

Tagore admired Gandhi but also differed sharply: Amartya Sen

H S Rao London, May 7 (PTI)

Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore admired Mahatma Gandhi immensely but differed with him sharply when he departed from adequate reasoning, well-known Indian economist Amartya Sen has said. "Perhaps, the central issues that moved Tagore most are the importance of open minded reasoning and celebration of human freedom," Sen said while launching the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Tagore here last night.

Delivering a lecture at the British Museum on 'What difference does Tagore make', Prof Sen said Tagore, who gave Gandhi the title of Mahatma, admired the apostle of non-violence immensely. "Tagore admired Mahatma Gandhi immensely and expressed his admiration for his leadership time and again, but sharply differed with him when Gandhi was departing from adequate reasoning," Sen underlined. He cited an earthquake in Bihar in 1934, which killed many people. He quoted Gandhi as saying that this was "a divine chastisement sent by God for our sins, the sin of untouchability." Tagore was as much concerned about the fight against untouchability, Sen said, but reacting to Gandhi's remark, asserted: "It is all the more unfortunate because this kind of an unscientific view of phenomena are accepted by a large segment of our countrymen."

Sen, who won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1998, said Tagore also rejected Gandhi's "alternative economic", and described his advocacy of spinning the charka as "antiquated". The 77-year-old scholar further illustrated that Tagore disagreed with Gandhi's prescription of abstinence as a method of birth control. Tagore believed in family planning. The two differed sharply on the role of modern medicines, Sen said. "Many of these issues remain deeply relevant even today," he said. At the outset, Sen said the author of Gitanjali has transformed the Bengali language. "Tagore has been able to reshape and reconstruct modern Bengali." He said "Tagore's impact on Bengali prose was, perhaps, less than the Bengali poetry." Perhaps, the central issues that moved Tagore most are the importance of open minded reasoning and celebration of human freedom. This places Tagore in somewhat distinct category from his compatriots, said Sen, who was awarded the Bharat Ratna in 1999.

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