

# **GANDHI AND THE COMMUNAL PROBLEM: SOME ASPECTS**

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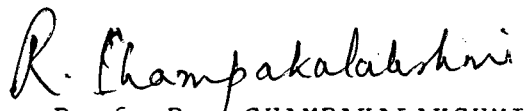
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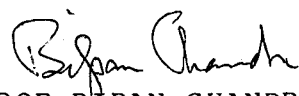
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DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled "GANDHI AND THE COMMUNAL PROBLEM : SOME ASPECTS" submitted by AVIJIT GHOSH is in partial fulfilment of requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University and is his own work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
Prof. R. CHAMPAKALAKSHMI  
Chairperson

  
PROF. BIPAN CHANDRA  
Supervisor

### Acknowledgements

It happened one angry autumn night when I was barely out of school. I remember reading B.R. Nanda's Mahatma Gandhi deep into the morning. It was my reintroduction to the man behind a face I was told was that of "The Father of the Nation" and had seen hanging in cheap photoframes in every government office since my childhood.

I was also troubled by the book. Troubled by the man's failure to achieve what he most wanted : Hindu-Muslim unity, words that were the breath of his being in his treasured, tortuous quest.

The choice, therefore, for my dissertation was natural, my private chance of knowing what I always wanted to.

This, however, would not have been possible but for my guide, Prof. Bipan Chandra, from whom I not only learnt history but some of the finest human values as well.

I also acknowledge my debt to Rachana by acknowledging that I am indebted to her.

To my friends : Rajesh, Gautam, Sanjay, Ranjan, Sunil Srivastava, Amit and Prema - I say 'Thank you ' for nothing.

To the NMML and JNU library staff my gratitude for their co-operation.

And to Anil, Krishan and Yashpal who made this happen with their hands, my hand of friendship.

20/07/91

AVIJIT GHOSH

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# Introduction

## Introduction

To the perceptive student, Indian history presents a pageant of faiths and cultures striving for unison through the synthesis of varying elements into a harmonious whole. This process of striving for unity, implicit in the pattern of Indian history, received a set-back at a critical time.

The struggle for freedom from the political, social, economic and cultural subjugation of the British required that there should be in the minds of Indians of all regions and of all creeds and communities, the consciousness of being one people with a common culture and a common cause. In other words, it was a long winding struggle of 'welding India into a nation'.

This, however, was a greatly arduous task; and the process of nation-in-the making "highly differential". "The formation of new social classes and strata and the impact of imperialism on the people also occurred in a differential manner leading to the emergence of a varied relationship between imperialism and the different sections of the Indian society. This resulted in the extremely uneven development, both in time and space, of national and anti-imperialist consciousness among different social classes and strata as

well as people belonging to different religions, castes, linguistic areas etc."<sup>1</sup>

This was to show in various ways. The growing unification of the country in various aspects, the basic contradiction between colonialism and the Indian people becoming more pronounced, the rise of modern politics in the late 19th century, the formation of modern social classes and strata were some of them.

The twain phenomena that emerged from this momentous cauldron of Indian history were the forces of nationalism and communalism.

Therefore, both nationalism and communalism were recent phenomena, i.e., modern phenomena. Both were the products of social change, of the same historical process. In fact, as pointed out in an important work on communalism, the development and growth of communalism is "integrally connected with the emergence of Indian nationalism".<sup>2</sup>

There was, however, one crucial difference.

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1. Bipan Chandra, Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India, New Delhi, 1979, p.253.
  2. Prabha Dixit, Communalism: A Struggle for Power, New Delhi, 1974, p.1.



"Nationalism in the colonial situation and as the consciousness of the new identity of the Indian people or nation was the valid or legitimate consciousness of the objective reality, i.e., of the developing identity in real life of the common interests of the Indian people for modern social, economic, political and cultural developments, and in particular, against the common enemy, foreign imperialism, and the need to unite against it in struggle. Nationalism represented the struggle for national liberation from the colonial state and for the formation of an independent state. It was historically valid at the moment as it provided a real solution to a real problem - national liberation against colonial domination".<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, communalism was the false consciousness of the historical process of the last 150 years because no real conflict between the interests of Hindus and Muslims existed.<sup>4</sup> Emerging in the late decades of the 19th century, it gradually ensconced itself as an ideology diametrically opposed to nationalism. In reality, it also made itself the numero uno hurdle to the national movement.

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3. Bipan Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, New Delhi, 1984, pp.21-2.

4. For details, see Ibid., pp.18-33.

Historians of varying shades from Beni Prasad to Bipan Chandra have contributed in their own way to develop a proper perspective on the communal problem.

Beni Prasad, in his important work<sup>5</sup> published in the forties, makes a detailed diagnosis of the problem. He sees the problem primarily in terms of "attitude", "culture" and "politics"<sup>6</sup> and does not ascribe to the British "the whole responsibility for the creation"<sup>7</sup> of the problem. He, therefore, highlights both the need for cultural integration (common education, etc.) and political settlement concluding that the problem was by no means insoluble and more importantly that "there is a basic identity of economic interests among all the communities."<sup>8</sup>

The following year (1942) witnessed another important work on the subject by Ashok Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan.<sup>9</sup> The focus of their argument was on the role played by the

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5. Beni Prasad, Hindu - Muslim Question, Allahabad, 1941.

6. Ibid., p.95.

7. Ibid., p.163.

8. Ibid., p.169.

9. Ashok Mehta, Achyut Patwardhan, The Communal triangle in India, Allahabad, 1942.

British government. They wrote: "to treat the communal problem merely as a question of Hindu-Muslim adjustment is to view it out of focus, as the third party, the British government, has played a great and often a decisive part in Hindu-Muslim relations."<sup>10</sup>

W.C. Smith's "Modern Islam in India : A social Analysis"<sup>11</sup> was the first detailed and systematic examination of the communal problem in Marxian terms. Smith was the first to see communalism as a "dynamic phenomenon". "We say 'communalism has been' rather than 'communalism', because no definition of what communalism is could remain long valid... the thing defined changes and develops".<sup>12</sup>

It was he who repeatedly demonstrated "how communal categories, which were readily used for describing aspects in Indian society, appeared absurd when used to describe the same aspect in the west."<sup>13</sup>

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10. Ibid., p.7.

11. W.C. Smith, Modern Islam in India, London, 1946.

12. Ibid., p.157.

13. Aditya Mukherjee, 'Colonialism and Communalism', in (ed.), Sarvapalli Gopal, Anatomy of a confrontation, New Delhi, 1991. pp.164-65.

Prabha Dixit's work in the seventies<sup>14</sup> viewed communalism as "a political doctrine which makes use of religio-cultural differences to achieve political ends".<sup>15</sup> It further said that "only when a deliberate choice is made by a community to initiate political demands on the basis of religio-cultural differences that communal awareness turns into communalism in the form of a political doctrine".<sup>16</sup> She also shows how the upper sections of both the communities, attempt to combat the modern trends of nationalism and democracy through the use of communal ideology to retain their pre-eminence within their own community.

Asgar Ali Engineer has attempted to theorise communalism at the macro-level in his important book, Communalism and Communal Violence in India.<sup>17</sup> The book has focussed on the "class nature of the society on the one hand, and the under development of the economy and scarcity of resources on the other."<sup>18</sup> This, according to him leads

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14. Prabha Dixit, op.cit.

15. Ibid., p. 1.

16. Ibid.

17. Asgar Ali Engineer, Communalism and Communal Violence in India, (an analytical approach to Hindu - Muslim conflict), New Delhi, 1989.

18. Ibid., pp.4-5.

to a non-development of "an inter-communal cohesive class structure." In such a situation, a community is mobilised mainly by the upper class of the lesser advanced community on communal lines. Engineer also highlights the urban petty bourgeois base of the phenomenon and further links it to the dynamics of social change in the society. The deep insecurity among those who are adversely affected by such social change often makes them vulnerable to communal ideology or politics. A significant aspect of Engineer's work is his treatment of various facets of contemporary communalism. For instance, assertion of religio-cultural identity leading to communal violence as exemplified by the Nellie massacre in Assam in 1980's.

Of late, Bipan Chandra's Communalism in Modern India<sup>19</sup> has been much subject to scholarly attention. The author perceives communalism as an ideology and the need to counter it. He examines the complex integration of communal ideology and politics with colonialism and colonial policy. The social roots of communalism, the role of ideological, social and cultural elements, the role of colonial state etc., have also been dealt with clarity and in detail. He also attempts to focus on the failure of the national

19. Bipan Chandra, op.cit., 1984.

movement to deal effectively with the communal problem despite its commitment to secularism.

Gyanendra Pandey<sup>20</sup> tries to make a historiographical departure from all earlier studies by trying to get away "from the imperialism of categories." He not only rejects the colonial view<sup>21</sup> but also the nationalist view.<sup>22</sup> He also differs with the continuous search for 'causes' and for 'rationality' in economic and political terms by conservatives, liberal and leftist scholars alike and objects to their taking "the history out of the movements".<sup>23</sup>

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20. Gyanendra Pandey, Construction of communalism in colonial North India, New Delhi, 1990.

21. "The phenomenon of communalism in India is age old; it flows from the essential character of the peoples of India; and it affects more or less the whole population, with only a few enlightened, liberal western-educated men and women being truly free from the communal spirit". Ibid., p.11.

22. Which recognizes "communalism as a problem of recent origins, as the outcome basically of economic and political inequality and conflict, and as the handiwork of a handful of self-interested elite groups (colonial and native) with the mass of the people being essentially secular". Ibid.

23. Ibid., p.21.

He instead contends that "communalism is a form of colonial knowledge. The concept standing for the puerile and the primitive - all that colonialism in its own reckoning, was not."<sup>24</sup> His basic understanding is also that "categories of thought and movement of people like 'communalism', 'nationalism' are also made... out of shared as well as contested experiences and common as well as naturally contradictory visions of struggle."<sup>25</sup>

The book is well researched no doubt, but it hardly makes the historiographical departure it claims to make. Pandey is often unsure and vague in his own explanation of the problem. As such, he often tries to steer clear from taking open positions.

Besides these very important books on the problem, several books have also been written on Muslim political history.<sup>26</sup> They trace the Muslim movements, Muslim political and social thought, Muslim separatism etc.

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24. Ibid., p.6.

25. Ibid., p.22.

26.a. Ram Gopal, Indian Muslim: A political history (1857-1947), Bombay, 1959.

b.K.K. Aziz, The Making of Pakistan : A Study in Nationalism London, 1967.

Contd/...

Similarly, there exists a limited corpus on Hindu communalism.<sup>27</sup>

A detailed discussion of these works would be out of place here because the object of this dissertation is not to analyse Hindu-Muslim relations but some aspect of Gandhi's understanding of the problem.

Compared to the research work on the Hindu-Muslim problem as such, little of distinction has been done on

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(...Cont.)

- c. A.H. Albiruni, Makers of Pakistan and Modern Muslim India, Lahore, 1950.
- d. Ahmed Aziz, Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, London, 1967.
- e. Peter Hardy, The Muslims of British India, Cambridge, 1972.
- f. H. Malik, Modern Nationalism in India and Pakistan, Washington, 1963.
- g. Francis Robinson, Separatism among Indian Muslims, Cambridge, 1975.
- h. Moin Shakir, Khilafat to Partition, New Delhi, 1970.
- i. Mushirul Hasan, Nationalism and Communal Politics in India (1916-28), New Delhi, 1979.
- 27a. Indra Prakash, A review of the history and work of the Hindu Sangathan Movement, 2nd ed, Delhi, 1952.
- b. Richard Gordon, "The Hindu Mahasabha and the INC (1915-26)", Modern Asian Studies, Vol.4, 1975.



Gandhi's attitude towards the Hindu-Muslim problem, though innumerable studies<sup>28</sup> on his various political and social viewpoints have come out.

S. Abid Husain in his book entitled, "Gandhiji and communal unity", has tried to show that Gandhi's interest and effort for Hindu-Muslim unity was "not political but religious"<sup>29</sup>. It was his fundamental religious ideas which "led him to regard the love and service of the Muslim community in India as an essential part of his religious duty as a Hindu".<sup>30</sup>

Whereas it is true that Gandhiji's approach towards communal unity was consistent with his overall viewpoint of life, it would be erroneous to totally overlook the political aspect of Gandhi's approach.

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28a. B.R. Nanda, Mahatma Gandhi, A Biography, Bombay, 1965.

b. B. Bhattacharya, Evolution of the Political Philosophy of Gandhi, Calcutta, 1969.

c. Judith Brown, Gandhi: A Prisoner of Hope, London, 1990.

