Rabindranath Tagore (7 May 1861 – 7 August 1941), the first Asian Nobel Laureate in Literature (1913), has left a vast legacy in Indian and world literature and cinema, culture, politics, and thought. In this course, we will explore Tagore's universal humanism through selections from his massive oeuvre of literary and artistic works, including poetry, songs, plays, fiction, and essays on a wide variety of subjects such as education, anti-imperialism, pacifism, and the philosophy of science. Tagore's work is also celebrated today for its focus on women's lives and empowerment. Tagore's humanism goes beyond European enlightenment discourse in that it embraces a wide range of thought from the classical to the modern: the Sanskrit Upanishads, Buddhist philosophy, world religions, Bengali and Indian folk culture, and much more. Studying Tagore today sheds light on pressing questions about peace and conflict in a deeply troubled world. The six-lecture course will look at diverse aspects of Tagore's life and work: a) the making of Tagorean thought; b) new humanism: poetry, aesthetics, and the world; c) Tagore and politics: nationalism, socialism, and beyond; d) Tagore, education, and women's empowerment; e) Tagore's travels: from Japan to the Bay Area f) Tagore and Einstein on the nature of reality.

Reading materials, films and/or film clips, and other links are on bcourses/OLLI course site.
Syllabus and schedule

Lecture I

The making of Tagorean thought

Readings and viewings

Rabindranath Tagore, _chhelebela_ or Boyhood days
--- _Jibansmriti_ or Reminiscences of life (autobiography)
_The Upanisads_
Blog from kolkatacitytours.com on Rabindranath Tagore’s house in Jorasanko in Kolkata
Satyajit Ray, _Rabindranath Tagore_ (1961, English, 54 mins, B/W)

In this lecture, I will discuss the making of Rabindranath Tagore as a poet and universal humanist. We will discuss five themes and contexts here. Each of these themes is intertwined with the other.

1. Tagore’s observations in his memoir, _Chhelebela_ or “Boyhood days,” where he reminisces his impressions of a colonial city seen through the eyes of a child (3-4 pages)
2. Excerpts from _Jibansmriti_ or Reminiscences of life or autobiography where he shares the events that shaped his early youth and thought. We will learn about his travels to the Himalayas and North India with his father Debendranath Thakur. This experience opened his eyes to the themes and practices of Upanishadic spirituality (excerpts from letters and other travel writings, also in _Jibansmriti_, 4-5 pages)
3. The concept of the universal spiritual in _The Upanishads_, which shaped the bulk of Rabiindranath’s ideas about universal humanism as the spiritual foundation of humanity, is central to his optimism despite the ravages of colonialism, imperialism, and the rise of fascism. We will read excerpts from _The Upanishads_ (5-6 pages, edition TBA)
4. Brahmo observances and cultural feasts in Jorasanko in colonial Kolkata (or Calcutta) and their impact on spiritualism. We will also meet Tagore’s siblings and cousins who left deep impressions on his views of the arts, sciences, and the notion of Enlightenment both from Western and non-Western points of views, especially in the context of colonial Calcutta and India. You can read a short blog on Jorasanko in Calcutta and its cultural legacy here: [http://kolkatacitytours.com/rabindranath-tagore-house-jorasanko-thakur-bari/](http://kolkatacitytours.com/rabindranath-tagore-house-jorasanko-thakur-bari/)
5. And finally, we will discuss the documentary by a fellow Brahmo, Satyajit Ray, _Rabindranath Tagore_ (1961, English, 54 mins, India, B/W) to become familiar with the biography of Rabindranath Tagore as a poet, writer, essaying, artist, and humanist.
Lecture II

New humanism: poetry, aesthetics, and the world

Reading, listening, viewing

Readings from *Gitanjali* or Song Offerings (2-3 poems)
Listening to Rabindrasangeet (Tagore’s songs), especially nature and spiritual songs (singers: Debabrata Biswas, Rezwana Banya—2 songs)
W.B. Yeats’ letter to Rabindranath Tagore; [https://www.lehigh.edu/~amsp/yeats-tagore.htm](https://www.lehigh.edu/~amsp/yeats-tagore.htm)
Ezra Pound on Tagore’s poetry and the Western world: [http://fortnightlyreview.co.uk/2013/04/rabindranath-tagore/](http://fortnightlyreview.co.uk/2013/04/rabindranath-tagore/)

Rabindranath Tagore and his paintings: [http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/r/rabindranath-tagore-poet-and-painter/](http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/r/rabindranath-tagore-poet-and-painter/)

In this lecture, I will present to you Tagore’s celebrated poetry, music, and the arts, especially painting.

