



## **SPEECH**

**His Excellency Mr Dharambeer Gokhool G.C.S.K.,  
President of the Republic of Mauritius**

**EVENT: 18<sup>TH</sup> TAGORE MEMORIAL LECTURE**

**VENUE: RABINDRANATH TAGORE INSTITUTE**

**DATE: 01 JUNE 2026**

**TIME: 10:30 HOURS**

## **Theme: Reclaiming the Human in Tagore's Vision**

### **Protocol**

Her Excellency Mrs Aparna Ganesan, Deputy High Commissioner of India;

Honourable Members of the National Assembly,

Distinguished Members of Academia,

Distinguished Guests,

Dear Students.

### **Introduction**

Good morning.

Thank you for your warm welcome and the opportunity to deliver this address as we mark the 165th Rabindra Jayanti and celebrate the enduring legacy of Rabindranath Tagore.

At the outset, I thank the Rabindranath Tagore Institute for sustaining, since 2007, an intellectual tradition of honouring not only the memory of this great humanist and cultural genius, but also the living movement of his ideas on culture in its widest sense, education, philosophy, spirituality, politics, and international relations.

Keeping in view the constraints of time, I shall limit my intervention to a selected number of themes and invite you to explore and appreciate, on your own, the rich and fascinating heritage that Rabindranath Tagore has left for humanity.

I have structured my intervention today along the following thematic map:

- Tagore’s family background, influences, and vision of life;
- Tagore’s educational philosophy and journey, and
- Tagore on nationalism and his attachment to *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (“the whole world is one family”)

## **Overview of Tagore’s Family Background, Influences, and Vision of Life**

Before I share a few reflections about Tagore’s vision of life, allow me to present a synoptic view of his family background and the influences that shaped his worldview.

Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861 in Calcutta (now Kolkata), then the capital and cultural centre of British India.

The family name Tagore is the Anglicised version of the original Bengali surname “Thakur.”

His father was Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905) - a philosopher and religious leader referred to as “Maharshi” (“the great sage”). He was one of the leading figures of the religious reform movement, the Brahmo Samaj, and Rabindranath Tagore later served as its Secretary.

The grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore was Dwarkanath Tagore, a wealthy, educated industrialist, but also a man of culture, music, and theatrical performance.

Rabindranath Tagore belonged to a family of thirteen children; he was known by the name “Rabi,” and later as the “Bard of Bengal.”

His education was mostly through home-schooling, in a disciplined atmosphere.

He was exposed to a wide range of subjects, including English, Sanskrit, Literature, Science, Mathematics, and History, which resonates today with the modern **STEM** concept.

A concept which is now increasingly being expanded **into STEAM or STREAM**, where Reading and the Arts are included - representing the ongoing evolution of modern education.

It is a progression from focusing strictly on technical and logical skills to a more holistic, multidisciplinary, and culturally embedded form of learning.

At an early age, Tagore developed a passion for writing stories, poems, and participating in plays, the very foundation of his later creative and artistic genius.

Many of his early works were published.

He lost his mother and many members of his family as he was growing up - a grief which stayed with him and came to be reflected in his poetry and writings.

His closeness to his sister-in-law, Kadambari Devi, had a great influence on his literary and artistic interests, and when she passed away, this added profoundly to his sadness, and he descended into a period of depression.

At the age of nineteen, he was sent to England for further studies but was called back to marry, according to family tradition, Mrinalini Devi, who was then aged ten.

They had five children, of whom three survived.

Later, he became a strong critic of child marriage.

At the age of twenty-nine, he moved to his father's estate in the countryside, amidst nature and rivers. He loved boating and the calmness of the place and continued his writings.

At the age of forty, he moved to Shantiniketan, where he developed the site into a residential school set amidst nature.

It later grew into a full-fledged university: Visva-Bharati University.

As Tagore matured, he wrote in almost all literary genres, but poetry remained his favourite medium.

He came to be known primarily as a poet, publishing more than fifty volumes of poetry.

In 1913, Rabindranath Tagore became the **first Asian** to be awarded the **Nobel Prize in Literature** for his collection of poems entitled **Gitanjali**.

He was knighted in 1915 but renounced his knighthood after the massacre of demonstrators in India in 1919.

### **The Polymath Tagore**

But Rabindranath Tagore was not merely a poet.

He was a polymath - a person with deep knowledge and expertise across multiple, often unrelated, disciplines.

While being a prolific writer, he was also a novelist, philosopher, playwright, composer, educator, social thinker, painter, and humanist.

He composed over two thousand songs, transformed and popularised Bengali literature and music, and engaged with the deepest questions of

civilisation: freedom, education, nationalism, ecology, spirituality, and humanity itself.

Tagore was also a prolific globetrotter.

His travels provided him with opportunities to interact and exchange ideas with prominent intellectuals, and experiences that later deeply influenced his philosophies on internationalism, universalism, and humanism.