29. S. Abid Husain, Gandhiji and Communal Unity, New Delhi, 1969, p.20.

30. Ibid.

Of the numerous articles published on various aspects of Gandhian thought on the eve of Gandhi centenary, one noteworthy article on Gandhi's perception of the Hindu-Muslim problem was by A.B. Shah.<sup>31</sup> The author criticizes the Gandhian approach which he calls the "Ram-Rahim" approach. It was, according to him, bound to fail because "it postulated the peaceful co-existence of Hindus and Muslims without any fundamental modification in their attitude to religion".<sup>32</sup>

S.R. Bakshi's work "Gandhi and Hindu-Muslim unity"<sup>33</sup> is basically a scissor and paste job. It provides little analysis or insight to warrant a comment.

Gargi Chakravarti<sup>34</sup> has attempted to bring out the 'attitudinal limitations' of Gandhi; how his very approach to the Hindu-Muslim problem with its interplay of religion and politics, the non-exponence of secular nationalism,

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31. A.B. Shah, "Gandhi, Communalism and National Unity" in (ed.) S.C. Biswas, Gandhi: Theory and Practice: Social Impact and Contemporary Relevance, Simla, 1969.

32. Ibid., p.170.

33. S.R. Bakshi, Gandhi and Hindu-Muslim Unity, New Delhi, 1987.

34. Gargi Chakravarti, Gandhi: A challenge to communalism (1919-29), New Delhi, 1987.

became a hurdle in his quest for Hindu-Muslim unity. She labels his policy towards the problem as "a bundle of contradiction" but is unable to bring out clearly why Gandhi, despite his Hindu Mahasabha leanings (during 1924-26) as she puts it, remained a consistent fighter against communal hatred (as she herself admits) till the very end. The limited time span of her work (1919-29) makes it further difficult to draw any broad generalisations regarding Gandhi's perception of the problem as a whole.

Another important work<sup>35</sup> by Khan Mohd. Afaque attributes Gandhi's failure to resolve the Hindu-Muslim conflict to certain "inherent weaknesses" in his methods. The author opines that "Muslims separatism was essentially a strategy to maintain and protect the privileged position occupied by the Muslim elite against the threat being posed by the emerging Hindu middle class."<sup>36</sup> Therefore, Gandhi had only two alternatives before him. Either to recognise their political and economic interests or rally the common Muslim masses on issues of common economic interests along with Hindus. His failure to do either, resulted in the failure of

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35. Khan Mohd. Afaque, Gandhian approach to communal harmony, New Delhi, 1986.

36. Ibid., p.84.

his efforts to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity.

In a recently published monograph, Antony Thomas has tried to show that Gandhi's failure to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity was mainly due to the "constraints imposed by the basic strategy of pressure-compromise-pressure followed by the anti-imperialist struggle".<sup>37</sup> While agreeing with the above statement that there were indeed certain constraints due to the very nature of the movement, one would disagree that its very nature prevented Gandhiji from bringing about such a unity.

This dissertation would argue that Gandhi lacked a proper understanding of the problem in the early 20's. This conditioned his approach towards the problem which was essentially faulty.

In the later 30's and 40's , he developed a more varied understanding of the problem. However by now the forces of communalism had developed far more strength than could be countered by him. The tragedy lay in the fact that while he recognised the importance of mass contacts theoretically, he was unable to evolve a mechanism to make it happen.

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37. Antony Thomas, Mahatma Gandhi and the Communal Problem, New Delhi, 1983, p.3.

It would be imperative to point out at the very outset that Gandhi's understanding of the various aspects of Hindu-Muslim problem and subsequently his methodology to solve it were essentially linked to his broader political, social and philosophical perspective. In the context of this dissertation, therefore, it would be necessary to put across the bare bones of his fundamental ideas like satyagraha and ahimsa because they were the very means Gandhi used to try to attain Hindu-Muslim unity.<sup>38</sup> As he wrote : "I have only one way of attaining independence as well as Hindu-Muslim unity, and that is satyagraha."<sup>39</sup>

To Gandhi, the means were as important as the ends one sought to achieve. His theory of satyagraha was based on the pursuit and attainment of Truth. What then was Truth to him? Truth to him was God and as he said, "Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious have to be guided by the ultimate aim

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38. Gandhi studiously avoided using the terms communal unity and communal tension in his speeches and writings, with a few rare exceptions. He himself explained, "I use that (Hindu-Muslim) expression deliberately instead of 'communal'-for if we find this, the other will follow as a matter of course". M.K. Gandhi, collected works, Vol. LXVII, p.9.

39. Ibid., Vol. LXVI, pp.424-25.

of the vision of God... the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all".<sup>40</sup>

Ahimsa was the means he used to attain this Truth. Traditionally, ahimsa meant non-injury and non-killing. To Gandhi, "non-injury or non-killing did not by itself constitute ahimsa, it was such only when born out of compassion."<sup>41</sup> The key word, therefore, was compassion. "Where there is no compassion, there is no ahimsa. The test of ahimsa is compassion".<sup>42</sup>

Ahimsa both in its active and passive sense was grounded in love. In its passive sense, it meant refraining from causing harm and destruction to others. In its active sense, it meant promoting their well being. Gandhi concluded that ahimsa was really the same as love.<sup>43</sup>

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40. Ibid., Vol. LXIII, p.240.

41. Bhikhu Parekh, Colonialism, Tradition and Reform, New Delhi, 1989, p.113.

42. Raghavan Iyer, The moral and political writings of Mahatma Gandhi (Vol. II), Oxford, 1987, p.225.

43. Bhikhu Parekh, op.cit., p.113.

In practice, he held on to ahimsa believing it "as the one means universally valid and applicable because it would never distort the end. It was in a sense the goal itself... it was truth acting through the courageous man who was prepared to follow it to his own cost".<sup>44</sup>

It was in the context of his pursuit for Hindu-Muslim unity that his theory of ahimsa was to be put to the severest test. Despite such heavy odds, Gandhi took upon himself the arduously intricate task of reviving "the perennial spirit of Indian unity" at a crucial moment of Indian history.

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This dissertation consists of three chapters in the main with an introduction and a brief conclusion.

In the first chapter, Gandhi's usage of religion, religious texts, religious symbols is analysed in the context of the communal problem. One would argue that despite Gandhi's usage of such terminology his message was essentially secular and humanistic.

The second chapter deals with Gandhi's understanding of the causation of communal riots, his reactions to them, the means and methodology he advocates to counter them and,

44. Judith Brown, op.cit., p.84.

lastly, his understanding of the role of the colonial state in these riots. Effort is made to show how and why Gandhi, while often successful in controlling a conflict situation for a short time, failed to evolve a suitable mechanism to efface the malady of riots.

The third chapter entitled "Gandhi's understanding of the communal problem" would attempt to trace the evolution of Gandhi's perception of the problem during his active political years in India (1917-48). It would analyse Gandhi's understanding of the problem, his approach towards the problem, the evolution of his perceptions, the new insights, the shifting positions over the years on important questions like his definition of communalism, the reasons behind its causation, the role of the colonial state in creating or sustaining it. On the basis of these questions we would endeavour to analyse the reasons for his inability to bring about a solution to the problem.

The conclusion sums up the main arguments of all the chapters and puts forward the broad tentative, generalisations on the basis of the research done.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1

### GANDHI, RELIGION AND THE HINDU MUSLIM PROBLEM

It is essential to have a proper understanding of Gandhi's perception of religion because it is directly linked to his understanding of the communal problem. At least for the earlier part of 1920's, Gandhi thought that the Hindu - Muslim problem centred primarily around the issue of religious intolerance.<sup>1</sup> Although in a separate chapter we will examine in much greater detail how his understanding of the communal problem evolves and matures over the decades with significant shifts from his earlier position, religion continued to play a role in this matter. A statement given as late as 1947 amplifies this :

"Muslims will not serve Islam if they annihilate the Hindus; rather they would thereby destroy Islam. And if the Hindus believe that they would be able to annihilate Islam it means that they would be annihilating Hindu dharma."<sup>2</sup>

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1. An examination of Gandhi's own writings in the 1920's substantiates this view. During this period, Gandhi considered issues like cow-slaughter and music before mosque as the main causes of Hindu Muslim problem. For instances he says, "save for the cow, the Hindus have no ground for quarrel with Musalmans". Young India, May 11, 1921.

2. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. LXXVI, p.45.

Thus religion, religious terminology, religious imagery all remained parts of the digits of his expression.

However, Gandhi's usage and understanding of religion was essentially interpretative rather than that of following the written word. It was this that made him say : "My Hinduism is not sectarian. It includes all that I know to be best in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism."<sup>3</sup>

Judith Brown captures this spirit of Gandhi's contention remarkably in her latest book, Gandhi : A Prisoner of Hope. She writes, "Although the Hindu tradition remained Gandhi's spiritual home, he maintained from this early stage in his life that true religion was beyond all religions."<sup>4</sup>

Gandhi's own conception of what religion actually was differed fundamentally from the layman's accepted views of religion. Despite being a man of religion, governed by an unshakeable faith in God, he remained unconventional in his approach towards it.

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3. Harijan, April 30, 1938 quoted in M.K. Gandhi, (ed.) U.R. Rao, The Way to Communal Harmony, Ahmedabad, p.44.

4. Judith Brown, Gandhi : A Prisoner of Hope, London, 1991. p.81.

This chapter will concentrate primarily on the issues Gandhi perceived to be religious in nature perpetuating the communal problem. How did Gandhi apply religion to understand it? How did he illustrate his arguments with religious symbols to counter a conflict situation. On the basis of its findings, it would also attempt an explanation as to why Gandhi used religion to solve the Hindu-Muslim problems and bring about Hindu-Muslim amity.

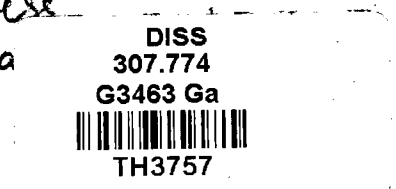
To make a beginning, one would briefly examine Gandhi's ideas on religion.

The two basic principles of Gandhi's religious faith have been succinctly summed up by Abid Hussain.<sup>5</sup> They are, according to him,

- (a) Belief in an indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything and sustains the universe. He calls it "Truth", which he regards to be identical with God.
- (b) Belief in Love or Ahimsa as the best way to the realisation of Truth.<sup>6</sup>

5. See S. Abid Hussain, Gandhiji and Communal Unity, New Delhi, 1969.

6. For a detailed analysis of these terms see - Introduction.



In brief, the supreme religious end for Gandhi could be stated as the realisation of Truth or God and the supreme religious duty, the only way of realising Truth, is love-which means affection for and service of all humanity.

Therefore, Gandhi's concept of religion had little in common with what commonly passes for organized religion, i.e., dogmas, rituals etc. According to him, "man's ultimate aim is the realization of God and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God."<sup>7</sup> It did not matter "if people (took) different roads, so long as they (reached) the same goal."<sup>8</sup> As such religious distinctions were not to be seen as hurdles in the way of the people's common destiny.

And that, "to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion."<sup>9</sup>. With this universalist religious philosophy, he refused to accept that the religious differences of the Hindus and the Muslims made them two separate nations which could not be united on issues vital to social, economic, political life in India.

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7. N.K. Bose, Selections from Gandhi, Ahmedabad, 1957, p.26.

8. Ibid. p.224.

9. Harijan, May 11, 1947.

As stated earlier, since Gandhi thought that the Hindu-Muslim problem was essentially religious, in his framework, therefore, the solution would also come through religion.

This was to be done first by approaching the masses with one's own idea of the function or purpose of religion. "Religions ... are given to mankind so as to accelerate the process of realization of fundamental unity."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, "if religion is allowed to be, as it is, a personal concern and a matter between God and man, there are many dominating common factors between the two (Hindus and Muslims) which will compel common life and common action. Religions are not for separating men from one another, they are meant to bind them."<sup>11</sup>

Gandhi, therefore, clearly believed in the unifying power of religion. It was this power which he sought to awaken among the masses. His methodology to deal with this aspect lay in making the two communities realise that there is little religious reason to be in a state of conflict. "There is nothing in either religion (Hinduism or Islam) to keep the two (Hindus and Muslims) apart."<sup>12</sup>

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10. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. XXVIII, p.93.

