THE NOBEL PRIZE
ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

I am glad that I have been able to come at last to your country and that I may use this opportunity for expressing my gratitude to you for the honour you have done to me by acknowledging my work and rewarding me by giving me the Nobel Prize.

I remember the afternoon when I received the cablegram from my publisher in England that the prize had been awarded to me. I was staying then at the school Shantiniketan, about which I suppose you know. At that moment we were taking a party over to a forest near by the school, and when I was passing by the telegram office and the post office, a man came running to us and held up the telegraphic message. I also had an English visitor with me in the same carriage. I did not think that the message was of any importance, and I just put it into my pocket, thinking that I would read it, when I reached my destination. But my visitor supposed he knew the contents, and he urged me to read it, saying that it contained an important message. And I opened and read the message, which I could hardly believe. I first thought that possibly the telegraphic language was not quite correct and that I might misread the meaning of it, but at last I felt certain about it. And you can well understand how rejoicing it was for my boys at the school and the teachers. What touched me more deeply than anything else was that these boys who loved me and for whom I had the deepest love felt proud of the honour that had been awarded to him for whom they had feeling of reverence, and I realized that my countrymen would share with me the honour which had been awarded to myself.

The rest of the afternoon passed away in this manner, and when the night came I sat upon the terrace alone, and I asked myself the question what the reason could be in spite of my belonging to a different race, parted and separated by seas and mountains from the children of the West. And I can assure you that it was not with a feeling of exaltation but with a searching of the heart that I questioned myself, and I felt humble at that moment.

I remember how my life’s work developed from the time when I was very young. When I was about 25 years I used to live in utmost seclusion in the solitude of an obscure Bengal village by the river Ganges in a boathouse. The wild ducks which came during the time of autumn from the Himalayan lakes were my only living companions, and in that solitude I seem to have drunk in the open space, like wine overflowing with sunshine, and the murmur of the river used to speak to me and tell me the secrets of nature. And I passed my days in the solitude dreaming and giving shape to my dream in poems and studies and sending out my thoughts to the Calcutta public through the magazines and other papers. You can well understand that it was a life quite different from the life of the West. I do not know if any of your Western poets or writers do pass the greatest part of their young days in such absolute seclusion. I am almost certain that it cannot be possible and that seclusion itself has no place in the Western world.

And my life went on like this. I was an obscure individual - to most of my countrymen in those days. I mean that my name was hardly known outside my own province, but I was quite content with that obscurity, which protected me from the curiosity of the crowds.

And then a time came when my heart felt a longing to come out of that solitude and to do some work for my human fellow-beings, and not merely give shapes to my dreams and meditate deeply on the problems of life, but
try to give expression to my ideas through some definite work, some definite service for my fellow-beings.

And the one thing, the one work which came to my mind was to teach children. It was not because I was specially fitted for this work of teaching, for I have not had myself the full benefit of a regular education. For some time I hesitated to take upon myself this task, but I felt that as I had a deep love for nature I had naturally love for children also. My object in starting this institution was to give the children of men full freedom of joy, of life and of communion with nature. I myself had suffered when I was young through the impediments which were inflicted upon most boys while they attended school and I have had to go through the machine of education which crushes the joy and freedom of life for which children have such insatiable thirst. And my object was to give freedom and joy to children of men.

And so I had a few boys around me, and I taught them, and I tried to make them happy. I was their playmate. I was their companion. I shared their life, and I felt that I was the biggest child of the party. And we all grew up together in this atmosphere of freedom. The vigour and the joy of the children, their chants and songs filled the air with a spirit of delight, which I drank every day I was there. And in the evening during the sun-set hour I often used to sit alone watching the trees of the shadowing avenue, and in the silence of the afternoon I could hear distinctly the voices of the children coming up in the air, and it seemed to me that these shouts and songs and glad voices were like those trees, which come out of the avenue, and in the silence of the afternoon I could hear distinctly the voices of the children coming up in the air, and it seemed to me that these shouts and songs and glad voices were like those trees, which come out of the heart of the earth like fountains of life towards the bosom of the infinite sky. And it symbolized, it brought before my mind the whole cry of human life, all expressions of joy and aspirations of men rising from the heart of Humanity up to this sky. I could see that, and I knew that we also, the grown-up children, send up our cries of aspiration to the Infinite. I felt it in my heart of hearts.

In this atmosphere and in this environment I used to write my poems *Gitanjali*, and I sang them to myself in the mid-night under the glorious stars of the Indian sky. And in the early morning and in the afternoon glow of sun-set I used to write these songs till a day came when I felt impelled to come out once again and meet the heart of the large world.