His poems inspired the national anthems of **India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka**.

Tagore died in 1941.

**What does Tagore's life and legacy represent to us and to the whole of Humanity today?**

### **Lessons from Tagore's Philosophy of Life**

Tagore's philosophy of life was profoundly shaped by the Upanishads - the ancient Hindu texts composed roughly between 800 and 200 BCE that represent the culmination of Vedic introspection.

His exposure to these ancient texts, the formative influence of his family heritage, and his own life experiences provided him with a framework for **universal humanism**:

A deep reverence for nature, and a spiritual vision of the interconnectedness of all life.

Tagore believed in the Upanishadic concept of non-dualism (**Advaita - a vision of unity**), which taught him that the divine is present in all living beings and in nature, erasing the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, between the infinite divine and the finite human being.

This is a central theme throughout Tagore's works.

There is a simple yet powerful universal spiritual message about human life in Tagore's poetry and **writings**.

Tagore's greatest contribution **may well have been** his creation of a blueprint for transforming personal pain and suffering into universal love, peace, and wisdom through art in all its forms- poems, music, songs, dance, painting, introspection, and conversation.

This is beautifully illustrated in this quotation from his poem **"Stray Birds"**:

**"Clouds come floating into my life,  
no longer to carry rain or usher storm,  
but to add colour to my sunset sky."**

These lines speak of peace and resilience. They encourage us to view past difficulties as a source of hope and renewal despite loss and pain.

Tagore's works offer profound and enduring guidance for contemporary quests for meaning in a world marked by fragmentation and materialism.

They firmly position him as a bridge between traditional wisdom and global modernity, and affirm the possibility of transforming suffering into love, joy, and a meaningful life.

Tagore is not only describing spiritual experience.

He is rethinking the human self as something open and unfinished, continually shaped by experience, loss, rediscovery, renewal, and reconnection with the divine.

**As he conveys in these lines from the poem "Service"**:

**“I slept and dreamed that life was joy.  
I awoke and saw that life was service.  
I acted and behold, service was joy.”**

This profound reflection beautifully captures the evolution from idealism to purpose and, ultimately, to fulfilment.

This is but a glimpse of Tagore’s vision of human life.

His outstanding literary achievement must therefore be an invitation for all of us to undertake this transformative journey of understanding who we are and discovering our purpose in life.

It is a vision that beckons humanity toward authentic, joyful, and interconnected living, affirming that the divine is never remote but forever dwelling in every heart -

In yours, in mine, and in all those who may be different from us, but who are nonetheless bound to us in the shared fabric of being.

**But in a world marked by polycrisis, are we still capable of such transformation?**

Food for thought and introspection.

### **Tagore’s Educational Philosophy and Journey**

In the polycrisis that the world is witnessing, we are confronted with a troubling paradox.

Never before has education been so widespread, so institutionalised, and so central to national development - and yet, the outcomes seem increasingly at odds with the ideals that justified its expansion.

Education is meant not only to produce academic achievers, but also disciplined, compassionate, creative, and socially responsible citizens;

A holistic approach that embraces environmental, cultural, literary, sporting, and philanthropic initiatives, thereby demonstrating a strong commitment to community service.

But instead of producing reflective, thoughtful, and discerning citizens, we observe a growing tendency towards superficial engagement, diminished concentration, and a readiness to react before understanding.

Contemporary schooling increasingly revolves around **standardisation, measurability, efficiency, and examinations.**

At the same time, our broader social environment is exerting a powerful counterforce.

Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are actively training our mind toward rapid switching, emotional immediacy, and continuous stimulation.

The student who enters the classroom today does not possess the same attentional habits that earlier educational models assumed.

Our very capacity for stillness and sustained engagement - upon which Tagore's approach depends - has been eroded.

These conditions recall, uncannily, the dystopian warnings of thinkers such as **Aldous Huxley** and **E. M. Forster**, who foresaw societies not oppressed by a lack of information, but overwhelmed by distraction, immediacy, and mediated experience.

**Can Tagore's Vision of Education Speak to our Time?**

Dear Friends,

We are living in a world shaped by rapid technological change, artificial intelligence, digital transformation, and new economic realities.

The promise of enlightenment through education appears, at times, to be giving way to a subtle regression.

This is the dramatic situation confronting many parts of the world.

In such a context, can Tagore's vision of education still speak to our time?

Rabindranath Tagore envisioned an education rooted in experience, aesthetic sensitivity, dialogue, and deep engagement with nature and culture.

At institutions such as Visva-Bharati University, he attempted to cultivate not merely knowledge, but a quality of attention - a capacity to dwell, to perceive, and to respond thoughtfully rather than reactively.

Tagore emphasised introspection, integration, and inner cultivation, while advocating greater space for the arts and redesigned, learner-centred learning environments.