11. Harijan, June, 1940 quoted in (ed.) U.R.Rao, op.cit., Ahmedabad, 1963, p.38.

12. M.K. Gandhi, quoted in Collected Works, Vol. XX, p.90.

It also lay in promoting tolerance for the other religion. "The key to the solution of the tangle lies in everyone following the best in his own religion and entertaining equal regard for the other religions and their followers."<sup>13</sup>

It was to drive such viewpoints home that he used quotes, anecdotes and imagery from the life and sayings of saints, preachers and holy books people knew and identified with to illustrate his own point. For instance, he wrote : "Guru Nanak says that God may be called by the name of Allah, Rahim and so on. The name does not matter if He is enshrined in our hearts. Guru Nanak's efforts like those of Kabir, had been directed towards synthesizing the various religions."<sup>14</sup>

Likewise : "I can detect no inconsistency in declaring that I can, without in any way whatsoever impairing the dignity of Hinduism pay equal homage to the best of Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism ... Tulasidas has summed it up in one doha: "The root of religion is embedded in mercy, where egotism is rooted in love of the body.

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13. Harijan, Jan 4, 1948, quoted in (ed.) U.R. Rao, op.cit p.40.

14. Harijan, Oct.5, 1947, quoted in Ibid., p.40.

Tulasi says that mercy should never be abandoned, even though the body perishes."<sup>15</sup>

The accent therefore was on bringing out the nobler qualities of the common man through easily digestible illustrations from popular religious texts and beliefs.

Hence, to understand the essence of Islam and also not to be dependent on other person's interpretation of Islam, he himself read the Koran and other books on the Prophet.<sup>16</sup> About the Prophet, he wrote in his Autobiography: "I read Washington Irving's Life of Mohammed and his successor and Carlyle's panegyric on the Prophet. These books raised Muhammed in my estimation."<sup>17</sup>

Such studies and others<sup>18</sup> helped him immensely in his

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15. Harijan, Nov.30, 1947, quoted in Ibid., p.46.

16. Mahatma Gandhi, Autobiography, p.137. Of his reading of the Quran he goes so far as to say that 'if he is not to disrespect Quran-e-Shareef he must look up to it with the eye of a Muslim ....", Margaret Chatterjee, Gandhi's religious thought, Hong Kong, 1983, p. 124.

17. Autobiography, p.159.

18. Ibid, p.137, he writes, "I purchased Sale's translation of the Koran and began reading it. I also obtained other books on Islam.



endeavours to strengthen his arguments on various issues.<sup>19</sup> In his handling of live wire issues of the times like cow-protection and music before mosques such groundwork proved to be an immense help to him.

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Gandhi believed that cow-slaughter was "the first constant cause of friction"<sup>20</sup> between the two communities. Also that, "save for the cow, the Hindus have no ground for quarrel with the Musalmans."<sup>21</sup>

Gandhi himself believed that cow protection was "one concrete belief common to all Hindus".<sup>22</sup>

He even gave it philosophic overtones when he further wrote that "... cow worship means to me worship of innocence... cow-protection means the protection of the

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19. Ibid., p.497, On Islam and non-violence he writes, "I had long discussion on the subject with the late Maulana Abdul Bari and the other ulemas, specially with regard to the extent to which a Musalman could observe the rule of non-violence. In the end, they agreed that Islam did not forbid its followers from following non-violence as a policy..."

20. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. XXIV, p.150.

21. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. XX, p.90.

22. Ibid. p.194.

weak and the helpless... cow-protection means brotherhood between man and beast".<sup>23</sup> More importantly, he wrote that "the cow to me means the entire sub-human world. Man, through the cow, is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives..."<sup>24</sup>

It is from this perspective that he was to write:

"The central fact of Hinduism is cow-protection... cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world. And Hinduism will live so long as there are Hindus to protect the cow"<sup>25</sup>.

The method that Gandhi adopted to end this source of friction was a novel one.

Convincing the Muslims by using their own religious book to illustrate that cow-slaughter was not moral was one of the modes he selected to use. "The Koran, so far as I have been able to understand it, declares it to be a sin to take the life of any living being without cause. I want to develop the capacity to convince the Mussalmans that to kill

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23. Ibid.

24. Young India, October 6, 1921, quoted from (ed.) U.R. Rao, op.cit pp.93-4.

25. Ibid.

the cow is to kill their fellow countrymen and friends - the Hindus. The Koran says that there can be no heaven for one who sheds the blood of an innocent neighbour."<sup>26</sup>

Gandhi, therefore, adhering to his principle of non-violence, tried to exert moral pressure to get fulfil his objective. The usage of religious scripture is utilised here to substantiate and solidify his argument. The usage though from a religious book is essentially secular in spirit and non-violent in character.

Gandhi well understood and accepted that "it is... wrong legally to enforce one's religious practice on those who do not share that religion."<sup>27</sup> Such acceptance and tolerance for the other person's faith remains an unchanging feature of his efforts.<sup>28</sup> Like non-violence, which was to be

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26. Young India, Jan. 29, 1925, quoted from (ed.) U.R. Rao, op.cit, p.88.

27. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol.LXXXIX, p.73.

28. For instance, elsewhere he says: "Hindu - Muslism unity requires the Mussalman to tolerate, not as a virtue of necessity, not as a policy, but as a part of their religion, the religions of others so long as the latter believed it to be true. Even so is expected of the Hindus to extend the same tolerance as a matter of faith and religion to the religions of others, no matter how repugnant they may appear to their (the Hindus) sense of religion. M.K. Gandhi, Communal Unity, p.72.

the means to be faithfully adhered to in order to achieve any end. He wrote : "I would not kill a human being for protecting a cow, as I will not kill a cow for saving a human life, be it ever so precious..."<sup>29</sup>

He also went into the essence of Hinduism when he said, "I believe myself to be an orthodox Hindu and it is my conviction that no one who scrupulously practices the Hindu religion may kill a cow-killer to protect a cow."<sup>30</sup> This also vindicates his position on non-violence and his quintessentially secular and humane position on the subject.

This position was further vindicated by his scathing criticism of the cow-protection societies. "Cow protection societies must turn their attention to the feeding of cattle, prevention of cruelty... Hindus do sin against God and man when they omit to do any of the things I have described before. They commit no sin if they cannot prevent cow-slaughter at the hands of Musalmans, they do sin grievously, when, in order to save the cow, they quarrel with the Musalmans."<sup>31</sup>

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29. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. XX, p.110.

30. Young India, May 7, 1919, quoted from (ed.) U.R. Rao, op.cit., p.215.

31. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol.XXIV, p.151.

Probably, Gandhi was aware of the confrontational attitude of such societies and the bad blood they generated. He saw that they had little to offer constructively to alleviate the problem. There was however another aspect of these societies. Their religiosity was often couched in communal undertones. Gandhi took note of it but failed to take strong counter measures.

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What then was to be the way out?

The Khilafat<sup>32</sup> provided the opportunity for a solution. "The way to save the cow is not to kill or quarrel with the Musalman. The way to save the cow is to die in the act of saving the Khilafat without mentioning the cow."<sup>33</sup>

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32. In November, 1914, Turkey had entered the 1st world war. The Sultan of Turkey was also known as the Caliph and was regarded by most Muslims around the world as their titular religious head. Having ended on the losing side, Turkey faced the unenviable prospect of being divided among the victors (as it happened in retrospect). The Khilafat began in India to pressurise the government primarily to maintain the dignity/existence of the Caliphate and also the integrity of Turkish empire.

33. Young India, June 29, 1921, quoted from (ed.) U.R. Rao, op.cit p.90.

And more importantly, "The Hindus' participation in the Khilafat is the greatest and the best movement for cow-protection."<sup>34</sup>

During the Khilafat-Non-co-operation period, the Hindu-Muslim relations reached an all time high. (its linkages, effects, etc., with the communal problem have been discussed in chapter - 3). Spectacular success was registered in cow-protection<sup>35</sup> justifying Gandhi's contention that "the only effective and honorable way is to befriend the Musalmans and leave it to their honour to save the cow."<sup>36</sup>

Cow protection was also to be non-violent in nature. "The Hindu dharma will not be satisfied if some tyrant secured by force of arms immunity of the cow from the slaughter. Islam in India cannot make a better gift to the

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34. Ibid., p.91.

35. "...is it not a cheering phenomenon that Khilafat workers, themselves Musalmans, are working to prevent cow killing? In the second place, I venture to assure... that the appeal has had wonderful success in almost all parts of India. Is it a small matter that the burden of cow protection has been taken over almost entirely by Musalman workres.? Was it not a soul - stirring thing for Hindus to witness Messrs. Chhotani and Khatri of Bombay rescuing hundreds of cows from their co-religionists and presenting them to the grateful Hindus." Young India, October, 20, 1921, quoted in (ed.) U.R. Rao, Ibid., p.91.

36. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol.XXIV, p.151.

Hindus than this voluntary self-denial."<sup>37</sup> The emphasis here is on the individual and his means; the means are to be non-violent and based on self-denial. Reference to religion here is to strengthen this viewpoint.

It is on similar lines that he approached "the music before mosque" question as well. Music before mosque was another point of discord between the two communities. Like cow slaughter, it often resulted in violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims. With revivalist movements like Shuddhi and Tabligh<sup>38</sup> gaining momentum, music before mosque became "an assertion and affirmation of religious right."<sup>39</sup> In an atmosphere of confrontation, "the Hindu insistence on playing music before mosques on the one hand and Muslim insistence on its stoppage on the other, resulted in a number of communal riots in India." <sup>40</sup>

In Gandhi's opinion, "This (music before mosque) is a sore point with the Musalmans as cow slaughter is with the

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37. Ibid., Vol.XXXV, p.437.

38. Shuddhi and Tabligh were conversion movements . The Arya Samaj led Shuddhi aimed at reconversion of Hindus to Hindu faith from Islam. Tabligh was its Muslim counterpart. Both created further bad blood and acted as a strong irritant in Hindu Muslim relations.

39. Khan Mohd. Afaque, op.cit, p.62.

40. Ibid., pp.62-3.

Hindus."<sup>41</sup> As in the case of cow-slaughter, he was clearly against the use of force/violence to prevent somebody from playing music before mosque. "In many places, however, the Musalmans have forcibly sought to stop Hindus from playing music. This is clearly intolerable. What is readily yielded to courtesy is never yielded to force. Submission to a courteous request is religion, submission to force is irreligion."<sup>42</sup>

The way to solve this tangle was to appreciate the sentiments of the other community with an understanding approach.

"I hold that we may not dignify every trifle into a matter of deep religious importance. Therefore, a Hindu may not insist on playing music whilst passing a mosque. He may not even quote precedents in his own or any other place for the sake of playing music. It is not a matter of vital importance for him to play music whilst passing a mosque. One can easily appreciate the Musalman sentiment of having

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41. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol.XXIV, p.151.

42. Young India, Sept 18, 1924, quoted from (ed.) U.R. Rao, op.cit p.78.



solemn silence near a mosque the whole of the twenty-four hours." 43

Gandhi, therefore, was clearly aware that even an apparently religious issue may not be a religious issue at all. It might be more a behavioral or psychological problem. Therefore what was required was tolerance and behavioral restraint coupled with respect for the other's religion. This is exactly what he advised in this matter. "The regulation of cow-slaughter and playing of music must be left to the goodwill of the respective communities. Each practice would assume a becoming proportion with the growth of the tolerant spirit."<sup>44</sup> Moreover, as he put it, this tolerant spirit would have to come from "either side... (and) it must be a voluntary effort."<sup>45</sup>

Conversion was another important religious issue of the time which created a lot of mutual ill-will. It was linked to the religious revivalism in the 19th century which "... was an attempt to purge the Hindus as well as Muslims of

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43. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol.XX, pp.90-1.(emphasis mine)

44. Young India, Sept.25, 1925.

45. Young India, May 29,1924 , op.cit, p.76.

elements which were not in accord with the true religion of the respective community."<sup>46</sup>

Conversion by its very nature generated forces of competitive communalism. Both communities tried to upstage the other as well as outnumber the other by going for more conversions. Movements like Shuddhi and Tabligh were the by-products. They created such compartmentalisation that "Hindus and Muslims alike began to give up many practices from one another ... and which had formed bridges between the two communities."<sup>47</sup>

Gandhi himself was not against conversion but he felt that it is a "... heart process known only to and by God. It must be left to itself..."<sup>48</sup> While treating conversion as an individual's choice and the need to treat it likewise, he was totally against all such movements of conversion : "I am against conversion, whether it is known as Shuddhi by Hindus, Tabligh by Musalmans or proselytizing by Christians."<sup>49</sup>

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46. Khan Mohd. Afaque, op.cit, p.65.

