CHAPTER IX

WAS THERE ANY REAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RABINDRANATH AND GANDHI?

9.1. Tagore and Gandhi

A study on Rabindranath and Gandhi would be incomplete without a review of the great spiritual bond that existed between the two thinkers and the nature of the famous 'public controversy' that incidentally developed between them in the period of 1921-25. Common people, being more interested in the matter of so-called 'Public Controversy', often overlook the great friendship that had developed between the two thinkers even before they had seen each other, and which they cherished so dearly till the end of their lives. In the words of Kakasaheb Kalelkar, who claimed to know both the thinkers, Rabindranath and Gandhi "were great friends, they adored each other, almost like lovers". C. F. Andrews who was a close friend of both Rabindranath and Gandhi maintained an identical opinion.

Tagore was a great poet and Gandhi was a great politician, as common people generally knew them. Any comparison between them seems to be a futile job like comparing "Nehru, the man of politics, with Homi Bhabha, the man of science". Against this, it may be said, that Nehru and Bhabha belonged to different fields of knowledge.
and they shared little in common. While Gandhi was mainly a spiritual idealist like Rabindranath and then a political leader as the people knew him in general. In fact, Gandhi's whole life was a series of experiments with the "spiritual force" and he truly named his 'Autobiography' as *My Experiments with Truth*. In his autobiography, he clearly explains that only accidents drew him in the sphere of politics and he wanted to introduce 'religion' into politics. Like Rabindranath, Gandhi always upheld the supremacy of the 'spirit' over the world of 'matter' and judged everything in terms of it. Like Rabindranath, Gandhi had an indivisible faith in 'God' and believed that the highest aim of life of man was the realization of 'God' in him. Thus to the thinkers, "self-realization" or realization of "God in man" became the norm for evaluating every action of man's life on earth. In this sense, Nehru, who was also a firm follower of Gandhi could not be compared with his master. Nehru himself, in his writings on Gandhi, has clearly pointed out his limitations in this respect. He explained that often he failed to appreciate Gandhi's ideal of 'spiritualization of Politics'. Thus when Gandhi used the word "Ram Rajya", he truly meant the 'spirit' inherent in the word. Nehru wrote that at first he thought that Gandhi had used the word only to enthuse the illiterate religious minded people of India; later he discovered that Gandhi employed
the word with a living faith in it. Nehru expressed his difficulty in following Gandhi as he wrote, "I realize that a statesman or man who has to deal with public affairs cannot ignore realities and cannot act in terms of abstract truth." But at the same time, Nehru insisted that even partial application of Gandhi's ideal of "acting in terms of abstract truth always produced rich results. Nehru acknowledging his limitations soberly wrote, "We are not worthy of him (Gandhi) and yet to the best of our ability we try to follow his teachings. Even to the limited extent to which we could follow his teachings, has yielded rich results." Nehru thus freely acknowledged his limitations in following Gandhi to act always in terms of 'abstract truth'.

On the other hand, Rabindranath wholeheartedly supported and glorified Gandhi's ideal of 'truth' or 'God'. Like Gandhi, Rabindranath believed that if absolute purity was beneficial for private or personal life, the same was true of the 'collective life' as well. Like Gandhi, Rabindranath did not make any distinction between a means and an end and always insisted like him that an unfair means could never yield a good result.

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.*
As it has already been pointed out earlier, long before Gandhi came to be known in Indian Politics, it was Tagore who upheld the cause of "spiritual force" in the anti-partition movement of Bengal in 1905-6, but withdrew himself from the current of politics of the time when violence or terrorist activities overtook the movement. It is no wonder then why some of the common sayings of Gandhi are found in the writings of Rabindranath almost in identical language and it sometimes becomes impossible to separate one from the other.

With a purpose of going into a detailed study of the close friendship which had developed between them even before they saw each other the present writings may be divided into three broad phases:

(i) The period of early contacts 1915-20.
(ii) The period of Public Controversy 1921-25.
(iii) The period of mutual understanding and true friendship 1925-41.

9.2 The period of early contacts - 1915-20

There is no record of Gandhi and Rabindranath having met each other in India or abroad before Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in January 1915. Although Rabindranath did not meet Gandhi up to this time, he was fully aware of Gandhi's achievements in South Africa. With Gokhale, Rabindranath fully realized and apprehended the
far-reaching effects of Gandhi's novel experiments with the "soul force" as a means of fighting out the "brute force" employed by the White authorities in South Africa. They sent Pearson and Andrews to South Africa to ensure their full support to Gandhi. As C. F. Andrews himself has written, "Gandhi's noble appeal of soul-force against soul-force against brute-force had won Tagore's entire approval*. 'When I (Andrews) had gone out with W. W. Pearson to help in the Passive Resistance struggle in South Africa, we had carried the poet's (Rabindranath's) blessings with us"#7.