**What would it mean for us today to recover such a capacity?**

In 1921, Tagore founded **Visva-Bharati University**, where students learned in open-air classrooms, engaged in artistic pursuits, and participated in agricultural and social welfare activities.

Are these not precisely the spaces our young learners still long for, even if they do not always have the words to express it?

Tagore's approach was based on five pillars:

- **A child-centred approach;**
- Freedom and creativity,
- Harmony with nature,
- Moral and spiritual growth, and
- Global citizenship

Tagore's vision of education is one where learning can be an enjoyable, liberating and fulfilling process.

What if learning was not confined within walls alone, but extended into life itself- into nature, community, and lived experience?

Perhaps the question Tagore leaves us with is this: how do we ensure that education does not only prepare us for a future world, but also allows us to become more fully human in the present one?

### **Nationalism and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam - The World is One Family**

Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861.

Now, this was a time when the world was undergoing profound transformation.

Colonial empires dominated vast territories, industrialisation was reshaping societies, and nationalism was emerging as a powerful force.

He was deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual traditions of India, yet intellectually open to the world.

Tagore loved his country, India, deeply.

In fact, it was he who wrote and composed the Jana Gana Mana in 1911, and it was adopted as the National Anthem of India by the Constituent Assembly on 24 January 1950.

Tagore also set “**Vande Mataram**,” the national song, to music and sang it publicly, including at the 1896 session of the Indian National Congress.

The song became associated with the Swadeshi movement and Indian nationalism.

But Tagore later expressed concern about the way **the Swadeshi movement and Indian nationalism** were articulated and interpreted.

According to him, nationalism that depends on the identification and demonisation of an “other,” whether another country or another community, is inherently divisive and helps to foment a culture of violence.

In his lectures and in his book *Nationalism*, Tagore warned that aggressive national pride fosters division, materialism, and violence.

He argued that humanity should transcend political and geographical boundaries.

Tagore was a prolific **globetrotter** who visited more than **thirty-four** countries.

His journeys deeply influenced his philosophies on internationalism, universalism, and humanism.

Over a span of approximately twenty years, he travelled extensively across Europe, the Americas, and Asia, often exchanging ideas with global luminaries, encounters that shaped his worldview.

He rejected narrow nationalism and instead advocated for global harmony, universal humanism, and the spiritual unity of humankind - a vision he expressed through his travels, writings, and educational institution.

He also cherished the vision of **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** - “**the world is one family**” - where cultures, ideas, and peoples retain their uniqueness while learning, living, and growing together.

He believed in universal humanism, in an underlying unity that binds all humanity.

His vision of Visva-Bodha (world consciousness) strongly echoes the Upanishadic concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, emphasising interconnectedness, mutual respect, and unity in diversity.

Tagore did not advocate the erasure of distinct cultural identities.

Rather, he saw the world as a rich tapestry in which diverse cultures and individuals could coexist, learn, and flourish in harmony.

This is where our own vibrant rainbow nation must continue to draw its strength.

We are **a multicultural, multireligious, multiethnic republic.**

Our history is shaped by slavery and indentured labour, and by movement across oceans and continents.

We may have come on different ships, but today we are in the same boat.

As our National Anthem so powerfully reminds us:

**“As one people, as one nation,  
In peace, justice and liberty.”**

We must continue to build our unity through intercultural and cross-cultural understanding, without forgetting that we form part of a larger community - humanity itself.

Rabindranath Tagore did not reject nationhood.

But he insisted that humanity is fundamentally interconnected- not only economically but also morally and spiritually.

He warned us that when nations pursue power without regard for humanity, the result is conflict, instability, and suffering.

Globalisation has woven economies together, but it has not always fostered solidarity.

We are more interconnected than ever before, yet often less united.

This is what we may describe as **interdependence without solidarity**.

His emphasis on cooperation and coexistence transcends boundaries and speaks to humanity at large.

It is in this context that Tagore’s philosophy of **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** acquires renewed significance, in a world where we are today witnessing:

- competition overriding cooperation;
- short-term interests prevailing over long-term stability; and
- divisions and conflicts deepening along political, economic, and cultural lines.

## Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The knowledge and wisdom of Tagore cannot be compressed within the confines of a presentation of a few moments.

What I have shared is but a glimpse of the rich legacy that Tagore has bestowed upon humanity, presented from my own personal perspective.

Tagore remains relevant not because he gives us ready-made answers, but because he sharpens our questions and invites introspection and dialogue.

We may not have all the answers to the challenges of our time.

But Rabindranath Tagore will remain a guiding light, illuminating our path in these times of polycrisis and beyond.

For Tagore was not only speaking to his own time.

In many ways, he was preparing us for ours - and for those who will come after us.

Allow me to end with this poem from Gitanjali, Tagore's collection of poems:

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms toward perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-widening thought and action -

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.”

**May this poem be an invitation for all of you to explore the rich legacy of Rabindranath Tagore.**

Thank you for your attention.