47. Beni Prasad, op.cit, pp.25-6.

48. Young India, June 6, 1927, quoted from (ed.) U.R. Rao, op.cit, p.56.

49. Ibid.

This was primarily because he saw little positive element in the way the actual conversion led to. For him it was "tragic to see that religion is dragged down to the low level of crude materialism, to lure people into which the most cherished sentiments of the millions of human beings are trodden underfoot."<sup>50</sup> It did little "to make Muslims, better Muslims; Hindus, better Hindus; Christians, better Christians; Parsis better Parsis."<sup>51</sup>

It is of significance here that while Gandhi personally was against all such movements of conversion, he did not launch a struggle against them. This has led certain historians to criticize his approach and even accuse him of soft pedalling communalism. <sup>52</sup>

However, Gandhi's attitude towards such movements and leaders has to be seen in his overall perspective of life where every individual essentially follows his conscience which is his own private truth. Therefore, every individual, sincerely believing in the movement and its spirit had a right to conduct it. "If the Arya Samajists think that they

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50. Harijan, August 8, 1936.

51. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol.LXXXVI, pp.405-6.

52. Gargi Chakravarti op.cit, puts forward this view.

have a call from their conscience, they have a perfect right to conduct the movement."<sup>53</sup>

Gandhi's fault therefore lay not in soft pedalling communalism but his inability to understand the ideological aspect behind such conversions which was essentially communal. He only perceived them from a religious point of view.

At the same time, it is also clear that Gandhi attempted to use religion to illustrate a point or to strengthen an argument but not to create religious identities. He also could not dispense with the use of religion in the form of symbols because it was the very idiom he chose to put himself across to the masses. This, however, is not the issue. The issue is whether his usage of religion and illustrations from it and whether in his use of the "saintly idiom" (as coined by Morris Jones)<sup>54</sup> were essentially secular in character or not. This brings us to a more fundamental question whether an individual can maintain his religious identity and yet be secular or not.

In the Gandhian framework it was so. In his framework,

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53. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. XXIV, p.149.

54. Quoted from, B.R. Nanda, op,cit, p.74.

the religious identity of the individual was never dissolved in his secular/class identity. It stayed with him. What it actually sought to invoke was the true religious identity - where there was absolute oneness of God, universal brotherhood and total harmony.

His usage of religious texts have to be seen in this context. To illustrate. "... he then told them that they must not harbour ill-will against their Muslim neighbours... There was a mantra in the upanishads (which says) that man became what he thought... let them beware of harbouring an evil thought."<sup>55</sup>

It is clear that whereas the communal leaders chose religion as a weapon to establish separate identities culminating in separatism, Gandhi chose it as an instrument innately secular in nature to bring the two together.

Even his later congregational prayer meetings affirm that he only sought to invoke the true essence of every religion. "While on my Harijan tour in Travancore, I added the first verse of Ishopanishad to it, as, in my opinion, it contains the cream of Hindu spiritual thought. Later on Raihena Tyabji...proposed the incorporation of a passage

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55. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. LXXXVII, pp.4-5.

from the Koran Shareef, and this was done. Lastly on Kasturba's death at the Aga Khan palace, Dr. Gilder had recited a passage from the Zoroastrian scripture. Since then that prayer has been a part of the Ashram prayer. In addition there was a bhajan in an Indian language or an English hymn and Ramdhun."<sup>56</sup>

His usage of mythology was not limited to Hindu mythology. He also used numerous examples from the Bible and the Koran.<sup>57</sup> The Muslim League, however, later made a selective interpretation of his terminology; terms like 'Swaraj' 'Sarvodaya' and 'Ahimsa' were later "used by the Muslim League to estrange Muslims from the nationalist struggle".<sup>58</sup> Historians have criticized Gandhi's usage of religious idiom on this ground.<sup>59</sup>

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56. Harijan, Jan 5, 1947, op.cit, p.80.

57. In an entirely different context he quotes the Bible (St. Luke, XXII), "Not my will but Thine alone shall prevail." M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. LXXX, p.286.

58. B.R. Nanda, Gandhi and his critics, p.74.

59. Even Khan Mohd. Afaque says: "The Hindu religious idiom which Gandhi employed successfully to mobilize the masses ... provided the Muslim leadership of the country an excuse to wean away their fellow religionists from the mainstream, of the National Movement which eventually culminated in the partition of the country. See op.cit., pp.115-6.

The point however is somewhat different. In any war of two contending ideologies, the contenders use and exploit every possible opportunity to their own advantage. Often opportunities are created to further their own ends. That the common Muslim was made to believe by the Muslim League and 'communal' Muslim press<sup>60</sup> that 'Ram Rajya' was Hindu raj and not the ideal state which Gandhi himself had in mind makes clear the type of politics and ideology the latter stood for. In more plain terms, communalism as an ideology was making use of all ammunitions to further itself.

On this basis, one might suggest that even if he had not used religious idioms, he might have been castigated for different reasons. For instance, for daring to speak for the Muslims and about the Muslims despite being a Hindu.

It would be, therefore, leading oneself on a wrong trail if one would see Gandhi's usage of religious idiom as one of the reasons which estranged the Muslims. The answer has to be sought probably in the type of politics of the time. The example of Nehru, who never used such terminology couched in religious illustrations reinforces this point.

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60. The Hag (Lucknow), The Hamdam (Lucknow), Asre Jadid (Calcutta), Al Aman (Delhi) were some of the important organs of the Muslim 'communal' press.

The communal press or the Muslim League still criticised him on the same grounds as Gandhi and even more stridently.<sup>61</sup>

The truth is that Gandhi's religious expressions had little religious significance. They were the means rather than the end.<sup>62</sup> The English translation of the "so-called" religious words he used "... may have sounded more 'modern', 'secular', but it would have passed over the heads of all but a tiny urbanised English educated minority.<sup>63</sup> His "Ram Rajya" was not a Hindu raj but a just raj unlike the British raj. It meant "an ideal polity, free from inequality, injustice and exploitation". Therefore, the symbols Gandhi used had ceased to be exclusively Hindu symbols; his idiom, though religious, was essentially secular. Secularism in

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61. "Ever since Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru started dreaming of RamRaj in India, the Muslim state of Hyderabad has become for him an eyesore. He has built up a mountain of lies... At the instance of Pandit Nehru the Desh Sewaks made a firm resolve privately at Ramgarh that they shall not rest until they have established their domination over Hyderabad". Cited in The Hag, June 1940, from A.I.C.C. Papers, File No. 6/40.

62. "When the villages of India heard Gandhi speak the Gita, they heard him, not the Gita, for the holy word has to be filtered through the charismatic. He reached the people not the book". Agehanada Bharti, Gandhi's Interpretation of the Gita: An anthropological analysis" in "India and the world : An international symposium (ed.) Sibarayan Ray, Bombay, 1970, p.55.(emphasis mine)

63. B.R. Nanda, op.cit., p.74.



the Indian context has certain features distinguishable from the western concept. This needs to be borne in mind. (In the Indian society), "ethical principles were inextricably clothed in a religious garb."<sup>64a</sup> Gandhi well understood this. Secularism for him, therefore, did not mean "an aseptic allegiance to the rational and the scientific (as in the western context it would be), but respect for all men and all faiths".<sup>64b</sup> M.N. Roy, the noted communist leader, was to confess later that "he had failed to detect the secular approach of the Mahatma beneath the religious and that Gandhi's message essentially had been moral, humanist and cosmopolitan."<sup>65</sup>

It would also not be entirely irrelevant to ponder on Louis Fischer's interesting observation that Jinnah, who had grown up as a secular nationalist in his younger days, and who apparently had little interest in religion, founded a state based on religion, while Gandhi, wholly religious, worked to establish a secular state. <sup>66</sup>

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64a. Margaret Chatterjee, op.cit, p. 120.

64b. Ibid.

65. Dennis Dalton, 'Gandhi and the raj: The interaction of ideologies in India' as Sibnarayan Ray (ed.). Gandhi India and the world, Melbourne, 1970, p.166.

66. Louis Fischer, Life of Mahatma Gandhi, London, 1951. p. 430.

Gandhi once said: "If Islam is dear to you and Hinduism is dear to me, sheer logic will force you to the conclusion that we must have equal respect for each other's religions".<sup>67</sup> What he meant by 'sheer logic' was two fold :

- a) plain rational application to the problem,
- b) the very essence of both these religions promoted goodwill and amity towards the other.

It was this logic which he tried to bring to the masses through his own understanding and interpretation of religion. Where he erred was not in the identification of the operative forces which prevented this from being a reality but in countering them ideologically.

At the same time one cannot be dismissive of Gandhi's efforts to create mutual respect, tolerance and his ideas of self-denial among the common people. They are important because other than its socio-economic-political basis, there was also the psychological aspect to it. The Hindu-Muslim problem, therefore, also needed a conscious effort by the people on these lines to be effaced.

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67. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, LXV, p.65. (emphasis mine).

It is essential to point out that Gandhi's emphasis on religious issues underwent a significant shift with lessening emphasis in the later decades. In fact, in 1942, he was to say that "religion is a personal matter which should have no place in politics,"<sup>68</sup> a marked departure from his earlier stance. Though illustrations from religious texts continued to remain his style and he continued to speak of God in every language he knew, he remained the quintessential secularist till the very end.

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68. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol LXXIV, p.26.

## Chapter 2

## Chapter II

**Gandhi and communal riots (his understanding of their causation, its effects and his means & methods to meet them)**

One of the inevitable results of communal politics in the long run is communal riots. Communalism often shows itself in the form of brutal violence - burning, looting, murder, rape of the members of one community by the members of the other.

Communal riots are not the "main form or content of communalism". Communal violence is, in the words of Bipan Chandra, "in the main, its reflection, its active episodic expression, its bitter and virulent manifestation and consequence, and one of the main instruments and agencies for its spread".<sup>1</sup> Once a particular town or city becomes a victim of communal violence, there is little or no respite from it because of the inevitable cycle of retaliation and counter-retaliation. Being barbaric in nature, they have "a tendency to force even basically secular persons to temporarily think in communal terms in order to provide for the safety of person and property... Moreover, a communal riot left a certain emotional residue or legacy which could be used later by the communal ideologue or politician".<sup>2</sup>

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1. Bipan Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, p.5.

2. Ibid, pp. 5-6.

For an individual like Gandhi, communal riots meant a real test for the principles he stood for : satyagraha and ahimsa. He, therefore, left no stone unturned to stop them. Many of his writings during this period deal with the causes and effects of communal riots. <sup>3</sup> Being a man of action, he attempted to work out means and methods to control and delimit the problem. In fact, he was to experiment significantly with the various means and methods he devised to control a conflict situation.

This chapter would attempt to examine from Gandhi's own point of view the main causation of communal riots. It would also examine the means and methods he employed to tackle the problem. Whether there were any significant shifts from the earlier phase to the latter will also be analysed.

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Gandhi was to write in May, 1924 : "I have examined all the causes, both original and continuing, of the tension between the two communities".<sup>4</sup> He was to spell out his

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3. Refer to Collected Works, Vol. XX ,Vol. XXIV, Vol. XXV for details.

4. Young India. May 29, 1924, quoted from M.K. Gandhi, (ed.) U.R.Rao The way to communal harmony, P. 183.

understanding in detail in a major article entitled :  
"Hindu-Muslim tension: its cause and cure".

He put down the following factors as the causes leading to the riots:

- (a) "The Shuddhi movement.
- (b) The most potent cause being tiredness of non-violence and the fear that the communities might, by a long course of training in non-violence, forget the law of retaliation and self-defence.
- (c) Musalman cow slaughter and Hindu music before mosque.
- (d) Hindu cowardice and consequent Hindu distrust of Musalmans.
- (d) Musalman bullying.
- (f) Musalman distrust of Hindu fairplay."<sup>5</sup>

It would be imperative to point out first that Gandhi's understanding of the causation of communal riots in this period essentially springs from the nature of his understanding of the Hindu-Muslim problem at this stage. To him, religious intolerance at this stage was the *raison d'être* of Hindu-Muslim differences. This shows up in his analysis of the causes of communal tension as well.

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5. Young India. June 5, 1924, quoted from ibid..

The Shuddhi movement, music before mosque, cow slaughter were rightly pointed out as potentially dangerous enough to cause communal riots in situations of communal tension. They were real, objective factors that might cause communal riots.

However, Hindu cowardice and Musalman bullying, Musalman distrust of Hindu fairplay were essentially subjective/psychological factors. Rather than they themselves being the cause of a communal riot, they created an atmosphere conducive to a communal riot. Although Gandhi did not categorise the two separately it is significant that he took these factors into account.

Recent social scientists have attempted to show how the colonial state used such stereotypes as 'Hindu cowards', 'Muslim bullies' to advance its own theories and further its own interests. Stereotypes were deliberately used to create such separate identities.<sup>6</sup> Later even communalists (both Hindu and Muslim) used such myths to further crystallize the different identities in an attempt to

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6 K.N.Panikkar, 'The Intellectual History of Colonial India,' in (eds.) S. Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar, (ed). Situating Indian History. Delhi, 1986. p.420.



polarize the two communities.<sup>7</sup>

It is true that Gandhi too accepted these stereotypes. However, his reasons for accepting them were fundamentally different from that of the communalists.

