

On Tagore's birth date (he was born on May 7, 1861), Young Metro explores how his philosophy of learning beyond walls and words continues to resonate with a new generation



Students attend a class under trees on the Visva-Bharati campus in Santiniketan. Telegraph picture

# The bard is felt, not memorised

**ADRIJA GHOSH**

**Calcutta:** A student of Class IX translates Tagore in English to understand the bard better. Another Class XI student imbibes his philosophy through his songs.

Tagore remains an intrinsic part of many youngsters' lives. His songs drift through seasons, his ideas linger in conversations, his presence shapes cultural identity. His works are still compulsory in the curriculum, but students are finding new ways to engage with Tagore, renewing a connection that has endured across generations.

Ajanta Bhattacharjee, a Bengali teacher of Bhavan's Gangabux Kanoria Vidyamandir, believes the challenge rarely lies in meaning. "Tagore's themes — nature, social issues, freedom, love, complexities of human nature — are universal and resonate strongly, especially in today's socio-political climate," she said.

The difficulty that students face is often linguistic. His

writing carries archaic vocabulary and layered, lyrical sentence structures. Munmun Goswami, head of the Bengali department at G.D. Birla Centre for Education, said: "Though students easily grasp the emotional core of his works, unfamiliar words slow them down. With guidance, however, this challenge becomes an opportunity to expand their vocabulary."

To bridge this gap, teachers are moving beyond conventional reading. Mrinmoy Sarkar, Bengali teacher at Stratford Day School, observed that students find texts in *cholit bhasa* easier than those in the more formal *sadhu bhasa*.

"I simplify the difficult passages using colloquial language, connecting the stories to students' lived experiences to make it more relatable," he added.

Performance plays a crucial role in this process. From Rabindrasangeet to dance dramas, Tagore's works extend beyond the page. Their rhythm and musicality lend

themselves naturally to performance, especially suited to stage adaptations and audiovisual interpretations.

"When students hear a song, their understanding deepens. They may not recognise all the words, but they get to grasp the emotions and the broader meaning," said Goswami. Bhattacharjee further said: "Students participate in inter-house competitions, which helps them delve deeper into the nuances of his literary genius."

Some schools also arrange visits to Santiniketan and the Jorasanko Thakurbari to provide insights into Tagore's life and times.

Audiovisual tools, digital classroom resources and authentic translations help students navigate linguistic barriers — something Tagore himself advocated for. Piyas Mukherjee, English teacher of M.P. Birla Foundation Higher Secondary School, said: "When I am teaching the texts of Tagore in English, I use audiovisual tools to incorporate the original Bengali

source into the lesson."

Students echo this shift. Soumili Mondal, a Class XI student of K.E. Carmel School, Amtala, is a Rabindrasangeet practitioner.

"I don't always understand every word," she admitted, "but when it is being performed, it becomes easier to comprehend the tone."

For Navoneer Bhattacharya of Class IX, Birla High School, Tagore's own translations of *Gitanjali* and a little help from his parents in deciphering the Bengali words are all that is needed: "I enjoy the flow and imagery in his works. I recently translated one of Tagore's poems into English; the exercise gave me a new perspective on his writings."

Tagore believed in a freedom "where words come out from the depth of truth". Even though his language may demand effort, his philosophy remains accessible. In today's classrooms, Tagore is not merely studied but experienced — ensuring that his voice continues to be both heard and understood.

IN THE LESSONS