In fact, it was with C. F. Andrews's direct encouragement and suggestion, Rabindranath wholeheartedly extended his invitations to the members of Gandhi's "Phoenix Family" and generously arranged their temporary lodging at Shantiniketan. Gandhi founded the "Phoenix Family" in Transval in 1904, but he had to close down the settlement before he left South Africa for good in 1915. Rabindranath's timely help in the matter relieved Gandhi of a great load of anxiety on that account. C. F. Andrews has noted some striking similarities between the 'Phoenix Ashram' founded by Gandhi in South Africa and the

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.
'Shantiniketan Ashram' of Rabindranath in India. As Andrews wrote, "of all the places that I have visited in South Africa it (Phoenix Ashram) was that one that reminds me most of all of Shantiniketan Ashram in India". In Phoenix Ashram" C. F. Andrews felt, "the same peaceful atmosphere which he experienced at 'Shantiniketan'". Among other similarities, C. F. Andrews noticed, was "the house of prayer" of Gandhi as one he saw at Shantiniketan for Rabindranath.

Gandhi returned from South Africa in 1915 with the intention of finally settling down in India. He reached Bombay on January 9, 1915. As one knows from Gandhi's Autobiography, that after a short visit to his home at Porbandar and some friends at Rajkot he went straight to Shantiniketan to meet his friends and members of the "Phoenix Ashram". Gandhi wrote in his Autobiography, "From Rajkot I proceeded to Shantiniketan. The teachers and students overwhelmed me with affection". As pointed out by Krishna Kripalani and many members of Shantiniketan of the time, Rabindranath was not personally present by that time at Shantiniketan to receive Gandhi. It was during Gandhi's second visit to Shantiniketan a month later, he met Rabindranath for the first time.

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.
As Gandhi has recorded in his Autobiography he mixed freely with the teachers and students and "engaged them in a discussion on self-help". Gandhi wrote that when he invited Rabindranath to join them, the poet explained to his students that the experiment contained the "key to Swaraj". Gandhi explained to the students that if they dispensed with the services of paid cooks and servants they would be able to manage their kitchen more efficiently and in a hygienic way. This would improve their physical and moral health and make them self-reliant.

The experiment was launched by Gandhi on March 10, 1915. Although the enthusiasm for the noble experiments was gradually lost among the students of Shantiniketan, the memory of this experiment started by Gandhi still survives in the observance of 10th March every year as "Gandhi day" at Shantiniketan, when all the paid servants and cooks enjoy a holiday and the students and teachers do all the works by themselves. "A typical example of recurrent symbolism in Indian tradition" as noted by Krishna Kripalani. One knows from Gandhi's Autobiography that he enjoyed his days at Shantiniketan but had to leave the place on hearing the death of Gokhale. Gandhi wrote, "I had intended to stay at Shantiniketan for some time, but fate willed otherwise. I had hardly been there a week when I received from Poona a telegram announcing Gokhale's death."
In this way a close friendship grew gradually among the two great minds that defied all occasional differences of opinion that usually draw the attention of common people of India even today.

In 1916, Rabindranath visited Japan and warned them in his lectures not to emulate the West in building power and increasing its lust for material wealth through the state-machine known as 'nation'. In September 1916, Tagore visited United States in connection with a lecture-tour from coast to coast. Tagore was not received warmly in USA as he was suspected to be associated with the so-called 'Gadar Party' in USA and the latter again suspected the Poet to be an agent of the British Government, who had been knighted by it in the previous year. In short, Rabindranath being deeply hurt and mortified by this episode terminated his contract for the lecture-tour prematurely and sailed for Japan in January 1917.

When Rabindranath kept himself busy in several lecture tours in foreign lands, Gandhi in the same time, launched his famous 'Satyagraha' movement in India in 1919, against the passing of the Rowlatt Act. In response to Gandhi's call for observing 'hartal' on March 30, 1919*, nation-wide spontaneous 'strikes' or 'hartals' were observed.

