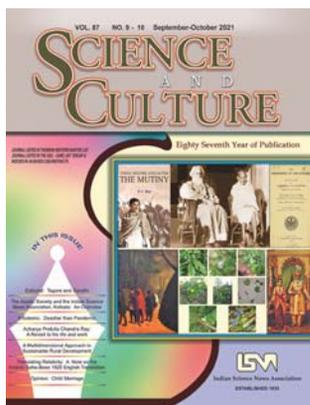


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EDITORIAL

TAGORE AND GANDHI



India has produced two great visionaries having greatest thoughts i.e. Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore (07.05.1861 - 07.08.1941) and Mahatma Gandhi (02.10.1869 - 30.01.1948). Tagore's educational philosophy is based on three forceful components : Man, Nature and Education. He

emphasized on three types of relationship among those : (a) between man and nature; (b) man and his social environment, and (c) then man and the "universal man". For the first, we can imagine two trends of thoughts: One taking nature as a machine. Science and Technology, absorbing and exploiting the trains of nature, take nature as a machine. When this is applied to our process of education, the latter becomes as mechanical as a machine.

The other trend is what the great poet had thought of is that a man can widen his universal love through nature. He rationalized the unbounded happiness of a child in mother's lap and applied this spontaneous interaction between man and nature to develop personality of children in a natural way. Tagore also used nature's relation with man for developing rural science. He used the scientific knowledge to remove

the poverty of the local people. Thus he founded the Institute of Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan. Tagore was the pioneer of the Co-operative movement and Rural Banking in India. He also founded the Loka Siksha Parishad – India's first Distant Education programme. The third is the relationship between man and the universal man. Tagore's educational thought speaks about man's infinite relation with national and international communities. He brought several eminent personalities from Europe, America, China and Japan to his Santiniketan - *Yatra Visvam Bhavatyekanidam (Where the world makes a home in a single nest)* – That is the motto of Visva-Bharati. Therefore, it is essential to understand the universality of man for the fulfillment of Tagore's ideal of education. Thus he laid a foundation of national integration in the young formative minds.



Tagore and Gandhi at Santiniketan in 1940

Tagore and Gandhi are the two great sons of India, one a poet, the other a prophet, one from the eastern flank of India, Bengal, the other from the western, Gujarat, one called the other *Mahatma* (in April 1919) and the other addressed the first as *Gurudeva*, they admired and revered each other like friends do and also they differed each other greatly in ideology but shared a deep mutual respect and admiration. Tagore and Gandhi met in Santiniketan, Ahmedabad, Kolkata and Delhi, between 1915 and 1941 overcoming all those inferences. Over three decades, their feelings and ideas warmed, cooled, vaporized and condensed to give each other through their letters, the gift of a friendship that could bewilder but never betray. Tagore and Gandhi, the two seekers of truth, were fellow travelers in quest of truth, traversing their own separate paths with infallible and irrepressible faith in their own path and trust in the singular sincerity of the other. A relationship that started only when Tagore was 54 and Gandhi 46, that did not involve persons who had stayed or worked together for any length of time, that was tossed around in the turmoil of storn of creation versus construction, and yet reached unprecedented heights of intimacy, is an astonishing fact surrounded by mystery. This is possible only when one can transcend the pretense of personality and reach and realize the person within (Shailesh Parekh, 2015).

It is interesting to note that on one hand, Tagore, the poet was cultivated and nurtured by the ambience in which he grew up. On the other hand, Gandhi, the saintly statesman, was a product of the adverse and oppressing circumstances around him. They met each other after more than half their lives were over and when each one of them was an acknowledged icon celebrated not only in India but also in the global arena. It was a period during which India found its identity and its downtrodden multitude was aroused from a stupor of centuries into the dawn of freedom. While Gandhi is an undisputed architect of this awakening, Tagore was its 'great sentinel', who had challenged many of Gandhi's tenets in no uncertain terms. The debates between them were the debates between

singular and plural, between the Man and men, between the seeker and the achiever. One believed in salvation through an individual, the other, through the multitude.

One hundred years ago in September 1921 two giants met at Jorasanko, Tagore's ancestral house, Kolkata. During the meeting Tagore told Gandhi in his face about his opposition towards non-cooperation movement. the instance of the protagonists of Swadeshi asking the people to shun Western textiles on the belief that they were impure. But Gandhi categorically mentioned that "a drowning man cannot save others. We must try to save ourselves. Indian nationalism is not exclusive, nor aggressive, nor destructive. It is health-giving, religious and thus humanitarian. India must learn to live before she can aspire to die for humanity". On the other hand Tagore wanted to rebuild the country from the grassroots, restructuring villages, revitalizing rural life through promotion of village cooperatives, working in silence and patiently, that's why he established Sriniketan – a centre for rural development and reconstruction.