I could see that my coming out from the seclusion of my life among these joyful children and doing my service to my fellow creatures was only a prelude to my pilgrimage to a larger world.

And I felt a great desire to come out and come into touch with the Humanity of the West, for I was conscious that the present age belongs to the Western man with his superabundance of energy.

He has got the power of the whole world, and his life is overflowing all boundaries and is sending out its message to the great future. And I felt that I must before I die come to the West and meet the man of the secret shrine where the Divine presence has his dwelling, his temple. And I thought that the Divine man with all his powers and aspirations of life is dwelling in the West.

And so I came out. After my *Gitanjali* poems had been written in Bengali I translated those poems into English, without having any desire to have them published, being diffident of my mastery of that language, but I had the manuscript with me when I came out to the West. And you know the British public, when these poems were put before them, and those who had the opportunity of reading them in manuscript before, approved of them. I was accepted, and the heart of the West opened without delay.

And it was a miracle to me who had lived for fifty years far away from activity, far away from the West, that I should be almost in a moment accepted by the West as one of its own poets. It was surprising to me, but I felt that possibly this had its deeper significance and that those years which I had spent in seclusion, separated from the life and spirit of the West, had brought with them a deeper feeling of rest, serenity and feeling of the eternal, and that these were exactly the sentiments that were needed by the Western people with their overactive life, who still in their heart of hearts have a thirst for peace, for the infinite peace. My fitness was that training which my muse had from my young days in the absolute solitude of the beaches of the Ganges. The peace of those years had been stored in my nature so that I could bring it out and hold it up to the man of the West, and what I offered to him was accepted gracefully.

I know that I must not accept praise as my individual share. It is the East in me which gave to the West. For is not the East the mother of spiritual Humanity and does not the West, do not the children of the West amidst their games and plays when they get hurt, when they get famished and hungry, turn their face to that serene mother, the East? Do they not expect their food to come from her, and their rest for the night when they are tired? And are they to be disappointed?

Fortunately for me I came in that very moment when the West had turned her face again to the East and was
seeking for some nourishment. Because I represented the East I got my reward from my Eastern friends.

And I can assure you that the prize which you have awarded to me was not wasted upon myself. I as an individual had no right to accept it, and therefore I have made use of it for others. I have dedicated it to our Eastern children and students. But then it is like a seed which is put into the earth and comes up again to those who have sown it, and for their benefit it is producing fruits. I have used this money which I got from you for establishing and maintaining the university which I started lately, and it seemed to me, that this university should be a place where Western students might come and meet their Eastern brethren and where they might work together in the pursuit of truth and try to find the treasures that have lain hidden in the East for centuries and work out the spiritual resources of the East, which are necessary for all Humanity.

I can remind you of a day when India had her great university in the glorious days of her civilization. When a light is lighted it cannot be held within a short range. It is for the whole world. And India had her civilization with all its splendours and wisdom and wealth. It could not use it for its children only. It had to open its gates in hospitality to all races of men. Chinese and Japanese and Persians and all different races of men, came, and they had their opportunity of gaining what was best in India, her best offering of all times and to all Humanity. And she offered it generously. You know the traditions of our country are never to accept any material fees from the students in turn for the teaching, because we consider in India that he who has the knowledge has the responsibility to impart it to the students.

It is not merely for the students to come and ask it from the master, but it is the master who must fulfil his mission of life by offering the best gift which he has to all whom may need it. And thus it was that need of self-expression, of giving what had been stored in India and offering the best thing that she has in herself that made it possible and was the cause and the origin of these universities that we started in the different provinces of India.

And I feel that what we suffer from in the present day is no other calamity but this calamity of obscurity, of seclusion, that we have missed our opportunity of offering hospitality to Humanity and asking the world to share the best things we have got. We lost our confidence in our civilization for over a century, when we came into contact with the Western races with the material superiority over the Eastern Humanity and Eastern culture, and in the educational establishment no provision was made for our own culture. And for over a century our students have been brought up in utter ignorance of the worth of their own civilization of the past. Thus we did not only lose touch of the great which lay hidden in our own inheritance, but also the great honour of being able to contribute to the civilization of Humanity, to have opportunity of giving what we have and not merely begging from others, not merely borrowing culture and living like eternal schoolboys.

But the time has come when we must not waste such our opportunities. We must try to do our best to bring out what we have, and not go from century to century, from land to land and display our poverty before others. We know what we have to be proud of, what we have inherited from our ancestors, and such opportunity of giving should not be lost - not only for the sake of our people, but for the sake of Humanity.

That is the reason, and that led me to the determination to establish an international institution where the Western and Eastern students could meet and share the common feast of spiritual food.