*Later Gandhi changed the date to April 6, 1919.
In some places like Nadiad, Bombay, Lahore, Amritsar and others, violent disturbances and disorders broke out and as a result Gandhi had to call off the movement. He was arrested by the British Government. In his Autobiography Gandhi acknowledged his mistake of using non-violence on mass-scale basis as "a Himalayan miscalculation"15.

As specifically pointed out by C. F. Andrews, "The Satyagraha campaign of 1919, after passing of the Rowlatt Act, together with Mr. Gandhi's noble withdrawal when violence broke out, won Rabindranath Tagore's heartfelt admiration from Shantiniketan"16. C. F. Andrews explained that Poet Rabindranath "had himself been through the same inner struggle and had been sickened at the news which came from Punjab" (the Zalianwala Bag episode on 13th April 1919). The Poet renounced his knighthood, as a gesture of indignant protest against the inhuman cruelties inflicted on the innocent civilians of Punjab. As it has already been said, C. F. Andrews described this act of Rabindranath, as his "first act of non-violence with a government which committed unpardonable wrongs"17.

C. F. Andrews emphatically pointed out as he wrote, "up to this point there had been hardly any divergence between the two spiritual leaders (Gandhi and Rabindranath). Gandhi's noble appeal of soul-force against brute-force had won Tagore's entire approval"18. Andrews was of opinion that one time

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.*
in 1919, and also in 1920, Rabindranath was fully prepared
to follow Gandhi and "throw in his lot with him if he
(Gandhi) gave the word". C. F. Andrews wrote that in one
of Rabindranath's letters to him the poet spoke of this
"in the clearest possible manner"19.

Not only in his letter to C. F. Andrews, but in a
letter directly addressed to Gandhi, on April 12, 1919,
Rabindranath clearly extended his heart-felt support to
Gandhi's spiritual leadership of the nation. The poet also
attached to the letter two of his own Bengali poems, which
he had translated into English. C. F. Andrews has quoted
the letter and the two poems in his writings on Gandhi
(Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas, pp. 252-54).

Some portions of the letter are worthy to be quoted
in this context. Paying a heartfelt tribute to Gandhi
Rabindranath wrote, "In this crisis you, as a great leader
of men have stood among us to proclaim your faith in the
ideal which you know to be that of India, the ideal which
is both against the cowardliness of hidden revenge and
the cowed submissiveness of the terror-stricken"*. In the
letter, Rabindranath wrote that people should know that
the 'moral conquest does not consist in success that failure
does not deprive it of its dignity and worth"*. He explained

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.
that those who believed in "spiritual life" should know that to stand against a wrong which had overwhelming material power behind it, was a victory itself, "it is the victory of the active faith in the ideal in the teeth of evident defeat". He added that the great gift of freedom could not "come to the people through charity". Indians should "win it" before they could "own it". India should willingly accept "her penance of suffering, the suffering which is the crown of the great". Armed with her utter faith in goodness "she must stand unabashed before the arrogance that scoffs at the power of spirit".

In this way, Rabindranath glorified Gandhi's ideal of utilizing "moral force" or "soul force" to be an effective instrument of redressing an evil based on physical force. The poet held the 'spirit' inherent in the ideal, as typically Indian - the great spirit of long suffering with a strong determination and courage of mind, to combat a 'physical force'. The poet wrote, "Such a fight is for heroes and not for men led by the impulses of the moment".

The letter shows clearly that Rabindranath wholeheartedly supported Gandhi during the Satyagraha movement in 1919. On Gandhi's personal invitation, Tagore

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.*
attended and addressed the Gujrat Literary Conference held at Ahmedabad on April 2, 1920. On the next day, Rabindranath met and addressed the members of Gandhi's "Sabarmati Ashram". Similarly, Gandhi on his way back from the special session of Indian National Congress held in Calcutta in 1920 visited Shantiniketan. The poet was not there to receive Gandhi, as he was in the United States of America on a lecturing tour at that time.

9.3 The controversy 1921-25

The special session of the National Congress was held at Calcutta from the 4th to the 6th of September in 1920 under the Presidentship of Lala Lajpat Rai. The famous resolution on Non-cooperation moved by Gandhi was carried by a majority of 1855 against 873. The Non-cooperation was aimed at rectifying the Punjab wrong and in support of 'Khilafat' cause. Surrender of titles, withdrawal of children from government aided and controlled schools and colleges, the gradual boycott of British courts by lawyers and litigants, boycott of the elections to the reformed legislatures in the country, and the boycott of foreign good formed the main items of the programme of non-cooperation.

