

CHRISTIE'S

RABINDRANATH TAGORE (1861-1941)

THE POCKET BOOK OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE,
OR 'MAZUMDER PUNTHI'

Lot 33 / Sale 1202

Price Realized

INR20,625,000

(\$334,362)

Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.

Estimate

INR4,000,000 - INR6,000,000

(\$65,183 - \$97,774)

Sale Information

Sale 1202

The India Sale

11 December 2014

Mumbai



Lot Description

RABINDRANATH TAGORE (1861-1941)

The Pocket Book of Rabindranath Tagore,
or 'Mazumder Punthi'

in Bengali, manuscript notes, poems, songs, calculations and drawings and doodles in pencil and ink on paper, signed in Bengali and signed ('Rabindranath Tagore') between 1889-1904, approximately 270 leaves, 16mo (108 x 171mm).

Blue leather covers with gilt title 'R. N. Tagore Pocket Book, 1889', gilt edged pages, metal clasp engraved 'Kalo Chowdhury Book-Binder No. 37 Old Boytockhana Bazar Road Calcutta'

Special Notice

Lots which are Art Treasures under the Art and Antiquities Act 1972 cannot be exported outside India. Please note that lots are marked as a convenience to you and we shall not be liable for any errors in, or failure to, mark any lot.

Pre-Lot Text

ANTIQUITY AND NATIONAL ART TREASURE - NON EXPORTABLE

PROPERTY OF THE MAJUMDAR FAMILY COLLECTION

Provenance

Presented to Subodh Chandra Mazumder by Rabindranath Tagore

Thence by descent

Lot Notes

The Essence of Rabindranath Tagore

The R.N. Tagore Pocket Book 1889 (Mazumder Punthi)

To own a work of art by Rabindranath Tagore is always a great statement, and every drawing and painting by him expresses the ultimate presence of his persona. But this Tagore notebook has a very quiet, humble presence. Yet, its potential, when it comes

to enriching our understanding of Tagore's journey in literature and art, is great. The writings in this pocket book provide rare insight into Tagore's psyche at the time, allowing us to better understand his later life. This is not just an ordinary notebook; it provides a visual approach to the manner in which Tagore wrote, while also revealing the artist he evolved into during the later stages of his life. Any scholar would gain precious understanding of the concealed layers of Tagore's mind and personality, by reading this notebook.

Tagore's life was like a vast ocean, making research in any single area of insufficient to understand Tagore's personality as a whole. As his life comprised different layers, it gave rise to different forms of expression: literature, painting, drawing, handwritten notes, doodles and letters, among others. This Tagore Pocket Book, however, reveals important aspects of Tagore's daily life with a unique, holistic perspective, as it was his constant companion from 1889 to 1904. It travelled with him to a variety of destinations, even to his estate, now located in Bangladesh. Tagore started writing in this notebook at the age of twenty-eight, and in it we discover how some of his best, long poems were written with great clarity and spontaneity.

This note book is also known by the name of 'Mazumder Punthi'. Once Tagore had filled this notebook and made final copies of his writings from it, he gave the book to a teacher, Subodh Chandra Mazumder, who was working at Santiniketan at the time. Later on, in his essay 'Rabindra Prathibhar Nepthya Bhumi', the author and artist Kanai Samanta gave this notebook the name 'Mazumder Punthi'.

This special notebook has been mentioned in a number of important publications and archives. Like all of Tagore's serious biographers, Prsanata Kumar Paul referred to it many times in his work 'Rabi Jiboni' volumes 3 and 5. Paul specifically notes that anyone interested in Tagore's life will need to constantly refer to this book to understand his evolution.

The author Amitava Chowdhury tells us that Sunil Mazumder, one of Subodh Chandra Mazumder's sons, states that the R.N. Tagore Pocket Book was a very personal record made by Rabindranath, in which he wrote many things over the period of a few years. It contains writings on a range of subjects from loss and profit calculations related to his estate, to poems and philology. On 15 June, 1889, Rabindranath was given the responsibility of looking after the family's Jorasanko record office, and it may well have been at this time that he prepared the book, as part of his official responsibilities. The very size of the notebook was handy for keeping daily records.

The notebook grew slowly as Tagore himself grew. It entered his life when he was twenty-eight years old, and it is fascinating to see how the words flowed into the notebook, filling it gradually. We can observe the confidence in his writing, a reflection of the presence he already had in early photographs. The poet uses words to describe fragments of pictures during a journey to Puri with his nephew Balendranath. During his stay at Kolkata, he recorded some Hindi songs and later wrote some new Brahma Sangeet verses based on these songs. He wrote many of his major poems and songs in this book, including 'Sonar Tari' (Golden Boat), 'Shaishob Sandhya Bimbobati', 'Rajar Chele O Rajar Meye', 'Baishnab Poems' and 'Jete Nahi Dibo'. The journal also contains some other poems from the 'Sonar Tari' series. In 1902, the year Tagore's wife died, he dedicated a series of poems called 'Swaran' to her; we find nineteen poems from the series in this notebook, as well as some from the 'Utsarga' series.

Over the course of Tagore's life he maintained journals similar to the one on offer. Three of these notebooks deserve to be mentioned: the Malati Punthi, the Heyalir Khata and of course the one we are discussing now, the 'Mazumder Punthi'. As we know, 'Sonar Tari' is one of the major series of poems Tagore wrote, and in this notebook we see how the earliest manuscript of this series was set down. This takes us far beyond the mere act of writing, allowing us a glimpse of the poet's inner psyche. Looking at the original visuals reveals the strength of the writings and the relationship between the poet's hand, mind and the surface of the page. All the words seem to emerge from the surface. In places, Tagore cuts something out with a single, soft line; elsewhere, he uses simple lines to refuse the words. As he was young at the time, he may have been unsure about his choice of words. Crossing things out is a process that reflects a certain dilemma. And then, there are many moments when he writes like water flowing through a valley.