1. We will read a very short selection of Tagore’s poems from his celebrated book of poems, *Gitanjali* or Song offerings. This will set the tone for his understanding of Upanishads in a modern context.
2. No course on Tagore is complete without listening to his music, known as Rabindrasangeet. The finest exponent of this musical tradition is the rebel-singer, Debabrata Biswas a.k.a. George Biswas. We will also listen to the rendition of Tagore’s nature and love songs by Rezwana Banya.
3. How did the West receive Tagore in the early 20th century? We will find out through the letters and a short essay by Yeats and Pound respectively. Both Yeats and Pound were instrumental in the nomination of Tagore for the Nobel Prize.
4. And finally, we will explore Tagore’s late passion for paintings and sketches

Lecture III

Tagore and politics: nationalism, socialism, and beyond

Readings and viewings

Excerpts from Sabyasachi Bhattacharya ed., *The Mahatma and the Poet*
Satyajit Ray, *Rabindranath Tagore*, film
Tagore’s letter to DuBois [http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b183-i409](http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b183-i409)
Watch clips from Satyajit Ray’s *Ghare baire* or Home and the world, a film on Tagore’s eponymous novel
In this lecture, I will discuss the critical aspects of Tagore’s political beliefs, activities, and views of nationalism and socialism.

1. We will learn about the interactions between Tagore and Gandhi in the context of anti-colonial and nationalist struggles in the late 19th-20th centuries in India
2. We will learn about Tagore’s critique of fascism and world politics.
3. We will learn about Tagore’s writings on socialism, especially his perspective of Russian socialism.
4. We will learn about Tagore’s politics and ideological struggles through film clips on Swadeshi or the home-grown.

Lecture IV

Tagore, education, and women's empowerment

Readings and viewings

Rabindranath Tagore, “Dui bon” or Two sisters,” a short story
Satyajit Ray, Charulata, a celebrated film based on Tagore’s novella, Nashta nir or Broken nest
A short history of Visva Bharati or India in the world, a non-European experimentation in the concept of open university (TBA)

In this lecture, I will discuss Tagore’s vision of modern education tucked in an Indian setting.

1. We will discuss Tagore’s views on general education.
2. We will explore Tagore’s ideas about women’s education through his story, Dui bon.
   This will also give us the opportunity to explore Tagore’s perspective of education in the context of women's question.
3. We will discuss Tagore's perspective of gender in modern Indian society
4. We will learn about Tagore’s contributions to world education through institutions, writing, and domestic and some international travels too.

Lecture V

Tagore's travels: from Japan to the Bay Area

Tagore’s Asian voyages
Excerpts from Tagore’s letters (publisher TBA)
Excerpts from essay, Stephen J. Hay, “Rabindranath Tagore in America”

In this Lecture, I will discuss Tagore’s travels. Tagore traveled widely—from Japan, Europe, Russia, and the Americas. I will attempt to answer the following questions:
1. Was there a difference between Tagore’s Asian and European travels?
2. What did Tagore think of the Americas—north and south?
3. What did he learn from these travels?
4. How were his views on nationalism, socialism, and modernity shaped by his travels?
5. How did the West respond to Tagore?
6. How did the Latin cultures respond to Tagore?
7. How did the Asians respond to Tagore?

Lecture VI

Tagore and Einstein on the nature of reality

Reading

Interview: “On the nature of reality: Albert Einstein in Conversation with Rabindranath Tagore”
Excerpts from Partha Ghose ed., Tagore, Einstein, and the nature of reality: literary and philosophical reflections

In this last lecture, I will discuss one of the most well-known meetings of two great minds: Einstein and Tagore.

1. Both Einstein was Tagore were keen to discuss the nature and structure of reality through their own intellectual engagements.
2. Reality, subjectivity, and religion were some of the main ideas discussed in the several meetings Tagore and Einstein had in Europe.
3. While Einstein and Tagore disagreed on the very foundation of reality as anything but constant, they discussed the nature of reality, causality, and change
4. These conversations give us the opportunity to explore some of the most debated concepts through the meeting of two beautiful minds: Einstein and Tagore.