Immediately after the special session was over, Gandhi undertook an extensive tour of the whole country with a view to popularising the programme. Finally, the resolution
was adopted in a revised form at the regular annual session of the congress in the last week of December 1920 at Nagpur.

The call for the boycott of law courts met with a fair response. The example of Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru was followed by a fairly large number of lawyers all over the country. The call for the boycott of schools and colleges at first created great enthusiasm among students. Despite the best effort of Nilratan Sarkar and Ashutosh Mukherjee, to discourage the students, nearly 30000 students joined the movement on the call of Chittaranjan Das. Quite a large number of students left their schools and colleges. Subhas Chandra Bose left government service in May 1921. Boycotting of foreign clothes led to huge bonfires of foreign clothes all over the country.

Although Rabindranath was not personally present in India at that time, he maintained a vigilant interest in the rapidly deteriorating political situation of his country, especially of Bengal, through his direct communications and personal letters with his friends in India. In this connection, the role of C. F. Andrews is worthy of mention because it was he who contributed by directly or indirectly (through his letters to the poet) to
formulate the particular stand which Rabindranath took up
against the Non-Cooperation Movement when he came back
to India from Europe, in July 1921, after an absence of
nearly fourteen months. The Non-Cooperation Movement
reached its highest peak in the early months of 1921 and in
the words of C. F. Andrews, "Then a violent spirit began to
enter the Movement from the side of the people, while at
the same time violence increased against them. There were
also acts of social tyranny against those who refused to
participate in the Movement. Just as Non-Cooperation
gathered power from numbers, so it gathered excitement".
C. F. Andrews described the "spirit" entirely 'new and
less spiritual' than what he had seen during the Passive
Resistance days in Natal in 1913-14 under Gandhi's
leadership.

When Rabindranath returned from Europe, at the very
height of the Non-Cooperation Movement and watched its
effect upon the people of his own province Bengal, as pointed
out by C. F. Andrews, "He was profoundly disappointed". He
felt that the "popular attitude had become one of wild
excitement rather than deep moral conviction".

Even from abroad, Rabindranath expressed his deep

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.
anxiety in his letters to C. F. Andrews dated March 2, 22 and 13th of 1921, about the rapidly deteriorating political situation of India, especially of Bengal. On his return to India, the poet came out openly and read a paper which he called "The Call of Truth" (Satyer Ahwan) at the Calcutta University Institute, in which he openly criticized Gandhi for exploiting the public sentiment as well as their excitement as a means of ensuring some quick political gain. He positively condemned the Non-Cooperation Movement as a symbol of himsa, as he thought it rested on hatred of others and on negative foundations. The poet also bitterly condemned the growing mood of lawlessness and indiscipline among public in burning foreign clothes. He argued while millions were dying in cold, it was inhuman to get amusement in burning clothes. Rabindranath observed, "I feel that the clothes to be burnt are not mine, but belong to those who most sorely need them . . . which might have gone to women whose nakedness is actually keeping them prisoners, unable to stir out of the privacy of their homes". The poet explained that the very principle of cultural seclusion from the West, was not good. India should receive the best in the Western culture because the "awakening of India is a part of the awakening of the world". He added, "From now onwards, any nation which takes an isolated view to its own country will run counter to the spirit of the New Age and know not peace".
Gandhi replied to Rabindranath's criticisms in his own inimitable way and tried to allay the misgivings and fears of Rabindranath regarding the Non-Cooperation Movement. Actually what Rabindranath feared, was "blind obedience" that might go in the name of outward liberty against the "real freedom of the soul". Gandhi welcomed Rabindranath as "The great sentinel**25 and pointed out as he wrote: "Our Non-Cooperation is neither with the English nor with the West. Our Non-Cooperation is with the system the English have established . . . . Our Non-Cooperation is a refusal to co-operate with the English administration on their own terms"**26. Regarding the boycott of foreign clothes, Gandhi observed, "In burning my foreign clothes I burn my shame. I must refuse to insult the naked by giving them clothes they do not need instead of giving them work which they sorely need"*. He emphasized that only the "spinning wheel" could provide employment to millions who were dying of hunger. He added, "True to his poetical instinct, the Poet lives for the morrow" but the reason of hunger of the millions at present was driving them to the "Spinning Wheel".