For the communalist, these myths were essential to show the fundamental differences between the two communities and to highlight their irreconcilable difference.<sup>8</sup> Since the differences between the two could not be reconciled, confrontation was the only way out; militarisation of the community was essential.<sup>9</sup>

For Gandhi, these myths were one of the reasons for the tension between the two communities which needed to be removed. They could be removed "if the thinking sections of both the communities realize the cowardice and folly at the back of the hostilities."<sup>10</sup> It could be ended but for that "both have to be brave, both have to be wise"<sup>11</sup> and the way has to be that of non-violence.

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7. Golwalkar's "A bunch of thoughts", Bangalore, 1966 attempts to theorise this aspect. 8. An examination of the speeches made by Jinnah in the post - 40 period makes this clear.

9. Moonje's military school in Poona being an example.

10. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, vol. XXXVII, p. 337

11. Ibid.

Gandhi did not believe in the physical strength of races. He wrote, "many muscular races have died out and some are even in the process of dying out."<sup>12</sup> So what had to be strengthened is "the spirit" because "so far as man is concerned... the world has no place for the weak in spirit."<sup>13</sup>

As he further elaborated, "where there are fools there are bound to be knaves, where there are cowards there are bound to be bullies, whether they are Hindus or Muslims... the question here, therefore, is not how to teach one of the two communities a lesson or how to humanize it, but how to teach a coward to be brave."<sup>14</sup>

It is, therefore, clear that Gandhi despite accepting the stereotype of "Hindu coward - Musalman bully" attempted not to pose the two communities as binary opposites but worked towards 'heart unity' between the two. It was essential to be brave not only because "Swaraj is not for cowards"<sup>15</sup> but also because "only when the Hindus and

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12. Ibid. Vol. XXV, p.168.

13 Ibid.

14. Ibid. Vol. XXXVII, p. 333.

15. Ibid.

Muslims shed their fear and mutual suspicion can real unity of heart come".<sup>16</sup> It was with this understanding that he used the stereotypes of 'Musalman bully' and 'Hindu coward'.

It is essential to note here that Gandhi was able to comprehend that distrust which according to him was a potent cause of the tension "never comes from well-defined causes. A variety of causes more felt than realized breeds distrust."<sup>17</sup> Therefore Gandhi had a glimpse of the reality that communal tension, which often expressed itself in form of communal riots and was a logical outcome of communal politics, although having its base in various other factors<sup>18</sup>, was also a state of mind. It was a state of mind in the sense that other than the social, political and economic aspects involved, there were certain psychological factors within the mindset of people due to various factors like historical memory of earlier riots, rumours, etc. Therefore, a conscious effort was needed by the people to efface such a state of mind.

Another psychological aspect of the problem which Gandhi attributed to the causation of Hindu - Muslim tension

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16. Ibid, Vol. XXXVI, p.301.

17. Ibid, Vol. XXIV, p. 272.

18. For details see Bipan Chandra, op. cit. (chapter-I).

was the tiredness against non-violence in the post non co-operation movement phase. Gandhi made a significant point here when he said that "the fear that the communities might, by a long course of training in non-violence, forget the law of retaliation and self defence" also goaded them to violence. He not only delved into the psychology of riots but also pointed towards the fact that the people's belief in non-violence as professed during the course of non co-operation movement was only 'skin deep'.

The propaganda of vilification of one community by the other further strained the already brittle relation between the two communities. It often led to communal riots. Gandhi highlighted this aspect : "Members of one community, when talking about those of the other, at times indulge in terms so vulgar that cannot but accentuate the strained relations between the two."<sup>19</sup>

A cursory look at some of the literature of this variety aptly illustrates this.<sup>20</sup> The press always had a

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19. Young India, May 7, 1919, quoted in (ed.) U.R.Rao, op. cit, p. 190.

20. Gandhi makes reference to volumes of Agakhani literature describing His Highness the Aga Khan as a Hindu avatar and "A life of Swami Dayananda" by "a Musalman". These books and articles show the level of crudity such literature could stoop to. A very well distributed pamphlet during this period entitled 'Rangila Rasul' showed the prophet as an amorous, immoral character.

vital role to play in situations like this. It has an enormous responsibility because the printed word always carries more weight; more so on the impressionable who often take it as the final word. It weilds tremendous power over the minds of people, for good or for worse. However, the role of the press during this crucial period left great deal to be desired.<sup>21</sup> Gandhi launched a scathing attack on the communal press : "The newspaper man has become a walking plague. He spreads the contagion of lies and calumnies. He exhausts the foul vocabulary of his dialect, and infects his virus into the unsuspecting and often receptive, minds of his reader."<sup>22</sup>

It would not be going afar to note that the Muslim League used the press later on similar lines to advance its politics.<sup>23</sup> Gandhi pointed to the serious responsibility of

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21. "The Press played an active role in keeping Hindu - Mohammedan tension alive". Extract from a letter of GOI, fortnightly report for second half of May, 1924, Home/Pol. File No. 25/24 quoted from Gargi Chakravarti, op. cit., p. 149. For a few extracts from the communal press see. Appendix I.

22. Young India, Dec. 30, 1926, quoted in (ed.) U.R.Rao, op. cit., pp. 191-92.

23. For example even Gandhi writes, "If newspaper reports are to be believed, responsible Ministers in Sindh and other equally responsible Leaguers almost all over are preaching violence in naked language. see Collected Works, Vol. LXXXV, p. 186. Again "The Muslim League  
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the leaders of public opinion irrespective of their party.<sup>24</sup>

Goonda elements play a very active role in any actual communal riot. It is they who are largely involved in looting, pillaging and all other activities characteristic of a communal riot. They are, however, not the reason behind its causation but its ugly frontal face. Gandhi displayed a proper understanding of the role of the goondas in the riots.

He wrote : "It would be wrong and misleading to underestimate the trouble by calling it the work of goondas."<sup>25</sup> while talking about the nature of people involved in a communal riot. As early as 1924, he was able to establish the politician - hooligan nexus. He wrote : "The goondas came on the scene because the leaders wanted them."<sup>26</sup> And far more bluntly : "Communal riots are

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may call Hindus names and declare India to be Dar-ul-Harb, where the law of jehad operates, and all Muslims who co-operate with the Congress as Quislings fit only to be exterminated," cited in Collected Works, Vol. LXXXV , p. 366.

24. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol LXXXVI, p. 259.

25. Ibid., Vol. LXXXIX, pp. 88-9.

26. Ibid., Vol. XXIV, p. 272.

engineered by politically minded men. Many of those who take part in them are under the influence of the latter".<sup>27</sup>

A very significant statement indeed, considering even today this is the case.<sup>28</sup> However, while pointing to the malady, Gandhi does not make a detailed exposition of it. Therefore, it remains another isolated instance of his near - glimpse of the reality with little outcome.

The forties marked a distinct shift in the very nature of communalism in India. While the thirties was largely characterised by moderate communalism, extreme communalism took over in the forties. There were significant differences between the nature of the two.

To quote Bipan Chandra:

"The liberal communalist was basically a believer in and practitioner of communal politics; but he still upheld certain liberal, democratic, humanist and national values. Even while holding that India consisted of distinct religion-based communities, with their own separate and special interests which sometimes came into conflict with

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27. Ibid., Vol. LXVII , p. 125. (emphasis mine)

28. One is referring to the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and the alleged role of some of the politicians in it.

each other, he continued to believe and profess publicly that these different communal interests would be gradually accommodated and brought into harmony within the overall, developing national interests, and India built as a nation."<sup>29</sup>

And : Extreme communalism was based on fear and hatred... It was at this stage that the communalists declared that Muslims, 'Muslim culture' and Islam and Hindus, 'Hindu culture' and Hinduism were in danger of being suppressed and exterminated'.<sup>30</sup> It had a tendency to use violence of language, deed or behaviour, the language of war and enmity against political opponents.

Now the stakes were much higher and the situation far more volatile, the nature of the communal riots also underwent a marked change.

The 1946-47 riots were much more gruesome in character with no quarters provided on either side. The riots in the 1920's were more numerous but less intense and brutal. For instance, there are hardly any specific references to the

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29. Bipan Chandra (etc.), India's struggle for independence, New Delhi , 1989, p.399.

30. Ibid.



crimes against women in the 20s. On the other hand, rape and abduction of women were two of the primary features of the partition riots. So much so that Gandhi was moved to say, "I do not want Swaraj at the cost of women's honour."<sup>31</sup>

Gandhi's advice to the women facing such a situation was consistent with his overall perspective of non-violence. He asked them to "be more courageous and (to have) more confidence in their own strength". They should create an "inner strength" to face death in the eye.<sup>32</sup> As he further elaborated . "The act of dying bravely and with honour does not need any special training, save a living faith in God. Then there would be no abductions and no forcible conversions".<sup>33</sup>

Since living faith in God is equated with truth which was the all important power in the Gandhian framework, it was this power which he tried to invoke. As such his statements like "I...will advise everyone running the risk of dishonour to take poison before submission to

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31. Harijan, Feb 10, 1946, quoted from (ed.) U.R.Rao. op. cit., p. 205.

32. For details see ibid. p. 208-10.

33. Harijan, Oct 5, 1947. quoted from (ed.) U.R.Rao, op. cit. p. 208.

dishonour"<sup>34</sup> is not male chauvinist in character because he is also asking the men to do the same. <sup>35</sup> This is so because for him, it was better to die than to live and be unable to face truth.

His attitude towards abducted girls further showed his real concern for the problem: "Some of them (abducted women) are pregnant. It is no fault of theirs. Their children, when born, should be treated with the same regard and respect as any other children. The religion of these children will be that of their mother. On growing up they are to change it if they wish. If any such girl comes to me, she will be treated by me as any other girl in my party. To castigate these girls for having fallen a victim to the lust of some monster is less than human. No shame attaches to them."<sup>36</sup>

The above lines go against the contention that Gandhi's view on women led to their being treated as less than equal as a selective interpretation of some of his statements

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34. Harijan, Oct 27, 1946, ibid.

35. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. XXXVII, pp. 337-38.

36. Harijan, Jan 4, 1948.

quoted earlier might suggest. Gandhi's attitude, one might suggest, is humane and practical at the same time. He is understanding towards women and also aware of the practical difficulty a child might face if without a religion. That he gives them a free rein to choose his/her religion at a later stage shows - his own belief that 'true religion was something beyond all religions.'

Gandhi further stated emphatically: "It is the duty of the two government to see that each one of these women is restored to her family. The families should receive them with open arms. To ostracize them for having fallen into evil hands is inexcusable cruelty."<sup>37</sup> It is because of his pleas that many women who had suffered a similar fate were taken back into their homes; young men even offered their hand, for their marriage, some of which were also consummated.

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37. Harijan, Dec 14, 1947. quoted from (ed.) U.R.Rao, op. cit., pp. 211-12.

What were the means and methods Gandhi applied to meet communal riots?

Gandhi's methodology was two fold :-

- (a) Easing communal tension, to prevent breaking out of riots. This was a pre-emptive measure.
- (b) Measures actually aimed at controlling riots once they broke out.

He saw arbitration as the key to the solution of the tension. It was further worked out in detail. It said :<sup>38</sup>

1. "The master-key of the solution is the replacement of the rule of the sword by that of arbitration. Honest public opinion should make it impossible for aggrieved parties to take the law into their own hands, and every case must be referred to private arbitration or to law -courts if the parties do not believe in non co-operation.
2. Ignorant fear of cowardly non-violence, falsely so called, taking the place of violence should be dispelled.
3. Growing mutual distrust among the leaders must, if they believe in unity, give place to trust.

4. Hindus must cease to fear the Musalman bully, and the Musalman should consider it beneath their dignity to bully their Hindu brothers.
5. Hindus must not imagine that they can force Musalmans to give up cow sacrifice. They must trust that, by befriending Musalmans, the latter will of their own accord give up cow-sacrifice out of regard for their Hindu neighbours.
6. Nor must Musalmans imagine they can force Hindus to stop music or Arati before mosques. They must befriend the Hindus and trust them to pay need to reasonable Musalman sentiment.
7. Hindus must leave to Musalmans and the other minorities the question of representation on elected bodies, and gracefully and wholeheartedly give effect to the findings of such referee.
8. Employment under national government must be according to merit to be decided by a board of examiners representing different communities.
9. Shuddhi or Tabligh as such must not be disturbed, but either must be conducted honestly and by men of proved

character. It should avoid all attack on other religions. There should be no secret propaganda and no offer of material rewards.

