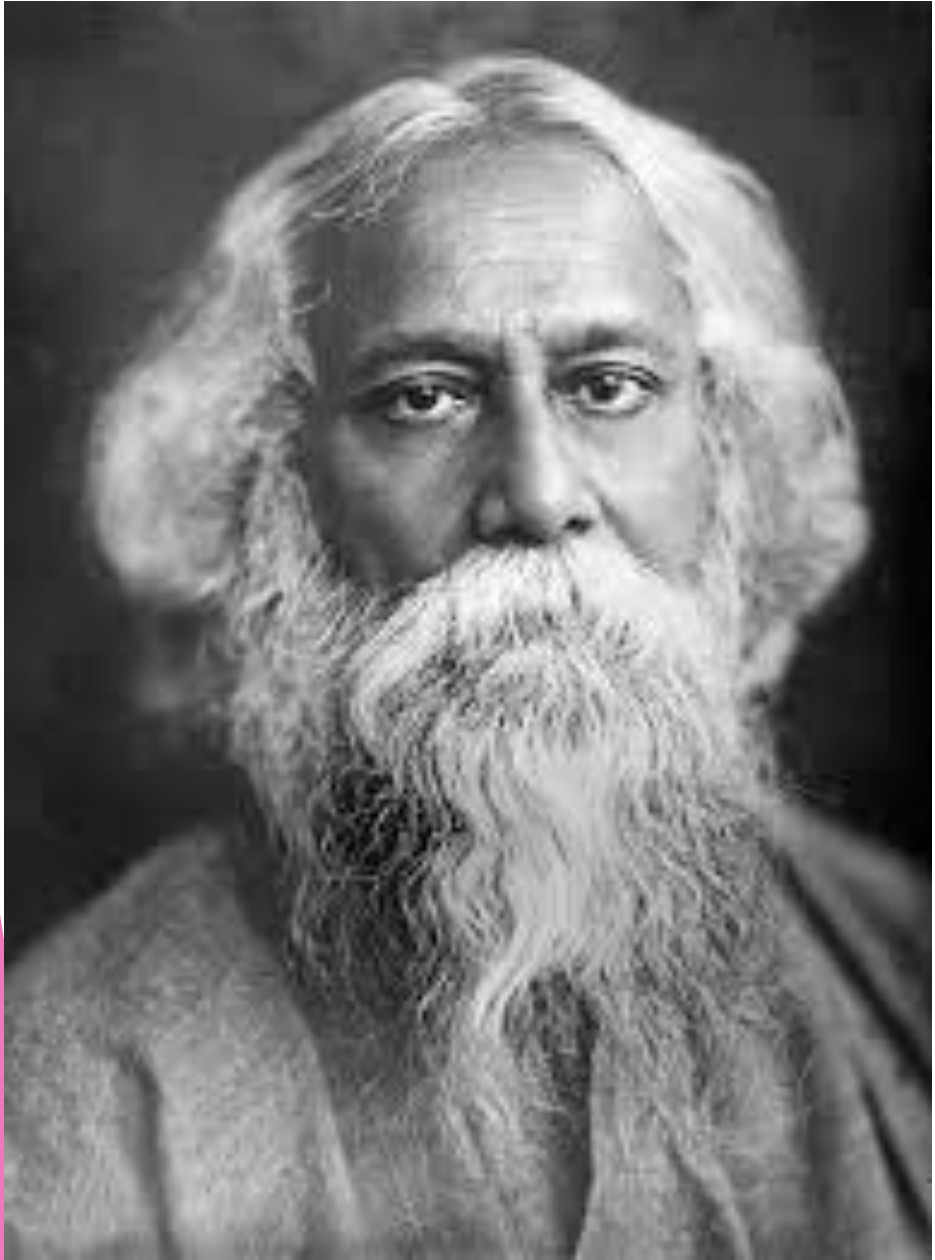


**Dr. H. N. SINHA ARTS AND
COMMERCE COLLEGE, PATUR.**

**Faculty of Commerce and Management
B.COM. I SEMESTER II
Subject : Compulsory English**

**THE POSTMASTER
-RABINDRANATH TAGORE**



Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was born in Calcutta. The youngest son of Devendranath Tagore, he received most of his education at home.

In 1878, he went to England for studies.

He earned recognition as a reputed writer after the publication of his poems, novels and short stories.

He won international fame when the Nobel Prize for literature was awarded to him in 1913 for his 'Geetanjali' a collection of devotion - lyrics.

Several universities, including Oxford University, conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Literature.

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- ▶ 'The Postmaster' is a touching tale of the sorrow of separation between the postmaster and Ratan, an orphan girl.
- ▶ It was especially the small girl for whom the pain of parting was profound.
- ▶ During his sojourn at Ulapur, the postmaster established cordial connection with her.
- ▶ The coming of any two persons is a purely temporary phase, as Matthew Arnold pointed out in one of his poems Like drift-wood spars that meet and pass upon the boundless oceans plain, so on the sea of life, Alas! Man meets man and quits again.

- ❑ The postmaster first took up his duties in the village of Ulapur.
- ❑ Though the village was a small one, there was an indigo factory nearby, and the proprietor, an Englishman, had managed to get a post office established.
- ❑ Our postmaster belonged to Calcutta. He felt like a fish out of water in this remote village.
- ❑ His office and living-room were in a dark thatched shed, not far from a green, slimy pond, surrounded on all sides by a dense growth.