Rabindranath again criticized Gandhi in his famous article, "The Cult of the Charka" contributed to "The Modern Review", September 1925. In the article Rabindranath

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.
argued that any artificial pressure imposed on public mind could bring no permanent good. He explained that 'the cult of Charka' would only lead to excessive public excitement, chaos and confusion. Rabindranath wrote: "As often have my reason and conscience restrained me, lest I should be a party to the raising of the Charka to a higher place that in its due, thereby distracting attention from other more important factors in our task of all-round reconstruction". Or in short, as C. F. Andrews has pointed out that Rabindranath could not understand why Gandhi directed all his enthusiasm to the 'Spinning wheel only' as the Poet regarded 'Charka' as one of the other means of providing employment but not the 'sole' or the 'only' means, as Gandhi believed it to be, Gandhi replied to Tagore's criticism in his own characteristic way, in the article entitled, "The Poet and the Charka" contributed to Young India 5th November 1925. In the article, Gandhi explained that Rabindranath's criticisms had not displeased him. He wrote, "The frank criticism (of Rabindranath) pleases me. For our friendship becomes all the richer for our disagreements. Friends to be friends are not called upon to agree even on most points. Only disagreement must have no sharpness, much less bitterness, about them. And I gratefully admit that there is none about the Poet's criticism".

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.
Gandhi explained that the poet denounced what he imagined to be the excesses of the Charka cult. But to Gandhi, the path of economic and moral freedom lies solely in 'Charka' as it would provide employment not only to the millions of Indian villages, it would teach them also the lesson of 'self-help' and 'self-confidence'. The villagers would develop a sense of unity, integrity and learn the value of co-operation.

It was Gandhi who clearly understood that differences between him and Rabindranath were not fundamental - he observed, "Where the differences between us are not fundamental . . . there is nothing in the Poet's argument which I cannot endorse and still maintain my position regarding Charka"*27.

From the above statement it becomes clear that Gandhi always received in good spirit the valued criticisms on the part of his poet friend Rabindranath.

It was C. F. Andrews, who clearly pointed out how Rabindranath's prophetic warnings regarding the results of the famous Non-Cooperation Movement came to be true. Rabindranath warned Gandhi as it has already been said, in his famous articles "The call of Truth", of the evil effects of experimenting with the Non-Cooperation Movement.

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.
on a mass scale. Rabindranath predicted increasing violence, chaos and disorder to be the logical results of the venture undertaken by Gandhi. In fact, as pointed out by C. F. Andrews, the violent mob-riots, chaos, indiscipline and killing of the several innocent lives in Bombay in 1921 and Chauri Chaura (in 1920) led Gandhi ultimately to suspend unconditionally the Non-Cooperation Movement throughout India. The incidents at Bombay and Chauri Chaura, gave a death blow to Gandhi's enthusiasm for Non-cooperation Movement. As Andrews wrote, "Probably no greater shock has ever come in recent years to any national leader, in the midst of an heroic struggle than that from which Mahatma Gandhi suffered at Bombay in 1921. . . . . When the news about Chauri Chaura reached him, he called off immediately the civil disobedience in Bardoli".*28.

Gandhi himself narrated the incident as a "warning" from God. He explained that God warned him in 1919, when the Rowlatt Act agitation was started. He acknowledged his fault as a "Himalayan miscalculation" when riots broke out in several places of India. "The next time it was through the events of Bombay that God gave a terrific warning" - continues Gandhi, "I am sure that the nation

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.
gained by the stopping of civil Disobedience. India stood for truth and Non-violence by the suspension. Mere withdrawal of the movement on the part of Gandhi could not end the spirit of violence and indiscipline that was already at loose and in the words of Andrews, "and the hurricane broke out at last in all its fury of the communal religious dissension during the summer of 1924". As an act of penance, Gandhi undertook prolonged fast towards the end of September 1924, which lasted for twenty one days. C. F. Andrews wrote, "Of all the acts in Mahatma Gandhi's eventful life perhaps the most revealing is the 'Greatest Fast' at Delhi."

9.4 The period of true understanding and close friendship 1925-41

Gandhi's unique way of rectifying "a public offence" through fast, penance and suffering not only amazed Andrews but also Rabindranath, as he himself acknowledged the fact: In the article entitled "Gandhi the Man", contributed to the Sunday Statesman of 13th Feb., 1938, the Poet publicly confessed as he wrote:

"I blamed Mahatmaji for exploiting the irrational force of credulity in our people, which might have had a quick result in a superstructure, while sapping the foundations. Thus began my estimate of Mahatmaji, as the guide of our nations and it is fortunate for me that it..."
did not end there"* Feeling deeply amazed and moved by Gandhi's ideal of fighting an evil by inflicting sufferings on himself (through fast and penance) Rabindranath wrote in the same article:

"I have since learnt to understand him (Gandhi) as I would understand an artist not by the theories and fantasies of the creed he may profess, but by the expression in his practice which gives evidence to the uniqueness of his mind"*.

