. Kegan Paul, Trench & Co.) in 1882.



- This is the garden house at Rambagan, in the outskirts of Calcutta where Toru Dutt lived occasionally. The garden is named “Baugmaree” (she wrote a sonnet on it). Her beloved casuarina tree was in this garden.



1 Sample picture of casuarina trees

- Her poetry shows a predominant influence of British Romantic Poetry.
- Wrote in the same mode of the poems written by John Keats and William Wordsworth.
- In *Critical Survey of Poetry*, vol. 8, second ed. (Salem Press, 2003), editors Philip K. Jason and Frank N. Magill write, “The tree, by the end of the poem, becomes a symbol not only of the poet’s joyous childhood but also, a thorough extension in time and space, of the poet’s longing for permanence and eternity.”
- The poem is of fifty-five lines, divided into five stanzas. Eleven lines of each stanza consist of an octave (8 lines), following the style of a sonnet that has two quatrains (4 lines) with closed rhymes and a rhyming tercet. Thus, making the overall rhyme scheme of the poem ‘ABBACDDCEEE FGGFHIIHJJJ KLLKMNNMOOO PQQPRSSRTTT UVVUWXXWYYY’. Further, using a rhyming tercet (3 lines) rather than the regular rhyming couplet (two lines) gives the impression of overflowing which mirrors the speaker’s overflowing emotions towards her childhood memories and the Casuarina tree, the center of the poem.

## Nissim Ezekiel



Born: 16 December 1924, Bombay  
Died: 9 January 2004, Mumbai

- He was an Indian poet, actor, playwright, editor, and art critic.
- He was a foundational figure in postcolonial India's literary history, specifically for Indian poetry in English.
- Ezekiel has been applauded for his subtle, restrained and well-crafted diction, dealing with common and mundane themes in a

manner that manifests both cognitive profundity as well as an unsentimental, realistic sensibility, that has been influential on the course of succeeding Indian English poetry.

- Ezekiel enriched and established Indian English language poetry through his modernist innovations and techniques, which expanded Indian English literature, moving it beyond purely spiritual and orientalist themes, to include a wider range of concerns and interests, including familial events, individual angst and sceptical societal introspection.
- Nissim Ezekiel is often considered the father of Modern Indian English poetry by many critics.
- He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for his collection, "Latter-Day Psalms", by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters. He was also honoured with the Padmashri award by the President of India in 1988.

### “Enterprise”

- The poem was first published in Ezekiel’s 1960 collection *The Unfinished Man*.
- ‘Enterprise’ by Nissim Ezekiel has a specific structure and rhyme scheme. The poet himself is the sole speaker in the poem. So, readers can say it is a lyric poem. There are specific instances where the poet uses a first-person narrative technique to describe the journey.
- The poem is 30 lines long. There are a total of 6 stanzas in the poem each containing 5 lines. The rhyme scheme is ABABA and it continues throughout the poem without any break.
- The poem is an allegory in the form of documenting a pilgrimage.

### Kamala Das (Kamala Surayya)



Born: March 31, 1934, Malabar, Kerala, India  
 Died: May 31, 2009 (age 75 years), Pune, India

- Kamala Das, through her confessional poetry, boldly explored themes such as sexuality, love, marriage, and nostalgia set in a uniquely Indian context.
- Her oeuvre consists of short stories and poems. The most controversial of these was her memoir titled *My Story*. Das also wrote extensively on socio-cultural issues. Her work has been translated into multiple foreign languages like French and German.
- Das’ conversion to Islam in 1999 and subsequent adoption of the name Kamala Surayya was the subject of many unwarranted debates at the time.
- Kamala Das was awarded the P.E.N.’s Asian Poetry Prize in 1963. In 1969, she also received Kerala’s Sahitya Akademi Award for her short story, “Thanuppu”. In 1985, she went on to win the National Sahitya Akademi Award too. She was also nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984.

### **“An Introduction”**

- The autobiographical poem, “An Introduction” was first included in *Summer in Calcutta*, Das’ first collection to be published, in 1965. The collection documented the trajectory of romance, describing its highs and lows.
- It is a sixty-line poem that is contained within a single stanza. The lines range from three words up to eleven and do not follow a specific metrical pattern. Das also chose not to use a rhyme scheme. The lines also vary greatly in length and syllable number. This means that the poem is written in free verse. This style of writing allows the poet to explore various structures and make use of more sporadic rhymes. There are several examples of half-rhyme and internal rhyme in ‘An Introduction’.
- Das explores themes of feminism/equal rights, freedom, and marriage in ‘An Introduction’. This poem is a very clear feminist statement that advocates for free choice for all women.