

# The Indian Economist

For the Curious Mind

Culture & Society Fresh Take

## Tagore – Poetry, Telugu and an Eternal Connection

The article sheds light on the influence of Tagore on Telugu literature and the eternal connect of his work with us.

The Indian Economist on July 7, 2016

**By Ananda Shankar Jayant**

The year 2016 marks the 155th birth anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore.

Think Tagore, and images of an erudite, artistic, modern and extraordinary individual come to one's mind. A polymath, Tagore was a genius. His writings spanned poetry, prose, plays, songs, dance-dramas, novels, travel writing, humour and children's writing. Such brilliance and luminescence has stayed unmatched in the modern history of mankind and continues to inspire artists even today.

My personal favourite among Tagore's work is his ode to our motherland – India. It is titled 'Oyi *Bhubon-monomohini*'. The motherland is described as *Maa* or mother.

### The Translation:

*Beloved of the whole world  
O land of my forefathers,  
My motherland  
Bathed in the orient sun  
There you stand – bright and  
chaste  
The blue waters of the oceans  
Wash your feet  
In the soft – blown breeze  
Gently flutters your green mantle  
Your snow- crested Himalayan  
brow  
Is kissed by the heavens  
The first day dawned  
In your sky  
Out of the heart of your  
hermitage  
Arose the first holy chants  
In your forest retreat were  
written  
The first epics of wisdom and  
faith  
Hail, mother of abiding mercy,  
Sustainer of millions at home and  
abroad.  
The holy waters of your Ganga  
and Jamuna  
Flow with your mother's milk of  
loving kindness*

The far-reaching impact of Tagore's poetry and nationalism is well established. However, what is lesser known, is Tagore's extraordinary influence on modern Telugu literature. His impact transcended literary engagement and permeated deep into the social ethos of the Telugus. Even today, one would find many Telugu children named 'Tagore'!

Tagore's *Gitanjali* was translated in Telugu, as early as, in 1914. Literary pilgrimages were undertaken to Shantiniketan, a town established by Tagore in West Bengal. Some even pursued their education at the school that was set up there.

## Bhavakavitvam

Tagore's overriding influence is also seen in the evolution of *Bhavakavitvam* – the poetry of

expression and emotion or *bhava*. It came to characterise itself as a kind of reformist, socialist prose on one hand, while being distinct from traditional, classical poetry on the other.

Intense subjectivity, love for nature, an assertion of individuality and an interest in the common man perfectly typifies *Bhavakavitvam*. The art form reached its zenith around the 1920-30s with luminaries such as Devulapalli Krishna Shastry, Vedula Satyanarayana Shastry, Rayaprolu Subba Rao, Abburi Ramakrishna Rao, Bezwada Gopala Reddy, Gurazada Appa Rao, Duvvuri Rami Reddy, Maalavarapu Visweswara Rao, Sri Sri Chalam, Venkata Parvateeswara Kavulu, among others, who drew immense inspiration from Tagore and were deeply influenced by his works.

*Bhavakavitvam* was *ganayogyam* – fit to be sung, *atmanayakam* – subjective, *vyanga pradhanam* – suggestive, *ekabhavashrayam* – dependent on one central emotion and *laghu rachana* – a short composition. It spawned many genres of Telugu literary engagement.

## Telugu and Tagore

In turn, the land of the Telugus also inspired Tagore. The National Anthem, written by Rabindranath Tagore in 1911, was set to the now familiar tune in 1919, at the Besant Theosophical College, in Madanapalle in Andhra Pradesh.