Even before this public confession, Rabindranath in his famous addresses and writings on Gandhi during the early thirties, upheld Gandhi's noble ideal of love and self-suffering of redressing an evil. In his famous message to the Society of Friends* in 1930, entitled "Moral Warfare", Gandhi's ideal was identified as "dharma yuddha"31 by Rabindranath. The poet observed, "We honour Mahatma Gandhi because he had brought this ideal (Dharma Yuddha or moral warfare) into the sphere of politics, and under his lead India is proving everyday how aggressive power pitifully fails when human nature in its wakeful majesty bears insult and pain without retaliating"*. On 1st December of the same year (1930) in a speech at a reception held under the auspices of the Discussion Guild and the Indian Society of

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.
America, Rabindranath magnified the "spiritual influence" of Gandhi on Indian people. He observed, "Not because of his (Gandhi's) political prudence, but for his spiritual influence the people believe in him, and they are ready to die for their faith".32.

In his touching address in Bengali, to the inmates of Shantiniketan on the day (20th September 1932), Gandhi entered on his "epic fast" in Yarvada Jail at Poona, the Poet observed, "The penance which Mahatmaji has taken upon himself is not a ritual, but a message to all India and the world. If we must make that message our own we should accept it in the right manner through a proper process of realization. The gift of sacrifice has to be received in a spirit of sacrifice".33.

It is interesting to note how much Gandhi counted on the valuable opinion of his "Gurudev" during the time of his mental trial and stress. Before undertaking the "epic fast" on 20th September 1932 against the British Prime Minister's verdict of communal award, Gandhi wrote a letter at 3 A.M. to Tagore asking his kind criticisms and blessing for the cause. Gandhi wrote, "Dear Gurudev, this is early morning 3'O'Clock of Tuesday. I enter the

*The underlines have been given to emphasize the words.*
fiery gate at noon. If you can bless the effort, I want it. You have been to me a true friend because you have been a candid friend often speaking your thoughts aloud. I had looked forward to a firm opinion from you one way or the other. . . . . . If your heart approves of the action, I want your blessing. It will sustain me*. I hope I have made myself clear". At 10 A.M. Gandhi added a postscript to the above, "Just as I was handling this to the Superintendent, I got your loving and magnificent wire. It will sustain me in the midst of the storm I am about to enter. I am sending you a wire. Thank you". The wire referred to was sent by Rabindranath on the previous day, congratulating Gandhi on his herioc stand. Gandhi wired him back. "Have always experienced God's mercy. Very early this morning I wrote seeking your blessing if you could approve action, and behold I have it in abundance in your message just received. Thank you".*34.

On 24th September Rabindranath, unable to keep himself away from his dear 'Mahatma', embarked on a strenous train journey from Calcutta for three days in his eightees only to be personally present beside the fasting Gandhi at the Yarvada Jail of Poona. Rabindranath has recorded in vivid detail his historic visit to Yarvada Jail in his

*The underlines have been given to emphasize the words.*
writings on Gandhi entitled "With Mahatmaji in Poona".

As one knows from Rabindranath's writings, Gandhi was overwhelmed with joy seeing Rabindranath. Rabindranath recorded, "Mahatmaji drew me near to himself, and kept me there for some time. 'What a joy to see you' he said". The Poet explained that Gandhi's condition was grave yet his inner vigour was undiminished, his personality was ever tireless. In a glowing tribute to Gandhi, Rabindranath wrote, "Transcending the extreme rigourous of his body this great manifestation of his invincible soul was before us moving us to profound admiration. I could hardly have fully realized how great is the strength of this frail man had I not come near to him like this". Gandhi broke his fast on the 26th of September 1932, Tagore being present by his bedside in jail. At the request of Gandhi, Rabindranath sang one of his Bengali hymns, "When the heart is hard and parched up, come with a burst of song" - before Gandhi broke his fast.

