

# CHITRA



SHAW  
FESTIVAL 60

*"My hands are strong to bend the bow, but I have never learned Cupid's archery."*

## The Story

The play begins with Chitra beginning a conversation with Madana, the god of love, and Vasanta, the god of springtime and eternal youth. They ask Chitra who she is and what is bothering her, to which she replies that she is the daughter of the king of Manipur and has been raised like a boy as her father had no male heir. She is a great warrior and heroine despite being born as a woman, but has never had the chance to truly live as a woman or learn how to use "feminine wiles".

Chitra explains that she has met the warrior hero Arjuna in the forest while hunting for game. Despite knowing that he has pledged several vows (including one for twelve years of celibacy), Chitra has fallen instantly in love with him. The following day she approaches him to plead her case, but Arjuna turns her away due to his vows. Chitra begs the two gods to give her a day of perfect beauty so she can win over Arjuna and have just one night of love with him. Moved by her pleas, the two gods give her not just one day but an entire year to spend with Arjuna.

Over the course of the year Arjuna marvels over Chitra's perfect beauty.  
Chitra, wrestles with revealing her true self to Arjuna.

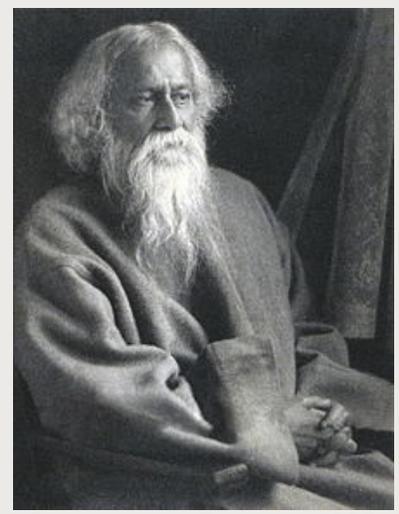
As the year draws to a close both have to reconsider their relationship, their love, and their identity.



Set & Costume Design by Anahita Dehbonehie

## The Playwright

Rabindranath Tagore was a Bengali polymath who worked as a poet, writer, playwright, composer, philosopher, social reformer and painter. He reshaped Bengali literature and music as well as Indian art with Contextual Modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Author of the "profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful" poetry of *Gitanjali*, he became, in 1913, the first non-European and the first lyricist to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Tagore's poetic songs were viewed as spiritual and mercurial; however, his "elegant prose and magical poetry" remain largely unknown outside Bengal. He was a fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society. Referred to as "the Bard of Bengal", Tagore was also known by sobriquets (a given descriptive nickname): Gurudev, Kobiguru, Biswakobi.



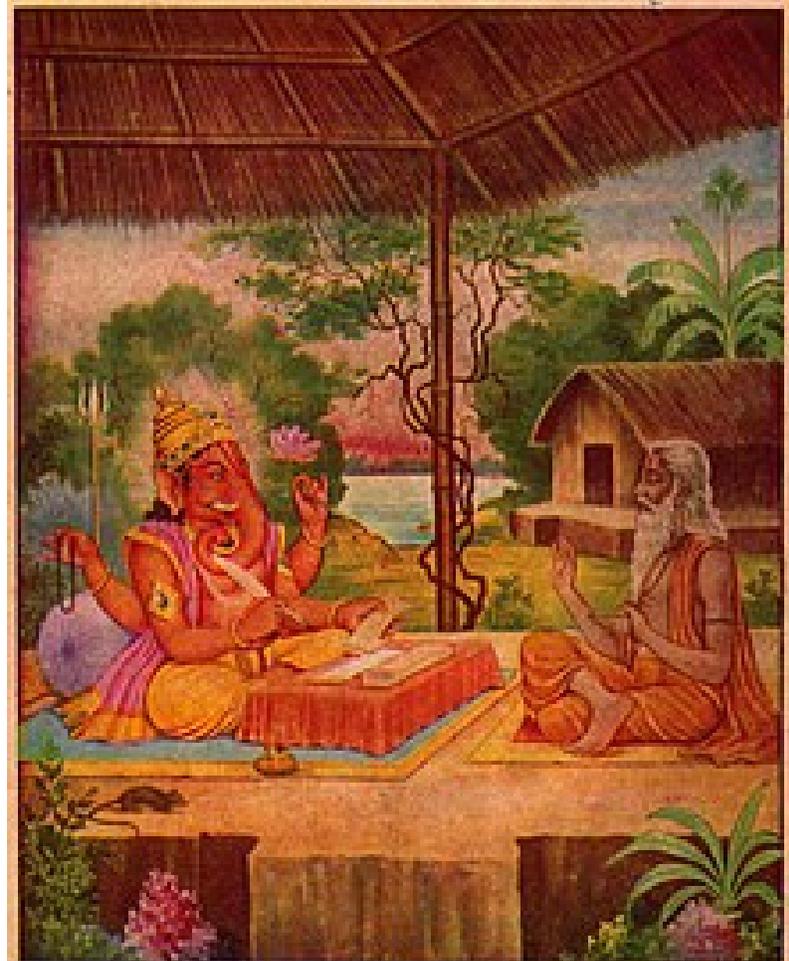
Rabindranath Tagore, c. 1925

## Chitra and The Mahābhārata



Manuscript illustration of the Battle of Kurukshetra

*Chitra* is a one-act play written by Rabindranath Tagore, first published in English in 1913 by the India Society of London. The play adapts part of the story from *The Mahābhārata* and centers upon the character of Chitrangada, a female warrior who tries to attract the attention of Arjuna.



Ganesha writes *The Mahābhārata* upon Vyasa's dictation.

*The Mahābhārata* is one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India written by Vyasa. It narrates the struggle between two groups of cousins in the Kurukshetra War and the fates of the Kaurava and the Pāṇḍava princes and their successors. It also contains philosophical and devotional material, such as a discussion of the four "goals of life" or *puruṣārtha*. The majority was probably compiled between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE, with the oldest preserved parts not much older than around 400 BCE.

It is the longest epic poem known and has been described as "the longest poem ever written". At about 1.8 million words in total, it is roughly ten times the length of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined. The importance of *The Mahābhārata* in the context of world civilization is compared to that of the Bible, the Quran, Greek drama, or the works of William Shakespeare.

# The Dance-Drama

Through its classical and folk traditions, India has evolved a type of dance-drama that is a form of total theatre, in which all elements - music, voice, movement and spectacle - work together in harmony. In dance-drama, the artist dances out the story through a complex gesture language, a form that, in its universal appeal, cuts across multilanguage barriers. Contemporary directors and writers are re-examining traditional dance forms and are using these in their current works for greater psychological appeal and deeper artistic impact. The director for this production, Kimberley Rampersad, has taken inspiration from dance-drama origins and included seven choreographed dances for this production.

## Music

Music plays a big part in this production as Co-Composers, Sound Designers, and brothers Ryan and Darryn deSouza were tasked with creating music for dances and scenes which underscore most of the play. Listen for the sounds of oboe, french horn, piano, cello, and the tabla which is perhaps the world's most recognized Indian hand drum and the preeminent percussion instrument of India itself.



A musician plays the tabla.

## Characters

MADANA: The god of love.

VASANTA: The god of springtime and eternal youth

ARJUNA: A prince of the house of Kurus, a former warrior that is living as a hermit at the start of the play.

CHITRA: Daughter of the king of Manipur, Chitrāngadā was raised as a boy due to the lack of a male heir.

VILLAGERS: A chorus whose meaning and form shifts to help tell the story.