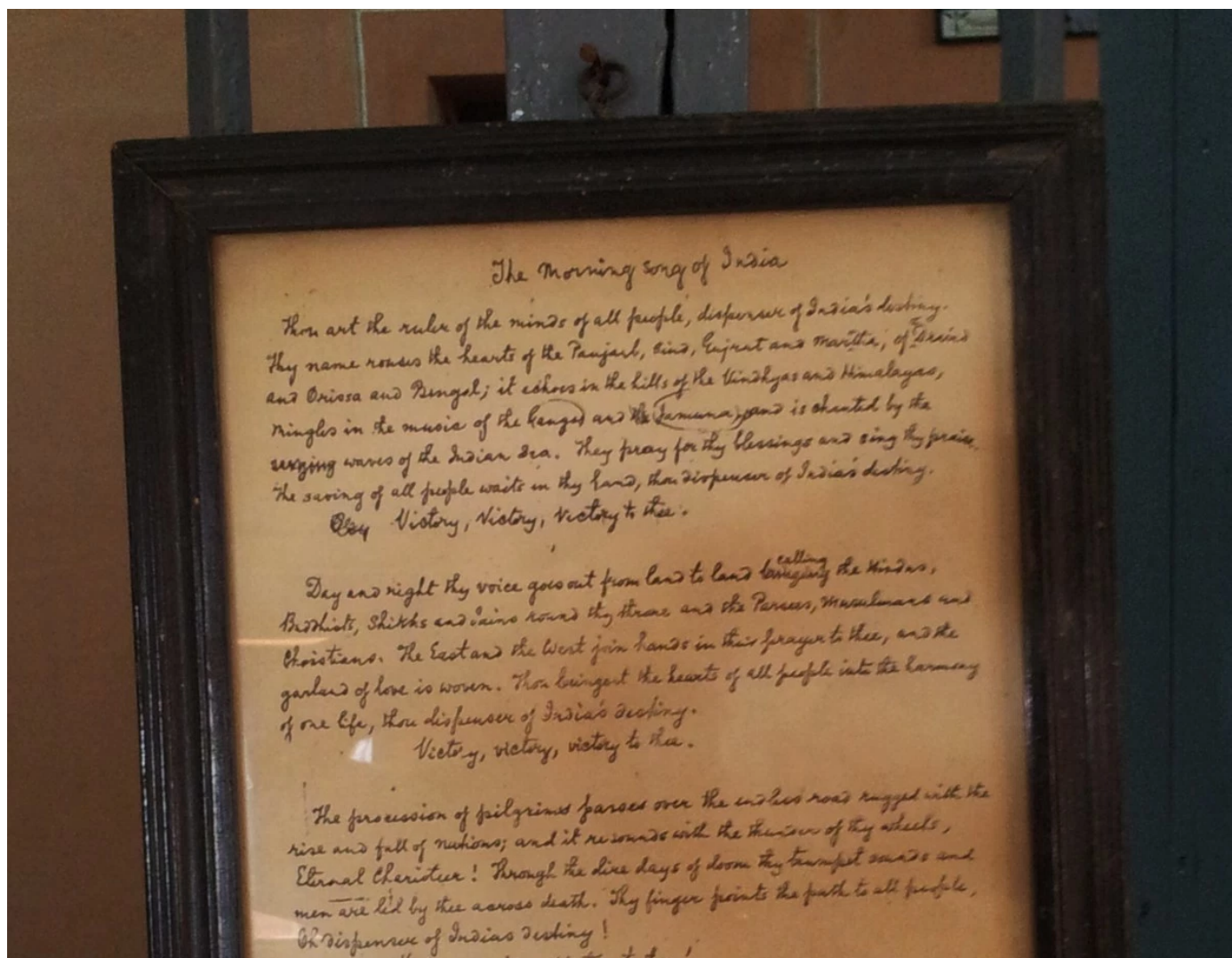


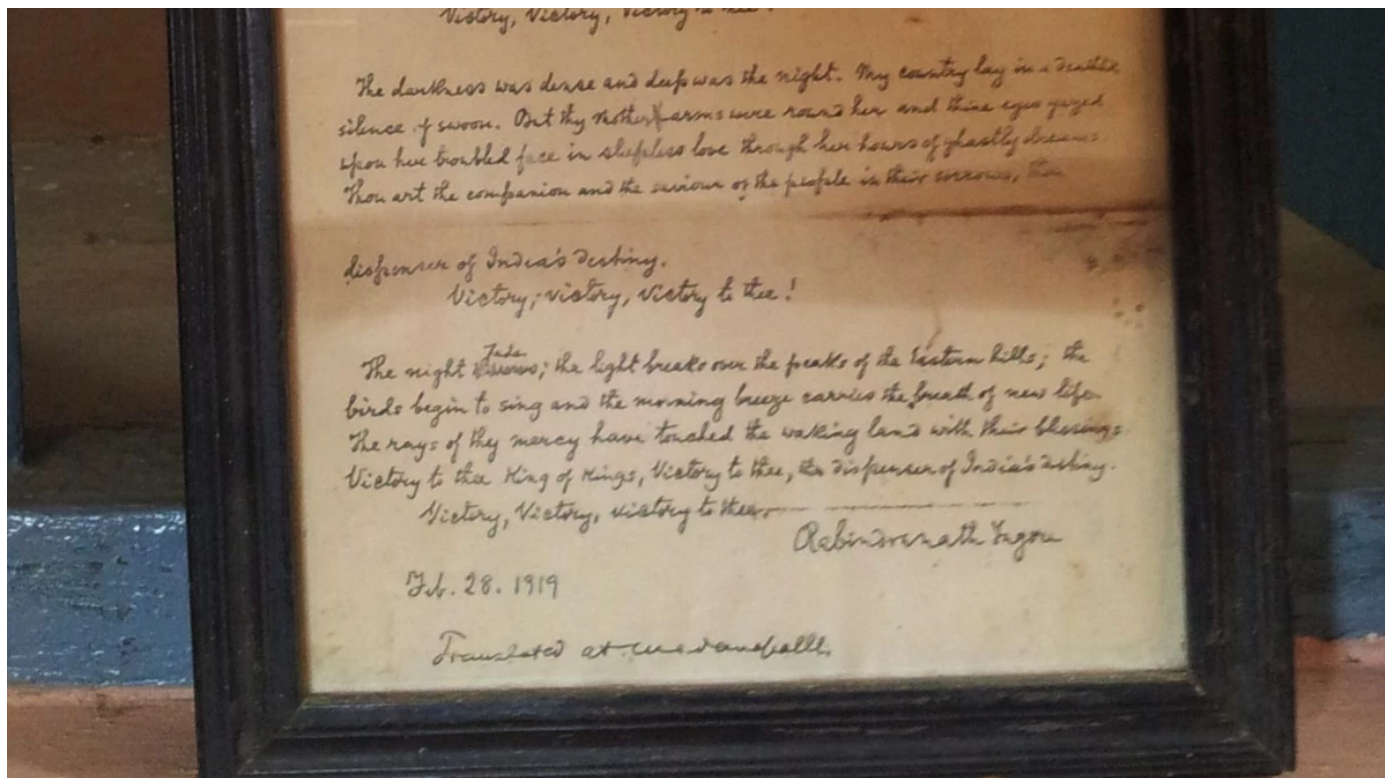
## Rabindranath Tagore's stay at Madanapalle in Andhra Pradesh