10. Public opinion should be so cultivated as to put under ban all the scurrilous writings principally in a section of the...Press.
11. Nothing is possible without the Hindus shedding their timidity. Theirs is the largest stake and they must be prepared to sacrifice the most."

It is of significance that Gandhi at this stage was advocating negotiations at the top even to control a communally tensed situation. This is because in the early 20's, he was yet to see the importance of mass contacts. Although he talked in terms of "befriending members of the other community", this has little thrust. The actual emphasis is on generating goodwill and in arbitration. Moreover, he was also unable to clearly distinguish between communal politics and communal tension. This is exemplified by his placing the question of employment and representative bodies in the same category as Shuddhi and Tabligh.

An examination of these points also makes it clear that

his understanding of the causation of communal riots was fair enough but his methods to counter them at this stage were largely limited to "tolerance" and "trust".

However Gandhi also used some specific methods in tune with his theory of non-violence as a method for controlling communal riots. Fasting was one such important measure. Gandhi used fasting against communal violence at Kohat (1924), Calcutta (1946), Delhi (1946) to exert the moral force of his personality and bring the riotous mobs back to sanity. For him fasting was not only 'personal penance,' as he said during his Kohat fast but also a prayer to the heads of all communities 'to meet and end this quarrel which is disgrace to religion and to humanity.'<sup>39</sup>

This had an immediate effect in the form of a Unity Conference.<sup>40</sup> However, Gandhi wished for real unity rather than for such patched up peace conferences.<sup>41</sup>

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38. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. XXIV, pp. 188-90.

39. Young India, Sept. 25, 1924.

40. "About 300 religious luminaries, including the Head of the Anglican Church, Bishop Foss Wescott, Shaukat Ali and H.A. Khan speaking for Muslims, and prominent Hindu, Swami Shradhanand & Pandit Malaviya came", J. Brown: Gandhi : A Prisoner of Hope, p. 188.

41. This was proved to him in 1925 when he and Shaukat Ali could not agree on the causes of the Kohat riot.

When violence erupted again at the time of partition, he again used 'the weapon of the fast' in "the attempt to muster spiritual power to transform an apparently deadlocked situation and to change people's attitudes".<sup>42</sup> Calcutta fast (1946) was one such successful attempt.<sup>43</sup>

Fasting was successful as a temporary measure in controlling communal conflict. It could however do little to prevent its recurrence. It was primarily a patchwork remedy. Moreover, the success of fasting in controlling a conflict situation, even as a temporary measure depended on the stature of the individual undertaking it. Probably it was keeping such limitations in mind that Gandhi said : "Fasting cannot be undertaken mechanically. It is a powerful thing but a dangerous thing if handled amateurishly."<sup>44</sup>

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42. Judith Brown, op. cit., p. 378.

43. "Gandhiji's fast in Calcutta did in the oft quoted words of the correspondent of the London Times: "it did what several division of troops could not have done." The finest tribute to Gandhi's work in Calcutta was paid by Mountbatten in a telegram on 26 August : "My dear Gandhiji, in the Punjab we have 55000 soldiers and large scale rioting in our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man and there is no rioting. As a serving officer, as well as an administrator, may I be allowed to pay my tribute to the one man boundary force", Pyarelal, Mahatma Gandhi : The last phase, p. 382.

44. Harijan, Oct 27, 1946, quoted from (ed.) U.R.Rao, op. cit., p. 224.



What is also admirable is that he never used it against (his) opponents. He did not, for example, fast to compel the Muslim League to give up its demand for Pakistan.<sup>45</sup>

The immense importance of mass contact as a genuine method to counter communal riots was recognized by Gandhi and assumed a practical form with the concept of Peace Brigade in the late thirties. The way to do it was "to seek opportunities to know them (the Muslim masses) and serve them", since "serving the Muslim masses without any expectations is the only honorable and effective way of winning their hearts."<sup>46</sup>

The elaborate concept of the Peace Brigade "whose members would risk their lives in dealing with riots, especially communal"<sup>47</sup> was a momentous step in this direction. The idea was that "this Brigade should substitute the police and even the military."<sup>48</sup>

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45. B.R. Nanda, Gandhi and his critics, p. 76.

46. The concept of Peace Brigade came out in 1938 with full details.

47. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. LXVI, P. 424.

48. ibid.

Gandhi had worked out in detail the qualifications a member of the contemplated Peace Brigade should possess. In brief, he was to have the following qualifications :

- (1) "He or she must have a living faith in non-violence...
- (2) (He) must have equal regard for all the principal religions of the earth. Thus, if he is a Hindu, he will respect the other faith current in India. He must therefore possess a knowledge of the general principles of the different faiths professed in the country.
- (3) Generally speaking this work of peace can only be done by local men in their own localities.
- (4) The work can be done singly or in groups. Therefore no one need wait for companions.
- (5) (He)... will cultivate through personal service contacts with the people in his locality or chosen circle, so that when he appears to deal with ugly situations, he does not descend upon the members of a riotous assembly as an utter stranger liable to be looked upon as a suspect or an unwelcome visitor.

- (6) (He) must have a character beyond reproach and must be known for his strict impartiality.
- (7) The Peace Brigade will not wait till the conflagration breaks out but will try to handle the situation in anticipation.
- (8) Whilst, if the movement spreads, it might be well if there are some whole-time workers, it is not absolutely necessary that there should be. The idea is to have as many good and true men and women as possible.
- (9) There should be a distinctive dress worn by the members of the contemplated Brigade so that in course of time they will be recognized without the slightest difficulty.

These are but general suggestions. Each centre can work out its own constitution on the basis here suggested".<sup>49</sup>

The idea in practice was that "when a riot breaks out, whether they (members of a Peace Brigade) happen to be alone or in group, whether they find a co-worker or not, they should lay down their lives in order to put down the riots wherever they might have started."<sup>50</sup>

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49. Ibid., pp. 125-27.

50. Ibid.

The concept of Peace Brigade therefore provided a detailed guideline to prevent a communal riot, both to prevent its intensity by attempting to quell it down, as well as, handling the situation in anticipation.

Indirectly, the concept throws light on Gandhi's advanced understanding of the origin and causation of communal riots. Gandhi by now seems to have developed the understanding that communal orgies largely take place in depersonalised, non-identifiable situations where the air is already poisoned by mutual suspicion, distrust and fears. Therefore by mobilising secular public opinion "through personal service and contacts", <sup>51</sup> he attempted to counter such a situation. Thus by the late thirties, Gandhi was able to work out, at least theoretically, a mechanism for riot control. This, when compared to his emphasis on arbitration, which he largely advocated in the twenties, is a far better and advanced concept to counter and control communal riots.

Aware of the role goonda elements place during such riots, he suggested similar means to neutralise them. "The would be member of a Peace Brigade should come into close touch and cultivate acquaintance with the so-called goonda elements in his vicinity. He should know all and be known to

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51. Ibid.

all and win the hearts of all by his living and selfless sacrifice."<sup>52</sup>

The Peace Brigade, therefore, was an ambitious Gandhian model for controlling communal conflict. It, however, remained an unborn child and only a theoretical break through. This was tragic when seen in the light of the partition holocaust that followed. The fact that it proved to be a non-starter showed that Gandhian principles had only partially been internalised by his followers. Men like Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi and Rajab Ali who laid down their lives for Hindu-Muslim unity remained exceptions rather than the rule.<sup>53</sup> And answers like "lay down your lives for Hindu - Muslim unity" to a query like "what is (one's) duty in the panic stricken areas where there are strong rumours about riots"<sup>54</sup> - remained without takers in real practice.

Gandhi assigned a direct role to the colonial state in the aggravation of the communal problem (treated in detail

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52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., Vol. LXXXIII, p. 400.

54. Ibid., Vol. LXXXIV, p. 61.

in chapter - III). But he was more restrained in assigning it a direct role in fomenting riots. For instance, he wrote : "News is pouring in from all quarters that their mischief was at the root of all these riots... The British in India will now have to see to it that the suspensions of both Hindus and Muslims that the British had a hand in the riots is not substantiated."<sup>55</sup> And similarly: "In the case of many of these disturbances we hear of Govt. agents being at the back of them. The allegation, if true, would be painful to me, not surprising. It should not be surprising if Govt. fomented the trouble, it being their policy to divide us."<sup>56</sup>

Probably, lack of direct, circumstantial evidence made Gandhi more circumspect in his criticism about the state's direct involvement in communal riots.

Of the different aspects of communalism, communal riots was one aspect which Gandhi handled the best. Being essentially a man of action, he would throw himself headlong into the heart of the situation and try to bring the marauding mobs back to normalcy and people back in their homes.

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55. Ibid., Vol. LXXXVII, p. 253. (emphasis mine)

56. Ibid., Vol. LXXXIV, p. 61. (emphasis mine)

His shortcoming lay in the fact that his methods to ensure normalcy were necessarily extensions of the moral force of his powerful personality. For instance, fasting as a measure could be effective only with Gandhi or with someone with an equally arresting moral force. They could not apply to one and all.

In the late thirties when he did succeed in providing the guideline for an universally applicable method, it was too "unadulterated" in its non-violence to have a broad based appeal.

To conclude, Gandhi was one of the few leaders who consistently fought not only against communalism but also against communal riots, its violent manifestation. Functioning persistently within his broad philosophy of satyagraha and ahimsa, he attempted to unlock the riddles of communal violence. It was in this striving that he had his brief shining moments in Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar. These were the moments when the man, his living life and his philosophy were fused into one organic whole. These were the moments when by his sheer commitment to the cause of humanity, he made a mockery of all who question his secular credentials. And these were the moments, when he came closest to his private goal of Truth.





### CHAPTER 3

#### **Evolution of Gandhi's understanding of the communal problem**

Ever since Gandhi's initiation and active participation in India's freedom movement, the attainment of Hindu-Muslim unity<sup>1</sup> always remained one of his major pre-occupations. His endeavours were directed not only to free the country from colonial rule but also to resolve the Hindu-Muslim conflict.<sup>2</sup> This was essential because as he said "...I see no way of achieving anything in this afflicted country without a lasting heart unity between the Hindus and Mussalmans. I believe in the immediate possibility of achieving it, because it is so natural, so necessary for both, and because I believe in human nature".<sup>3</sup> It was natural because the points of contact were 'deep and

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1. In Gandhian usage, Hindu-Muslim unity takes on a different meaning altogether. As he wrote in Young India, Sept 2, 1921, "Hindu-Muslim unity means not only unity between Hindus and Muslims but between all those who call India their home, no matter to what faith they belong".
2. Gandhi studiously avoided using the terms communal unity or communal conflict etc. in his speeches and writings, a few rare exceptions notwithstanding. He himself explained "I use that (Hindu-Muslim) expression deliberately instead of 'communal' for if we find this, the other will follow as a matter of course". M.K. Gandhi, collected works, Vol. LX VII, P.9.
3. Ibid, Vol. XXIV, P.153.

permanent', the differences, 'superficial'. It was necessary because the political struggle against the British Raj demanded "the help and support of all communities to put forward their basic demand ie. Swaraj."<sup>4</sup>

The conflict/problem, however defied and eluded any solution, constantly raising its ugly head in the form of vicious and virulent communal riots throughout the length and breadth of the country. The first step in tackling any problem of this kind was to understanding its nature: only when the mechanism that created, aggravated and sustained it was understood, the modalities of providing a solution could be put into order. This, however, was easier said than done.

One of the major problems faced by social analysts even today in developing an adequate perspective on the communal problem is due to its varying/changing nature. As such, any social analyst (more so a political leader) would have to constantly readjust, reshuffle and redraft his positions and perspective.

The problem was further magnified by the non-availability of any sound theoretical model in the early decades of the 20th century, which would at least attempt to

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4. S.R. Bakshi, op.cit., P.150.

put the problem in a coherent frame. Therefore, any understanding of the problem could only emerge from the experience which comes from trial and error.

It is under this backdrop that we would attempt to trace the evolution of the pattern and process of Gandhi's understanding of the Hindu-Muslim problem.

What was his understanding and approach towards the problem? How did he define communalism? Did he define it at all? How did his understanding evolve? Could it be periodized? Was there any definite breakthrough in the later phase? How did he perceive the role of the colonial state in creating, sustaining and precipitating the problem? And why did he fail despite 'leaving no stone unturned' to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity? These are some of the questions one would analyse and attempt to answer during the course of this chapter.

For the larger part of 1920's (as already seen in Chapter I) the focus of Gandhi's understanding of the causation of Hindu-Muslim problem is primarily<sup>5</sup> on the religious intolerance between the two communities.