The scholar, Dr. Sukumar Sen, describes the poem, 'Jete Nahi Dibo' as the smallest epic of Indian literature. It is a poem Tagore wrote during his stay at Jorasanko, Kolkata. In this notebook we can see how he set down this poem, in one uninterrupted flow, like a river in full spate. Apart from a few minor corrections and a break for a tax report related to his estate, it is carried along by its own impetus. We get the impression Tagore already had a complete vision of the poem when he began writing. The poem is full of details and is a reflection of how much he missed his wife. Possibly this is the explanation for the title, 'Jete Nahi Dibo' or 'I will not let you go'. He also evokes his daughters in this poem. Most of the poems or songs he wrote in this notebook were later incorporated into different series of poetry books including 'Gitabeetan' (a compilation of Tagore songs).

Tagore's mind was like a photographic plate as we can see from his detailed visual description of a journey to Puri in 'Mazumder Punthi'. He sets down in words the fragments of images he wanted to capture during the journey. As we read the words, the images come to life, as in the brief picturesque note: "A transparent flow of sand dune and grey horizon, Banyan tree and Peepul tree, Way to Bhubaneshwar, Broken temple at top of mountain, Evening walk, A long clear shady road and a few covered carts, Blue ocean". Later, Tagore wrote a series of letters called 'Chinnopartaboli'. In one of them (letter no 81), he created a long epistle using similar fragmented words.

In the 'Sonar Tari' series 'Purashkar' is the longest poem (662 lines). It was first written in the Tagore Pocket Book with a few mistakes. Looking at this manuscript, we can imagine how great Tagore's command over language and rhythm already were at a young age. The swift flow of the writing leads us to believe his mind was absolutely clear and the poem had already taken shape before he wrote it down.

In this context it would be relevant to quote some excerpts from Tagore's essay 'Personality' (The world of personality). He writes, "There is a point where in the mystery of existence contradictions meet; where movement is not all movement and stillness is not all stillness; where the idea and the form, the within and without are united; where infinite become finite, yet not losing its infinity. If this meeting is dissolved, then things become unreal." (A. Chakraborty ed., *A Tagore Reader*, New York, 1961, p. 264)

This text gives us an idea of the initial stages of Tagore's personality, as well his iconic approach to art and literature. His contributions are still relevant today and are worth studying. Just looking at how he translates a picture in his mindscape into words is a process in itself. During a later phase of his life, he states that he did not see the language of poems, but he actually saw his images in nature. We know that he went on to create over two thousand five hundred paintings and drawings, but all this began here, in the present notebook. We see small lines and lines that cut through words turning into doodles and drawings. The whole narrative takes place and emerges from the paper, just as all his writings emerge. When it comes to his paintings, we can see they are not always pre conceived or planned, but what we call Tagore's art is in fact life experience emerging on to a page as the result of a mental process. We should note that Tagore never worked on canvas or any surface other than paper, a surface he had a lifelong relationship with and remained deeply familiar with.

It is often believed that Tagore never did any realistic drawing, but in this journal we find a very detailed drawing of a hibiscus flower. There are also drawings of birds which tell us about his early doodles and drawings, which were always present on his work surfaces. Some of the geometric doodles found here might also prove a good starting point for a study of his later 'Purabi' doodles.

This original note book is an opportunity to study the processes mentioned above through Tagore's writings. He always wrote with a pencil, and it is important to remember that the relationship of a pencil to a paper surface, the hand and the mind is far deeper than that of any other implement, and is marked by certain integrity. By changing the pressure on the paper surface the whole language of expression can be modified, and this is what Rabindranath did. As pencil markings are not even permanent, it also left him the option of denying the words he had written.

Reading handwriting is always like a journey that allows us to travel from the mind to the final surface of execution. This analysis is of great importance as Tagore himself was a man of multiple, complex layers. His son, Rathindranath Tagore, stated he was unable to really decipher his father's inner mind (in his short essay, "Father as I knew him"). This notebook is thus a great opportunity for scholars to look at Tagore's words, art and early life in depth.

In Tagore's other noteworthy journals, 'Malati Punthi', and 'Heyalir khata', he expresses his engagement with art. The present Pocket Book, however, confirms Tagore's familiarity with realistic drawing. Some of the doodles are important as they are simple, early expressions of what was to become a very complex approach to art.

This notebook is truly a revelation of certain aspects of Tagore's personality. He expressed himself through innumerable forms like writing, doodling, photographic self-portraits, painting and sculpting, but nothing was ever really complete, because all the time he was deeply conscious of his presence, his own existence, the 'self' and the 'me'. This is a note book which reveals Tagore's personality, as completely as possible, through texts and images, including an early series of portraits. It needs to be savoured and reopened, time and time again, for a sensitive mind to sink into its many layered depths.

This journal is not just a notebook, but a picturesque description of Rabindranath Tagore from within, expressing a panoramic vista of the early days in his life.

Samit Das, Author of *Tagore's Concepts of Space: Architecture of Santiniketan*
Reference: Prasanta Kumar Paul, Rabi Jiboni, Ananda Publishers, Kolkata

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