On 27th September, 1932, Rabindranath addressed a vast gathering at Sivaji Mandir, Poona. In the speech he appealed to his countrymen to follow Gandhi wholeheartedly and give united support to his fight to the
Tagore criticized Gandhi when he linked the Bihar earthquake (1932) with the sin of untouchability. As usual Gandhi replied to Tagore with utter modesty and fellowfeeling. Gandhi wrote, "The Bard of Shantiniketan is Gurudev for me.

. . . . . our mutual affection has never suffered by reason of our differences, and it cannot suffer by Gurudev's latest utterance on my linking the Bihar calamity with the sin of untouchability. He had a perfect right to utter his protest when he believed that I was in error. My profound regard for him would make me listen to him more readily than to any other critic".

Thus it was the right of a friend to the other, the unity of mind and heart, that drew the thinkers to a closer friendship and affection that defied even death and time.

In his old age (1936) when Rabindranath was in great financial difficulty for his University and was undertaking journeys with his ballet troupe from one city to other in

*The underlines have been given to emphasize the words.
India, Gandhi feeling much perturbed, sent Rabindranath a letter enclosing a bank draft for Rs.60,000, as an offering from "Your humble countrymen" and requested the Poet to sit back and relax. In 1940, Gandhi with his wife Kasturba visited Shantiniketan - his last meeting with his friend poet Rabindranath. Rabindranath received Gandhi warmly. Gandhi replied, "Even though . . . . I call this visit a pilgrimage . . . . I am no stranger here. I feel as if I have come to my home".*

The ailing poet feeling too much worried about the future of his institution, put a letter in Gandhi's hand, before he left Shantiniketan. In the letter Rabindranath requesting Gandhi wrote, "Accept this institution under your protection, giving it an assurance of permanance if you consider it to be a national asset". Gandhi replied in his unique way: "Who am I to take this institution under my protection? . . . . It carries God's protection, because it is the creation of an earnest soul"*. Rabindranath died on 7th August 1941, exactly one year after his last meeting with Gandhi.

Gandhi visited Shantiniketan again in 1945, for the last time of his life. Pyarelal in his Shantiniketan

*The underlines have been given to emphasize the words.
Pilgrimage has captured in living words the pathos of Gandhi during the visit. Gandhi's dear 'Gurudev' was not living any more to welcome him. Gandhi appealed to the members of Shantiniketan to live according to the best ideals and values upheld by Rabindranath throughout his life. Paying a glowing tribute to the immortal soul of the Poet, Gandhi observed, "It is my conviction arrived at after a long and laborious struggle that Gurudev as a person was much bigger than his works*, bigger even than this institution".

In his reply to a question put by one of the inmates of Shantiniketan regarding his differences with the poet Gandhi observed: "I started with a disposition to detect a conflict between Gurudev and myself but ended with a glorious discovery that there was none".*

*The underlines have been given to emphasize the words.
REFERENCES - IX


3. The point has been discussed in Chap. II of the thesis.


8. Ibid., p.213.

9. Ibid.


12. Ibid., and The Calcutta Municipal Gazette, Tagore Birthday Supplement, May 19, 1941.


16. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., p.252.

20. Ibid., p.255.
21. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Gandhi replied to Rabindranath through his article entitled "The Great Sentinel" contributed to *Young India* December 13, 1921.
26. Ibid.
27. *Young India*, Nov. 5, 1925.
29. Quoted in Ibid., p.284.
30. Ibid., p.303.
32. Ibid., p.64.
33. Ibid., p.37.
36. Ibid., p.47.
37. Ibid., pp.54-57.
38. Harijan, Feb. 16, 1934, pp.4-5.
40. Ibid., p.25.
Tributes to Gandhi from Rabindranath

Gandhi Maharaj

We who follow Gandhi Maharaja's lead
have one thing in common among us:
We never fill purses with spoils from the poor
nor bend our knees to the rich.

When they come bullying us
with raised fist and menacing stick,
We smile to them, and say:
your reddening stare
may startle babies out of sleep
but how frighten those who refuse to fear?

Our speeches are straight and simple,
no diplomatic turns to twist their meaning;
confounding penal code
they guide with perfect ease the pilgrims
to the border of jail.

And when these crowd the path to the prison gate
their stains of insult are washed clean
their age-long shackles drop to the dust,
and on their forehead are stamped
Gandhiji's blessings.

"The soul of the East has found a worthy symbol in Gandhi; for he is most eloquently proving that man is essentially a spiritual being, that he flourishes best in the realm of the moral and the spiritual*, and most positively perishes, body and soul, in the atmosphere of hatred and gunpowder smoke".