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5. This is only to state that he gave primary importance to religious intolerance. Other factors, as we will see, were also observed by him in the 20's itself.

As such, he treated certain symptoms of the problem like cow protection and music before mosque as the problem itself. The problem of Shuddhi and Tabligh was treated likewise. He also believed in the colonial stereotypes of 'Hindu cowardice', 'Mussalman bully' etc.<sup>6</sup> It was from such a perception that he came to believe that the problem was one of 'intolerance' and 'mutual distrust'.<sup>7</sup>

The solution, therefore, could only be by their replacement with mutual trust and tolerance. It had to be 'not a mere truce' but 'a union of hearts', 'a partnership between equals, each respecting the religion of other'.<sup>8</sup> It was in this pursuit to attain unity of hearts that Gandhi agreed on an 'unconditional' support to the Khilafat.

The digits of his understanding till this stage are clear. Gandhi hoped that "the Hindu's spontaneous and altruistic gesture in supporting the cause of the Khilafat would permanently win the gratitude of the Muslim community."<sup>9</sup> It would end mutual distrust, promote communal harmony.<sup>10</sup>

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6. Outlined in detail in Chapter-2.

7. M.K. Gandhi, (ed.) U.R. Rao, The way to communal harmony, p.188.

8. M.K. Gandhi, (ed.) U.R. Rao, op.cit, p.8.

9. B.R. Nanda, Gandhi and his critics, p.82.

10. "The Hindus participation in the Khilafat is the greatest and best movement for cow protection". See (ed.), U.R. Rao, op.cit., p.90.

It was also a sincere attempt to bring the Muslim community into the heart of the nationalist movement and break its political isolation because till then the Muslim masses did "not recognise the same necessity for Swaraj as the Hindus".<sup>11</sup>

Gandhi's support to the Khilafat, therefore, emerged from his understanding of the nature of the Hindu-Muslim problem and was primarily a means to solve it.

However, his understanding of the problem, even in the 20's, had its politico-economic aspects as well. He wrote in 1924, with this understanding that "the seat of the trouble, however, is in the Punjab. The Mussalmans complain that the Hindus have raised a storm of protest on Mr. Fazlul Hussain trying very timidly to give a fair proportion of government employment to Mussalmans... The causes of tension are thus more than merely religious."<sup>12</sup>

Gandhi, therefore, showed a glimpse of understanding of the linkage between competition for government jobs and Hindu-Muslim tension, so much true in the 1920's.<sup>13</sup> The

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11. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. XXI, p.10.

12. Ibid., Vol. XXIV, p. 137.

13. For a brilliant analysis of this aspect, see Bipan Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 34-43.

actual digests of his understanding, however, as exemplified by his politics are essentially in the broad framework of religious differences/religious intolerance/religious misunderstanding.

His approach towards the problem conditioned by this understanding was one of "unity at the top".<sup>14</sup> The Khilafat movement, apparently a mass movement was actually the first of a series of 'unity at the top' measures Gandhi would indulge in for the larger part of 1920's. This was "since the Muslim masses and lower middle classes were brought into the anti-imperialist movement through an agreement with the top leaders...".<sup>15</sup> Even when the concept of unity was blown to bits by the communal riots<sup>16</sup> that followed the post non-cooperation movement phase, Gandhi's modus operandi remained within the same paradigm.

The Unity Conference (1924), an example of this modus operandi, solved nothing in practical terms.<sup>17</sup> Neither did

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14. Term used by Bipan Chandra in 'Indian National Movement and the communal problem' in 'Nationalism and colonialism in Modern India, New Delhi, 1979, p. 253.

15. Ibid.

16. Multan Riots (1924), Kohat (1924) to name two of the worst riots of this period.

17. Judith Brown, Gandhi: A Prisoner of Hope, London, 1990, p. 188.

his attending the Punjab Provincial Conference (1924) or the All-Parties Conference, the nature of which, as scathingly remarked by B.R. Nanda was that of "a comic opera",<sup>18</sup> with "sentimental effusions of goodwill" on one hand and "irreconcilable antagonistic claims of seats in legislatures and allocation of government jobs on the other".<sup>19</sup>

Gandhi individually disliked such "pettifogging politics" and in his opinion 'generosity' on the part of Hindus would have gone a long way to alleviate Muslim fears. But as a practical suggestion, this view had few takers. Even theoretically, it failed to break the logic of communal politics.

During the years 1926-28, Gandhi remained largely silent on the communal issue.<sup>20</sup> There was also a feeling of helplessness as evident in the following statement. As early as Jan 1927, he told a meeting at Comilla in Bengal that Hindu-Muslim problem, had passed out of human hands

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18 B.R. Nanda, op.cit., p. 83.

19. Ibid.

20. In fact, he had retired from active politics (largely) involving himself with social issues like untouchability, women's rights etc.

into God's hands.<sup>21</sup> Besides sheer helplessness, this also betrayed the frustration of an individual for not being able to bring about what he considered to be 'a vital part of (his) being i.e Hindu - Muslim unity.

"With the Nehru Report cutting little ice among Muslims and he himself powerless to sway Muslim opinion at this stage, it seemed that 'unity at the top' politics, at least for Gandhi had reached the end of the road.

The Civil Disobedience Movement (1930) attempted a way out. To "take the attention of the nation off the communal problem and to divert it on the things that are common to all Indians, no matter to what religion or sect they belong"<sup>23</sup>, the Civil Disobedience movement (1930) was launched. It was a common struggle of the masses to redress common grievances. Gandhi then wrote : "Whilst we may staunchly adhere to our respective faiths, we must be in Congress Indians first and Indians last..."<sup>24</sup>

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21. B.R. Nanda, Mahatma Gandhi, p.259.

22. Khan Mohd. Afaque, Gandhian approach to communal harmony, New Delhi, 1986, p.7.

23. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol XL ii, pp. 383-84.

24. Ibid., p.379.



The distinct shift in the nature of the movement is evident. While in the Khilafat-Non Co-operation Movement, people participated with their religious identities intact as members of two respective communities, in the Civil Disobedience Movement, the religious identity was relegated behind the national identity. Many Muslims, without any formal pact with a Muslim leader, took part in the movement. It showed that the Hindu-Muslim problem had still not reached the point of no return and was by no means insoluble in the 30's. The communal parties were still 'looking for cover.' The problem only needed the right understanding of its nature and the right methodology. When Gandhi returned empty handed from the Round Table Conference he was to state that communalism could not be solved at the conference table; for that the Congress has to "serve all classes and communities".<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Gandhi by now had recognised the importance of mass contact, although he didn't spell it out theoretically. Moreover, he also makes a penetrating observation. "Does not the Hindu-Muslim question centre around a division of political power-spoils of office?"<sup>26</sup>

A consistent feature in Gandhi's understanding of the communal problem are such near-glimpses of the reality.

25. Ibid., Vol XLIII, p. 449.

26. Ibid., Vol. XLV, pp. 322-23.

However, most of them are not followed with any concrete thinking or action on those lines.

The Congress ministries in the provinces<sup>27</sup> (1937-39) had aroused tremendous expectations among the masses on all fronts and perhaps too optimistically even in its ability to solve the communal problem.

Recent researches<sup>28</sup> have shown how the number of riots during this period rule eroded the standing of the Congress in the eyes of the Muslims in United Province. Gandhi's own expectation of the Congress registered a dip. "Congressmen must be held partly responsible for the failure to compose communal differences."<sup>29</sup> There is disenchantment even with Congress ministries. "There is no mistaking the fact that many non-Congress Muslims honestly think that the Congress ministers did not pay enough heed to Muslim complaints".<sup>30</sup>

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27. Gandhi again was by and large silent on the communal problem in the years 1935-36. As he wrote in a letter to Zakir Hussain, "my silence at the present time on this question (Hindu-Muslim) unity is not a sign of my apathy. It is a sign of an ever deepening conviction that the unity has got to come" quoted in Ibid., Vol LXII, p. 442.
28. Mukul Keshavan, Communal violence in N. India (1937-39), article in NMML, second series Number Vol. XXII.
29. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. LXX, p. 291.
30. Ibid., p. 389.

This however, is not to condemn the Congress for shedding its secular stand but only the despair of a father who finds his child not living upto his own expectations. The firm belief and faith in Congress as the only party capable of delivering the goods is strong as ever. This is transparent in a letter written to Syed Bashir Ahmed.

"I cannot subscribe to your sweeping opinion that a Mussalman who joins the Congress betrays Muslim interests. On the contrary, I hold that Mussalmans who desire complete independence for India cannot do better than join the Congress in its uphill fight for independence. It is an organisation that is open to all who care to join it. Do you not see that Mussalmans, if they join it in their thousands, can shake the whole policy of the Congress? There is no proportional representation there. It is a wholly democratic organisation without any communal barrier."<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, we see that Gandhi had a proper understanding of the nature and character of the Congress. He rightly saw it more "as a movement than as a party".<sup>32</sup> But he is unable to formulate how Congress as a (ruling)

31. Ibid., Vol. LXVI, p. 181.

32. For a detailed examination of this concept see Bipan Chandra, Indian National Movement, New Delhi, 1988.

party would tackle the communal problem. His own emphasis is still on the fact that "though a political pact has to come, it will never satisfy me without a heart unity."<sup>33</sup> Since political pacts are mainly "business pacts",<sup>34</sup> therefore they are futile.

Gandhi's perception of the communal problem especially his approach towards it changed significantly with the Lahore (Pakistan) Resolution of the Muslim League. One would, in fact, suggest that if at all his understanding of the Hindu-Muslim problem was to be periodized,<sup>35</sup> it can be done primarily in terms of pre-Lahore resolution<sup>36</sup> and post-Lahore resolution perceptions. This is because as Gandhi himself put it, "the partition proposal (has) altered the face of the Hindu-Muslim problem."<sup>37</sup>

The Congress had already lost flexibility at the top<sup>38</sup>

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33. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. LXVIII, p. 324.

34. Ibid., Vol. LXVI, p. 181.

35. I am making this suggestion very tentatively based on my primary research and overall understanding.

36. See Appendix II.

37. Harijan, May 4, 1940.

38. "The Congress under the guise of establishing mass contact with the Musalmans is calculated to divide and weaken and break the Musalmans. It is an effort to ... detach them from their accredited leaders". Mr. Jinnah's Presidential Address as quoted by The Light, Oct. 24, 1937, in A.I.C.C Papers, File No. B 9/38. (Emphasis mine).

due to its announcement of the mass contact programme. This left Gandhi with little option. It was this that finally forced him to say "freedom now cannot wait for the realization of communal unity",<sup>39</sup> and made him ready for a mass movement even without the Muslims. As he wrote in 1942, "How can you think of a mass movement for liberation without first closing with Muslims?" ask Muslim correspondents whose letters fill my file. But I see for the moment I cannot reach the Muslim mind. The Muslim League blocks my way"<sup>40</sup>

It has been suggested that "Mahatma Gandhi decided to launch the Quit India movement in 1942 to solve the communal problem through a struggle."<sup>41</sup> It was, however, a futile bid, the Muslim mind was already blocked by the Muslim League. It was impossible to by-pass it now.

There was no way out now for Gandhi but to work out different variations of the "unity at the top" method.

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39. It was like wounding a tiger without pulling out its teeth. See Bipan Chandra, 1979, p. 272.

40. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. LXXVI, P. 390.

41. Antony Thomas, Mahatma Gandhi and the Communal Problem, New Delhi, 1983, p. 25.

There is, however, a significant point to be made here. Whereas Gandhi's "unity at the top" strategy of the 1920's emerged essentially from his understanding of the nature of the problem and was fundamentally a matter of choice, in the 40's, it was a Hobson's choice i.e. a choice without an option.

The "unitary method" which he suggested to work out a method was on similar lines. There was to be, according to it, "absolute justice", i.e. yield the maximum consistent "with the welfare of the whole nation without expectation of any consideration from the League".<sup>42</sup> This was to show that one can yield to the other "not out of fear or distrust"<sup>43</sup> but out of "love, a sense of justice".<sup>44</sup> In plain political terms, it seems that through this method, Gandhi is asking the Congress to satisfy the Muslim League to the maximum, consistent with the welfare of the nation.

Probably, Gandhi's failure in perceiving the nature of the communal problem was due to his inability to see it in ideological terms. This was the crucial aspect he essentially missed out.