- ▶ The postmaster's salary was small. He had to cook his own meals, which he used to share with Ratan, an orphan girl of the village, who did odd jobs for him.
- ▶ Ratan would sit outside waiting for this call, and, instead of coming in at once, would reply, "Did you call me, sir?"
- ▶ "Well, Ratan, do you remember anything of your mother?"
That was a fertile subject.

- ▶ Ratan partly remembered, and partly didn't.
- ▶ Her father had been fonder of her than her mother; him she recollected more vividly. He used to come home in the evening after his work, and one or two evenings stood out more clearly than others, like pictures in her memory.
- ▶ Ratan would sit on the floor near the postmaster's feet, as memories crowded in upon her.

- ▶ On some evenings, seated at his desk in the corner of the big empty shed, the postmaster too would call up memories of his own home, of his mother and his sister, of those for whom in his exile his heart was sad.
- ▶ He found himself naturally recalling them aloud in the presence of the simple little girl.
- ▶ And so it came about that the girl would allude to his people as mother, brother, and sister, as if she had known them all her life.
- ▶ In fact, she had a complete picture of each one of them painted in her little heart.
- ▶ "I was thinking," said the postmaster, "of teaching you to read." And then for the rest of the afternoon he taught her the alphabet.

► One heavily clouded morning, the postmaster's little pupil had been long waiting outside the door for her call, but, not hearing it as usual, she took up her dog-eared book, and slowly entered the room.

She found her master stretched out on his bed, and, thinking that he was resting, she was about to retire on tip-toe, when she suddenly heard her name--"Ratan!"

She turned at once and asked: "Were you sleeping, Dada?"

The postmaster in a plaintive voice said: "I am not well. Feel my head; is it very hot?"

- ▶ In the loneliness of his exile, and in the gloom of the rains, his ailing body needed a little tender nursing.
- ▶ He longed to remember the touch on the forehead of soft hands with tinkling bracelets, to imagine the presence of loving womanhood, the nearness of mother and sister.
- ▶ And the exile was not disappointed.
- ▶ Ratan ceased to be a little girl. She at once stepped into the post of mother, called in the village doctor, gave the patient his pills at the proper intervals, sat up all night by his pillow, cooked his gruel for him, and every now and then asked: "Are you feeling a little better, Dada?"
- ▶ "No more of this," said he with decision. "I must get a transfer." He at once wrote off to Calcutta an application for a transfer, on the ground of the unhealthiness of the place.

- ▶ While Ratan was awaiting her call, the postmaster was awaiting a reply to his application.
- ▶ At last, after a week, the call did come one evening. With an overflowing heart Ratan rushed into the room with her--"Were you calling me, Dada?"
- ▶ The postmaster said: "I am going away to-morrow, Ratan."
- ▶ "Where are you going, Dada?"
- ▶ "I am going home."
- ▶ "When will you come back?"
- ▶ "I am not coming back."
- ▶ Ratan asked no other question. The postmaster, of his own accord, went on to tell her that his application for a transfer had been rejected, so he had resigned his post and was going home.

The girl suddenly asked him: "Dada, will you take me to your home?"

The postmaster laughed. "What an idea!" said he; but he did not think it necessary to explain to the girl wherein lay the absurdity.

That whole night, in her waking and in her dreams, the postmaster's laughing reply haunted her--"What an idea!"

- ▶ The master said: "You need not be anxious about my going away, Ratan; I shall tell my successor to look after you."
- ▶ These words were kindly meant, no doubt: but inscrutable are the ways of a woman's heart!
- ▶ Ratan had borne many a scolding from her master without complaint, but these kind words she could not bear. She burst out weeping, and said: "No, no, you need not tell anybody anything at all about me; I don't want to stay on here."
- ▶ The postmaster was dumbfounded. He had never seen Ratan like this before.

- ▶ "Here is something for you; I hope it will keep you for some little time."
- ▶ He brought out from his pocket the whole of his month's salary, retaining only a trifle for his travelling expenses.
- ▶ Then Ratan fell at his feet and cried: "Oh, Dada, I pray you, don't give me anything, don't in any way trouble about me," and then she ran away out of sight.

- ▶ When he got in and the boat was under way, and the rain-swollen river, like a stream of tears welling up from the earth, swirled and sobbed at her bows, then he felt a pain at heart; the grief-stricken face of a village girl seemed to represent for him the great unspoken pervading grief of Mother Earth herself.
- ▶ At one time he had an impulse to go back, and bring away along with him that lonesome waif, forsaken of the world.
- ▶ But the wind had just filled the sails, the boat had got well into the middle of the turbulent current, and already the village was left behind, and its outlying burning-ground came in sight.

- ▶ So the traveller, borne on the breast of the swift-flowing river, consoled himself with philosophical reflections on the numberless meetings and partings going on in the world--on death, the great parting, from which none returns.
- ▶ But Ratan had no philosophy. She was wandering about the post office in a flood of tears.
- ▶ It may be that she had still a lurking hope in some corner of her heart that her Dada would return, and that is why
- ▶ she could not tear herself away.

- ▶ Alas for our foolish human nature!
- ▶ Its fond mistakes are persistent. The dictates of reason take a long time to assert their own sway.
- ▶ The surest proofs meanwhile are disbelieved.
- ▶ False hope is clung to with all one's might and main, till a day comes when it has sucked the heart dry and it forcibly breaks through its bonds and departs.
- ▶ After that comes the misery of awakening, and then once again the longing to get back into the maze of the same mistakes.