And thus I am proud to say that your awarding me the prize has made some contribution to this great object which I had in mind. This has made me come out once again to the West, and I have come to ask you, to invite you to the feast which is waiting for you in the far East. I hope that my invitation will not be rejected. I have visited different countries of Europe, and I have accepted from them an enthusiastic welcome. That welcome has its own meaning, that the West has need of the East, as the East has need of the West, and so the time has come when they should meet.
I am glad that I belong to this great time, this great age, and I am glad that I have done some work to give expression to this great age, when the East and the West are coming together. They are proceeding towards each other. They are coming to meet each other. They have got their invitation to meet each other and join hands in building up a new civilization and the great culture of the future.

I feel certain that through my writing some such idea has reached you, even if obscurely through the translation, some idea which belongs both to the East and the West, some idea which proceeding from the East has been able to come to the West and claim its rest there, its dwelling, and to be able to receive its welcome, and has been accepted by the West. And if in my writings I have been fortunate enough to be able to interpret the voice of the need of the time I am deeply thankful to you for giving me this glorious opportunity. The acknowledgment I got from Sweden has brought me and my work before the Western public, though I can assure you that it has also given me some trouble. It has broken through the seclusion which I have been accustomed to. It has brought me out before the great public to which I have never been accustomed. And the adjustment has not been yet made. I shrink in my heart when I stand before the great concourse of Humanity in the West. I have not yet been accustomed to accept the great gift of your praise and your admiration in the manner in which you have given it to me. And I feel ashamed and shy when standing before you - I do so now. But I will only say that I am thankful to God that he has given me this great opportunity, that I have been an instrument to bring together, to unite the hearts of the East and the West. And I must to the end of my life carry on that mission. I must do all that I can. The feeling of resentment between the East and the West must be pacified. I must do something, and with that one object I have started this institution.

I do not think that it is the spirit of India to reject anything, reject any race, reject any culture. The spirit of India has always proclaimed the ideal of unity. This ideal of unity never rejects anything, any race, or any culture. It comprehends all, and it has been the highest aim of our spiritual exertion to be able to penetrate all things with one soul, to comprehend all things as they are, and not to keep out anything in the whole universe - to comprehend all things with sympathy and love. This is the spirit of India. Now, when in the present time of political unrest the children of the same great India cry for rejection of the West I feel hurt. I feel that it is a lesson which they have received from the West. Such is not our mission. India is there to unite all human races.

Because of that reason in India we have not been given the unity of race. Our problem is the race problem which is the problem of all Humanity. We have Dravidians, we have Mohammedans, we have Hindoos and all different sects and communities of men in India. Therefore, no superficial bond of political unity can appeal to us, can satisfy us, can ever be real to us. We must go deeper down. We must discover the most profound unity, the spiritual unity between the different races. We must go deeper down to the spirit of man and find out the great bond of unity, which is to be found in all human races. And for that we are well equipped. We have inherited the immortal works of our ancestors, those great writers who proclaimed the religion of unity and sympathy, in saying: He who sees all beings as himself, who realizes all beings as himself, knows Truth.

That has once again to be realized, not only by the children of the East but also by the children of the West. They also have to be reminded of these great immortal truths. Man is not to fight with other human races, other human individuals, but his work is to bring about
reconciliation and Peace and to restore the bonds of friendship and love. We are not like fighting beasts.

It is the life of self which is predominating in our life, the self which is creating the seclusion, giving rise to sufferings, to jealousy and hatred, to political and commercial competition. All these illusions will vanish, if we go down to the heart of the shrine, to the love and unity of all races.

For that great mission of India I have started this university. I ask you now, when I have this opportunity, I invite you to come to us and join hands with us and not to leave this institution merely to us, but let your own students and learned men come to us and help us to make this university to a common institution for the East and the West, may they give the contributions of their lives and may we all together make it living and representative of the undivided Humanity of the world.

For this I have come to you. I ask you this and I claim it of you in the name of the unity of men, and in the name of love, and in the name of God. I ask you to come. I invite you.

26 May 1921, Stockholm

**A. T. Sturge Moore to the Secretary, Nobel Committee recommending Rabindranath Tagore for the Nobel Prize**

No. 17. Rabindra Nath Tagore
To the Secretary of the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy, Stockholm.