On a tour of South India in February 1919, Tagore, on the advice of C.F. Andrews, decided to rest at the Theosophical College in Madanapalle. The city is situated, about 120 km, south-east of Bangalore. Rabindranath Tagore's stay in Madanapalle College went down in history as a momentous occasion. The song 'Janaganamana' was given the melody with which it is now sung all over the country, at this very college.

The National Anthem, written by Rabindranath Tagore in 1911, was set to the now familiar tune in 1919, at the Besant Theosophical College, in Madanapalle in Andhra Pradesh.

It was also during this stay, that Tagore translated 'Janaganamana' into English. He wrote it down in his own beautiful handwriting and named it as the "Morning Song of India." At the bottom of the translated version, he signed his name, dated it as February 28, 1919, and presented it to Dr James Cousins. Eventually, the original was sold to an American art collector and the proceedings were added to the college fund. However, a copy is preserved in the Madanapalle Theosophical College today.





English translation of our National Anthem

Another interesting episode is Tagore's connection to the Banjara Hills in Hyderabad. In 1933, Tagore stayed for a short while with Nawab Mehdi Nawaz Jung, and wrote 'Kohesar' an ode to the beautiful rocks of Hyderabad.

### **Kohesar**

'From the distance thou didst  
appear  
barricaded in rocky aloofness  
Timidly I crossed the rugged path  
to find here all of a sudden  
An open invitation in the sky  
and friends embrace in the air  
In an unknown land the voice that  
seemed ever known  
Revealed to me a shelter'

### **An Eternal Connect**

Rabindranath Tagore became an aspirational symbol of evolved aesthetic, culture and excellence for the Telugu Middle Class in the early 20th century. Consequently, knowledge of Tagore's and other Bengali writers' works was considered a hallmark of good taste and refinement in Telugu society. Even today, Tagore's work connects with hearts and minds across mountains and rivers; resonating the unifying spirit of our motherland, India.

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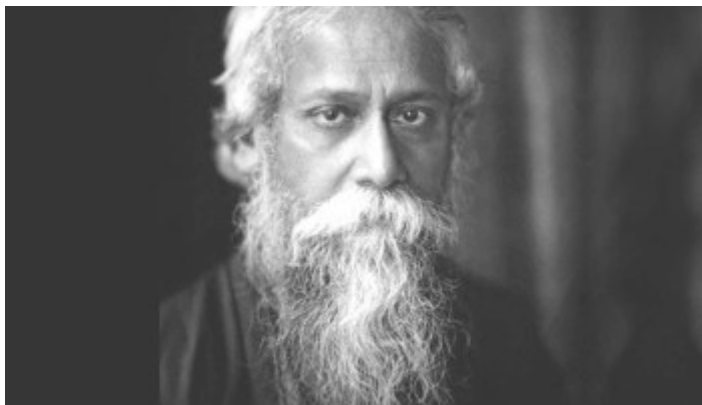
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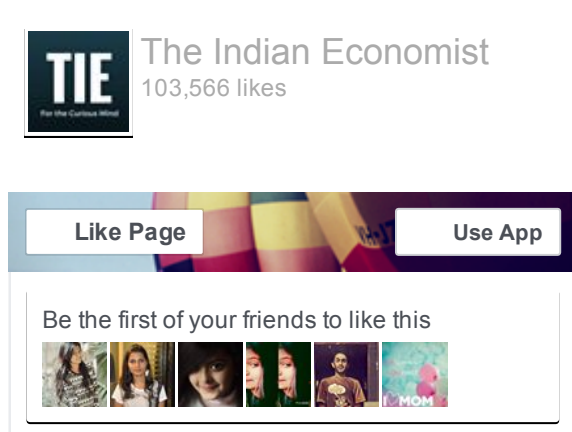
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