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42. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. LXXV, pp. 263-64.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

Hypothetically, even Congress satisfying the Muslim League to the maximum was no solution if the digests of the politics remained different between the two. The very ideological base of the politics of Congress and Muslim League were poles apart.<sup>45</sup> This became further clear in the Gandhi-Jinnah talks which, as Gandhi admitted, ran on "parallel lines". Therefore even an individual, non-political mass contact programme could have served little purpose as he had suggested while answering a query. "What could Congressmen do to draw Muslims to the Congress?" He replied, "in the presence of the prevailing distrust there should be no attempt to enlist Muslims or any other group or individuals. What, however, every Hindu could do was mutely to serve his Muslim neighbour or for that matter every non-Hindu neighbour as his blood brother. Such selfless sacrifice was bound to tell in the end."<sup>46</sup>

Answering another question asked in the context of the above answer: "Should we then do nothing political among the Muslim masses?", he replied, "I fail to understand it. If -----

45. "The Congress stood for democracy, socialism and a common Indian nationality; the League existed to promote the interests of Muslims in India as a separate political entity". B.R. Nanda, Gandhi and his critics, pp. 85-6.

46. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, vol. LXXXII, P. 266.

millions regarded non-Hindus as their blood brothers and sisters and treated them as such without the slightest tinge of political motive, it must result in the complete political unity of India... What I have deprecated in the present poisoned state of our communal relations is the attempt on the part of Congressmen to draw non-Hindus into the Congress fold, as it would only accentuate the existing mistrust. But supposing I make friends with Badshah Khan, how does it widen the gulf between the communities? On the contrary it immediately eases communal tension to that extent. Multiply this picture a million fold and it will be seen that difficulty posed in the picture is altogether chimerical..."<sup>47</sup>

Logical fallacy is obvious in the above statement. While it is true that an individual's relation with another improves through mutual interaction, it cannot be said to do the same with the entire community. This explains how people have a "Muslim/Hindu" friend and yet are often strongly communal. What is true on a horizontal one to one basis cannot be extended vertically for the entire community. Moreover, service to another might win an individual, the serviced person's love, affection, or

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47. Ibid., pp.358-59.



gratitude but it does not necessarily change his ideological commitments or predilections.

Gandhi also attempted to perceive the role of the colonial state in the context of the communal problem. After quoting from a Bengali zamindar's letter that "for over 500 years the relation between Hindus and Mussalmans was that of foes. After the advent of British rule, both the Mussalmans and the Hindus were compelled out of policy to forget that racial hatred, and the acrimony of that bitter enmity is now no more. But the permanent difference in the constitution of these two races does even now exist. I believe the present cordial relation is due to British rule and not to the catholicity of modern Hinduism", Gandhi commented : "I regard this statement as pure superstition. The two races lived at peace among themselves during the Muslim rule... There is nothing to prove that the Hindus and the Mussalmans lived at war with one another before the British rule."<sup>48</sup> It was for him a problem" co-eval with the British advent."<sup>49</sup>

The basic digits of his understanding was that the problem was essentially a British creation and the moment

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48. Young India, Feb. 26, 1925, quoted from (ed.) U.R. Rao op.cit, p.6.

49. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. XLVIII, p. 366.

the alien wedge was removed, the divided communities were bound to unite.

At the same time he also stated (1938) that "it is true that the presence of the third person is one reason for Hindu-Muslim differences. But I do not believe that these differences would be resolved merely by eliminating the third power."<sup>50</sup>

It shows that Gandhi had partially succeeded in easing himself out from the rather simplistic "British conspiracy" strait jacket and attributed the Hindu-Muslim problem to other factors as well.

At the same time he is aware of the role the problem has played in the maintenance of the colonial fabric. As he put it: "The builders of the British Indian Empire have patiently built its four pillars - the European interest, the Army, the Princes and the communal divisions".<sup>51</sup> And more importantly, he correctly perceived the role of the state in precipitating the problem. "What the British government have done is to play the Muslims against the Hindus and vice-versa in order to consolidate their power

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50. Ibid., Vol. LXVI, pp. 424-27.

51. Ibid., Vol. LXXI, p. 210.

and to exploit the vast resources of India in their own interest. It is they who finally cut the nation in twain by introducing the virus of separate electorates."<sup>52</sup>

Gandhi, therefore, had a well developed understanding of the role official patronage played in helping communalism flourish. There is, however, little attempt to work out in detail the linkages between colonial state and communal politics. For instance, how covert and overt British patronage helped the Muslim League in gaining recognition as the sole spokesman of the Muslim community.

It is highly probable that Gandhi having understood the means by which colonial state sustained itself<sup>53</sup> tried to draw all forces, even with substantial ideological differences into the mainstream of national movement. One can explain partially from this why Gandhi continued to look towards Muslim League even during the 40's.

It is true that Gandhi developed a more varied understanding of communalism towards the later phase of his political life. For instance, he now assigned an important role to constructive programmes in fostering communal unity:

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52. A.I.C.C. Papers, File No. 1251/40.

53. For a detailed examination, see Bipan Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, pp. 242-45.

"I ask all Hindus and Muslims to devote themselves to the noble task of re-organising village life and in improving their economic condition. Through cottage industries they will find themselves working together in the common task, and unity will thereby grow among them."<sup>54</sup>

Gandhi, therefore, understood the role of common economic endeavour in creating a commonality of consciousness among the masses. Although he does not use the word 'class', the insinuation is clear and also the need to work on those lines. Since he also agrees that a "socialist revolution is likely to make the Hindu-Muslim tension less acute."<sup>55</sup>

Another example of his varied insight in the later phase comes from one of his writings in 1947. He wrote: "It is my belief that communalism is one of the many evils of city life. It is necessarily an outcome of urbanization. Such an atmosphere is not to be found in the villages. The villages cannot even afford to be communal. Our villagers are so poor that they constantly need one another. Their mutual relations are such that they live in a kind of family atmosphere. Hence the problem does not arise here."<sup>56</sup>

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54. Harijan, Jan 26, 1947.

55. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. LXXXVIII, p.2.

56. Ibid., Vol. LXXVI, p. 240.

Two significant points can be brought out from this. Firstly, when he talked of communalism as "an outcome of urbanisation," he is probably hinting at the middle class urban base of communalism. Secondly, when he said that the villagers cannot even afford to be communal, he is hinting at the economic roots of the question.

To go back to one of the basic questions one sought to answer at the beginning of the chapter: how did Gandhi define communalism? did he define it at all? The answer is: Gandhi did not define communalism in plain terms as a social scientist would like him to. It has, however, to be kept in mind that Gandhi despite his voluminous writings on the Hindu-Muslim question, seldom attempted to theorise in the language of a social scientist. His definition (as he meant it) therefore has to be drawn out from his scattered, random insights.

On the basis of my primary research I would submit that the focus of his definition would have definitely differed from the 1920's to that of the 40's.

Whereas "religious differences/intolerance/misunderstanding" and the negative role of British were the central points of his understanding in the 20's, the focus was more scattered in the 40's with a greater emphasis on social-political and economic factors.

Gandhi's failure to resolve the communal problem has been open to various explanations by different historians. This has been dealt with briefly in the Introduction.

This dissertation would submit that Gandhi's failure to resolve the Hindu-Muslim problem was due to his inability to view it as an ideology. Communalism was, after all, a strongly vigorous ideology and could be countered only if an equally strong and vigorous ideological battle was launched against it. It could be appeased, pacified or accommodated only momentarily.

This ideological battle should have been launched in the 20's and 30's itself when communalism as a force was a mere shadow of the monster it turned out to be in the 40's. However, Gandhi's faulty understanding of the problem at this stage prevented him from working on those lines.

The tragedy remained that while he talked of mass contact in the 30's and 40's, he was unable to create a mechanism to make it happen. As such, while he talked of mass contact theoretically, in practice he was reduced to "unity at the top" politics.

Moreover, his variegated understanding of the problem could not be coalesced into a coherent whole.

As he himself said, tragically but truly, in a letter to Abdul Wadood Sarhadi in 1942 : "I sincerely want unity among Hindus and Muslims, but I do not know how it is to be brought about."<sup>57</sup>

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57. Ibid., p. 246.

**Conclusion**



## Conclusion

It would be significant to have a brief overview of Gandhi's vision of communal relations in free India to sum up his overall perspective of the communal problem.

Gandhi's free India was a secular and democratic India. "Free India will be no Hindu raj, it will be Indian raj based, not on the majority of any religious sect or community but on the representatives of the whole people without distinction of religion"<sup>1</sup>. In an independent India he could not "contemplate communal franchise (or) ... favoritism for anyone"<sup>2</sup>.

It was an India where everyone was welcome even after the partition trauma. "I cannot associate myself with the contention that India should drive out all its Muslim population to Pakistan as the Muslims of Pakistan are driving out all Non-Muslims. Two wrongs cannot make one right"<sup>3</sup>.

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1. Harijan, Aug 9, 1942, quoted in M.K. Gandhi, (ed.) U.R. Rao, The way to communal harmony, p.367.
2. Harijan, March 2, 1947, quoted in ibid, p. 362. (emphasis mine)
3. Harijan, Sept 28, 1947, quoted in ibid p. 365. (emphasis mine)

And above all, he was confident that for harmonious relations between the two communities "the new basis has to be built here in the villages where the Hindus and the Muslims have lived and suffered together on the land of their forefathers..."<sup>4</sup> Gandhi thus, believed that the communal problem had made little inroads in the villages.

It was with this perspective and the vision that "India is a big country, a big nation composed of different cultures, which are tending to blend with one another, each complementing the rest. If I must wait for the completion of the process I must wait,"<sup>5</sup> that he continued to strive in his long - winding quest to attain communal harmony.

To achieve it, he remained unwaveringly wedded to his fundamental principles of satyagraha and ahimsa.

His usage of religion in this context, was essentially the idiom through which he tried to reach the people. It was in his understanding a basic identity of the people and could not be dissolved forcefully; therefore what he attempted was to invoke the true religious identity of the people where all religions became one.

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4. Harijan, Jan 12, 1947 quoted in Ibid, p.406.

5. Harijan, May 4, 1940 quoted in Ibid, p. 405.

Even his attempts to counter communal riots were within his broader philosophical paradigm of satyagraha and ahimsa. Gandhi countered this vicious malady with a zeal of a fanatic, groping and stumbling to find a suitable mechanism to delimit its role.

The evolution of his understanding of the problem underwent significant changes over the years. Slowly but surely, Gandhi was able to realize the importance of directly reaching out to the Muslim masses and imparting them with a secular nationalist consciousness.

That he failed to do so was for two important factors. One, the realization came a trifle too late when communalism had gathered sufficient strength, two, lack of a suitable mechanism to make it work.

Second, Gandhi's failure to counter communalism, to reiterate a point emphasized earlier, was primarily due to his inability to perceive it as an ideology which needed to be countered. As such, while he could provide the healing touch he could not deliver the coup de grace to the cancer.

Gandhi once said : "My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statement on a given question, but to be consistent with Truth as it may present itself to me at a given moment. The result has been that I have grown from

Truth to Truth..."<sup>6</sup> And so it was, as he went on in his life-long quest for Hindu - Muslim unity through the elusive, tortuous lanes of time. But he went on regardless, leading kindly light, carrying on his long lean shoulders the shame of humanity till the day the flames of his dream shot into the night sky, hunted by an unreasonable bullet.

As an individual Gandhi made both the right and the wrong choices; more so in his striving for Hindu - Muslim unity. But in facing the problem right into the eye, as only he could, with a spirit and courage far beyond the frail frame of his small physique, he became a man beyond all history and all seasons.

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6. M.K. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol LXX, P. 203.

# Appendix

Extracts from communal press

Appendix I

The Matwala (Calcutta), 15 May, 1926, "Just at a time when Hindus had espoused the cause of a Khilafat, a Marwari widow was forcibly converted to Islam. Beef was forcibly thrust into the mouths of thousands of Hindus in Malabar...

Home/Pol. 1926, File No. 236/26.

Fereshta (A leaflet was printed in both Urdu and Bengali on 25 April, 1926) : Mussalmans, beware ! Do not spare the traitors. In retaliation for the murder of one Muhammadan (the heads of) 100 kafirs should be taken. In the name of Allah protect Islam

Home/Pol. 1926. File No. 11/XXV/26.

For details see, Gargi Chakravarti, op.cit. PP. 240-43

LAHORE RESOLUTION OF MARCH 1940

Appendix II

"It is the considered view of this session of the All-India Muslim League that no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles, viz., that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the North-Western and Eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute independent States in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign. Adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards should be specifically provided in the constitution for minorities in the units and in the regions for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them and in other parts of India where the Mussalmans are in a minority, adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards shall be specifically provided in the Constitution for them and other minorities, for the protection of their religious, cultural economic, political,

administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them. The session further authorizes the Working Committee to frame a scheme of Constitution in accordance with these basic principles, providing for the assumption finally by the respective regions of all powers such as defence, external affairs, communications, customs and such other matters as may be necessary."





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