Rabindranath, Gandhi p.63.

'A Spiritual Idealist'

"Perhaps he (Gandhi) will not succeed. Perhaps he will fail as the Buddha failed and as Christ failed to wean man from their iniquities, but he will always be remembered as one who made his life a lesson for all ages to come".

From Rabindranath's "Gandhi the Man", contributed to the Sunday Statesman 13th February 1938.

'End and Means'

"Politicians plume themselves on being practical

*The underlines have been given to emphasize the words.
and do not hesitate to ally themselves with the forces of evil, if they think that evil will accomplish their end. But tactics of this kind will not pass the audit of the Dispenser of our fortunes; so while we may admire their cleverness, we cannot revere them. Our reverence goes out to the Mahatma whose striving has ever been for truth, who, to the great good fortune of our country at this time of its entry into the New Age, has never, for the sake of immediate results, advised or condoned any departure from the standard of universal morality".

From Rabindranath's address at Santiniketan on Gandhi's birthday, 2nd October 1937.

The Visva-Bharati Quarterly, Nov. 1937.

Gandhi's letter to Rabindranath, on the eve of his historic fast at Yarvada Jail of Poona in 1932 -

Dear Gurudev,

This is early morning 3 O'clock of Tuesday. I enter the fiery gate at noon if you can bless the effort, I want it. You have been to me a true friend because you have been a candid friend often speaking your thoughts aloud. I had looked forward to a firm opinion from you one way to other. But you have refused to criticise. Though it can now only be during my fast, I will yet prize your criticism, if your heart condemns my action. I am not too
proud to make an open confession of my blunder, whatever the cost of the confession, if I find myself in error. If your heart approves of the action I want your blessing. It will sustain me. I hope I have made myself clear. My love.

20.9.32


10.30 A.M.

Just as I was handing this to the Superintendent I got your loving and magnificent wire. It will sustain me in the midst of the storm I am about to enter. I am sending you a wire.

Thank you.

M. K. G.

Ibid.

Rabindranath's telegram to Gandhi, before the latter undertook the epic fast at Poona.

"It is well worth sacrificing precious life for the sake of India's unity and her social integrity. Though we cannot anticipate what effect it may have upon our rulers who may not understand its immense importance for our people, we feel certain that the supreme appeal of such
self-offering to the conscience of our own countrymen will not be in vain. I fervently hope that we will not callously allow such national tragedy to reach its extreme length. Our sorrowing hearts will follow your sublime penance with reverence and love".

19-9-32.


Gandhi's telegram to Rabindranath on 20-9-32.

"Have always experienced God's mercy. Very early this morning I wrote seeking your blessing if you could approve action, and behold I have it in abundance in your message just received. Thank you."

20-9-32.


Amiya Chakravarty's telegram to Mahadev Desai.

"Gurudev egar start Poona if Mahatmaji has no objection. Wire health and if compromise reached."

29-9-32.

Gandhi's telegram to Rabindranath.

"Have read your loving message to Mahadev also Amiya's. You have put fresh heart in me. Do indeed come
if your health permits. Mahadev will send you daily wires. Talks about settlement still proceeding. Love. Will wire again if necessary."


Rabindranath's letter to Gandhi after his last meeting with the poet in 1940 -

Dear Mahatmaji,

You have just had a bird's eye view this morning of our Visva-Bharati centre of activities. I do not know what estimate you have formed of its merit. You know that though this institution is national in its immediate aspect it is international in its spirit, offering according to the best of its means India's hospitality of culture to the rest of the world. At one of its critical moments you have saved it from an utter break-down and helped it to its legs. We are ever thankful to you for this act of friendliness.

And, now before you take your leave of Santiniketan I make my fervent appeal to you. Accept this institution under your protection, giving it an assurance of permanance if you consider it to be a national asset. Visva-Bharati is like a vessel which is carrying the cargo of my life's best treasure, and I hope it may claim special
The text of Gandhi's reply to Rabindranath's letter -

Dear Gurudev,

The touching note that you put into my hands as we parted has gone straight into my heart. Of course Visva-Bharati is a national institution. It is undoubtedly also international. You may depend upon my doing all I can in the common endeavour to assure its permanance. I look to you to keep your promise to sleep religiously for about an hour during the day.

Though I have always regarded Santiniketan as my second home, this visit has brought me nearer to it than ever before.

With reverence and love,

Yours,

M. K. Gandhi

Visva-Bharati News, April, 1940.