For his 70th birthday, Gandhi wrote about Tagore in an anthology – the Golden Book of Tagore – "In common with thousands of his countrymen I owe much to one who by his poetic genius and singular purity of life has raised India in the estimation of the world". Gandhi also called Tagore, The "Great Sentinel" and said "I regard the Poet as a Sentinal warning us against the approach of enemies called Bigotry, Lethargy, Intolerance, Ignorance, Inertia and other members of that brood" (Aditya Ghosh, 2020).

Rabindranath Tagore, the renaissance poet, had met some of the greatest thinkers of his time and their exchange of thoughts had enriched the mankind. In paying tributes to such seminal encounters, I would like to present in brief the images of the Poet in conversation with *Romain Rolland, Albert Einstein, Helen Keller, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bos, Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi.*

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Nehru and Tagore at Santiniketan

Rabindranath Tagore once said, *“Whatever fate may be in store in the judgement of the future for my poems, my stories and my plays, I know for certain that the Bengali race must need accept my songs, they must all sing my songs in every Bengali home, in the fields and by the rivers..... I feel as if music wells up from within some unconscious depth of my mind, that is why it has certain completeness.”*

Romain Rolland was fascinated by the contrast between them, and when he completed his book on Gandhi, he wrote to an Indian academic, in March 1923: *“I have finished my Gandhi, in which I pay tribute to your two great river-like souls, overflowing with divine spirit, Tagore and Gandhi.”* Romain Rolland said *“The controversy between Tagore and Gandhi, between two great minds, both moved by mutual admiration and esteem, but as fatally*

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separated in their feeling as a philosopher can be from an apostle, a St. Paul from a Plato, is important. For on the one side we have the spirit of religious faith and charity seeking to found a new humanity, on the other we have intelligence, free-born, serene and broad, seeking to unite the aspirations of all humanity in sympathy and understanding”.

“When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us” said Hellen Keller, who had created a legend of her own to leave a blazing trail through darkness. She met the Poet in New York in 1930.

“One individual may die for an idea; but that idea will, after his death, incarnate itself in a thousand lives. That is how the wheel of evolution moves on and the ideas and dreams of one nation are bequeathed to the next.” Rabindranath Tagore coronated Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as *“Deshnayak”* and addressed at the foundation stone laying ceremony of Mahajati Sadan in 1939.

Since Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi were two leading Indian thinkers in the twentieth century, many commentators have tried to compare their ideas. On 27.08.1941 Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to Krishna Kripalani : *“Gurudeva and Gandhiji ———their message was for the world. And yet both were hundred percent India’s children and inheritors, representatives and expositors of her age-long culture. The surprising thing is that both of these men with so much in common and drawing inspiration from the same wells of wisdom and thought and culture*

should differ from each other so greatly. No two persons could probably differ so much as Gandhiji and Tagore”.

Professor Albert Einstein’s tribute to two of his contemporaries : About Rabindranath : *If the moon, in the act of completing its eternal way round the earth, were gifted with self-consciousness, it would feel thoroughly convinced, that it would travel its way of its own accord on the strength of a resolution taken once for all. So would a Being, endowed with higher insight and more perfect intelligence, watching man and his doings, smile about the illusion of his, that he was acting according to his free will. Thou sawest the fierce strife of creatures, a strife that wells forth from need and dark desire. Cherishing these, thou hast served mankind all through a long and fruitful life, spreading everywhere a gentle and free thought in a manner such as the seers of thy people have proclaimed as the ideal* [The Golden Book of Tagore, Calcutta :1931].

About Gandhi: *Gandhi is unique in political history. He has invented an entirely new and human technique for the liberation struggle of an oppressed people and*

carried it out with the greatest energy and devotion. A leader of his people, unsupported by any outer authority : a politician whose success rests upon craft nor the mastery of technical devices, but simply on the convincing power of his personality; a victorious fighter who has always scorned the use of force; a man of wisdom and humility, armed with resolve and inflexible consistency, who has devoted all his strength to the uplifting of his people and the betterment of their lot; a man who has confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being, and thus at all times risen superior. Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth. We are fortunate and should be grateful that fate has bestowed upon us so luminous a contemporary – a beacon to the generations to come [On the occasion of Gandhiji’s seventieth birthday : 1939]. □

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