Sir,

As a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom, I have the honour to propose the name of Rabindra Nath Tagore

As a person qualified, in my opinion, to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

T. Sturge Moore

Copy from Forslag till Nobel-pris 1913, no 19, p.40

**B. Telegram announcing the Award of the Nobel Prize on 13 November, 1913.**

**INDIAN TELEGRAPHS**

XF PH LONDON 14 EAST LN 19 RABINDRANATH TAGORE 6 DN TAGORE LANE JORASANKO CALCUTTA

SWEDISH ACADEMY AWARDED YOU NOBEL PRIZE LITERATURE PLEASE WIRE ACCEPTATION SWEDISH MINISTER

**C. The Nobel Prize in Literature 1913**

“because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West”

The 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature remains an exceptional chapter in the history of Indo-Swedish relations. Given at a time when but a handful of Swedes had been exposed to India, let alone Indian literature, the award is a testimony to the breadth of vision of the Swedish Academy.

Gitanjali (Song Offerings) was bestowed with the honour of Asia’s first Nobel Prize – its contents are just the first stepping stones into a monument of creativity, to be unravelled to the uninitiated. Gitanjali’s appeal is universal – transcending various cultures, international boundaries and above all – straddling a vast extension of the axis of time. Gitanjali offers only a limited glimpse of the range, dimension and versatility of Rabindranath Tagore’s diverse and multifaceted talent. Gitanjali is the external window of Tagore’s creative world through which the outsiders ordinarily delve into this extraordinary mind (Sushanta Dattagupta, 2012).

**D. Rabindranath Tagore: Telegram Accepting The Nobel Prize**

“I beg to convey to the Swedish Academy my grateful appreciation of the breadth of understanding which has brought the distant near, and has made a stranger a brother”.

Telegram from Rabindranath Tagore, read by Mr. Clive, British Charge d’Affaires, at the Nobel Banquet at Grand Hotel, Stockholm, December 10, 1913.

[Rabindranath Tagore could not be present at the Nobel Award Ceremony on 10 December 1913 at Stockholm, but sent a Telegram accepting the prize, which was received by the British Charge d’Affaires in Sweden on his behalf.

At a special ceremony in Calcutta on 29 January, 1914, Lord Carmichael, Governor of Bengal, delivered the medal and citation to Tagore.

Rabindranath delivered this address when he visited Stockholm in May, 1921.]

**Note by the Editor-in-Chief:** The Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech is printed here to show our respectful homage and tribute to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore for
his visit to Stockholm, Sweden to deliver the lecture on 26th May 1921 and the founding of Visva-Bharati in Santiniketan in 1921 as it is exactly one hundred years. Tagore was given a warm reception during his visits to Sweden in 1921 and 1926. The reception accorded to Tagore in Sweden was of course, appropriate to a Nobel Laureate, with His Majesty King Gustavus V receiving the poet in royal audience in Stockholm.

In 1878 Rabindranath made his first visit to England. His idea of a synthesis between East and West took shape and was developed during his second visit to England in 1890. In 1912, he travelled once again to Europe with a number of poems that he had written after an illness. He translated them himself into English and called the collection *Gitanjali*. Tagore was introduced to the cultural elite in London. He met William Butler Yeats, the Irish poet and dramatist, who later wrote a eulogistic foreword to *Gitanjali*. The book was published in March 1913 and was reprinted ten times before Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in November 1913.

Tagore was not present personally to receive the prize in 1913. He visited Sweden for the first time in May 1921 to deliver the Nobel Prize Lecture, and then in August and September 1926. The well-known explorer, Sven Hedin, received Tagore as a guest during his visit in 1921.
Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Distinguished Members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, citizens of America, and citizens of the world: I receive this honor with deep gratitude and great humility. It is an award that speaks to our highest aspirations that for all the cruelty and hardship of our world, we are not mere prisoners of fate. Nobel Prize Speech. The Nobel Acceptance Speech delivered by Elie Wiesel in Oslo on December 10, 1986. Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Chairman Aarvik, members of the Nobel Committee, ladies and gentlemen: Words of gratitude. First to our common Creator. This is what the Jewish tradition commands us to do. At special occasions, one is duty-bound to recite the following prayer: "Barukh shehekhyanu vekiymanu vehigianu lazman haze—Blessed be Thou for having sustained us until this day. Then thank you, Chairman Aarvik, for the depth of your eloquence. And for the generosity of your gesture. William Faulkner: Nobel Prize Speech Stockholm, Sweden December 10, 1950. "All his life William Faulkner had avoided speeches, and insisted that he not be taken as a man of letters. 'I'm just a farmer who likes to tell stories.' he once said. Because of his known aversion to making formal pronouncements, there was much interest, when he traveled to Stockholm to receive the prize on December 10, 1950, in what he would say in the speech that custom obliged him to deliver. Faulkner evidently wanted to set right the misinterpretation of his own work as pessimistic. But beyond that, he recognized that, as the first American novelist to receive the prize since the end of World War II, he had a special obligation to take the changed situation of the writer, and of man, into account."