

## Gandhi as a Harbinger of Peace

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### Abstract

*In society the conflicts are as old as the society itself. In any society or nation-state, the resolutions of conflict, and restoration of normalcy is a cyclic process, which can be controlled by inculcating the values of coexistence and syncretism among the citizens. Where a society is rooted in nonviolence principles, it becomes easier to resolve conflicts at their incipient stage and control them in their escalated state. When Mahatma Gandhi propagated and practiced nonviolence he not only ended an imperial intrusion, but the principles that an independent India inherited emerged from this conflict situation. The popularity and widespread acceptance of these principles make nonviolence a powerful tool that provides the grieving party with moral legitimacy and weakens the accused. Whatever their interpretation or scope, they are a potent force that can prevent a conflict from shifting its focus from instigating violence to finding solutions. Principles of non-violence can resolve conflict is by presenting its focus from shifting from finding solution towards instigating violence. Consequently, nonviolence is the calming factor which resolves conflicts in order to establish more effective socio-political processes and more productive institutional alternatives. The world is today faced with plethora of conflicts – of all types. Hence, we see the emphasis Gandhi places on universal brotherhood and peaceful coexistence has all time relevance. Therefore, his teachings are the most upheld patriotism principles as well as ways and means of ending various global conflicts. In fact, a true testimony of Gandhij's teaching lies in the fact that mere "good ends" do not justify 'bad' means. The world over therefore, today the emphasis is on human dignity and upholding the values of natural justice. It is obvious that in today's world, nothing seems to be permanent except the 'crisis of peace' – and nothing would be a better tribute to this man than to re-dedicate ourselves towards the cause of 'peace' and mutual tolerance. Here lies the relevance of Gandhism.*

**Keywords:** Non-violence, Harbinger, Peace.

In the midst of chaos and unhindered interventionist policies of the erstwhile great powers, i.e., U.K., Gandhi's ideas on *Hindu-Muslim* unity are significant and pertinent even in contemporary times.

After the success of nationalist movement in India, Mahatma Gandhi vowed for peace among communities and liberation of other subjugated peoples the world over. The paper attempts to analyze the urge and relevance of peace during the struggle for independence and the union between Hindus and Muslims. It also evaluates the context, of a unified movement against the colonial masters for the liberation of the country and in terms of the changing world order.

Gandhi's non-violence policy was based on principles of Ahimsa which is quintessentially the backbone of world systems survival. Lastly, the paper will attempt to uncover the penultimate understanding of peace which has become a sine qua non and the cardinal principle of world's survival in light of cultural-political and international changes.

Gandhi was instrumental and profoundly interested in *Hindu-Muslim* unity and made it one of the central planks of his nationalist agenda based on building a true national and secular society in its indigenous sense with equal respect for all religions.<sup>1</sup>

Gandhi championed the cause of *Hindu-Muslim* unity. The Lucknow Pact of 1916 was premised on this fact that once the communal unity is attained by the leaders it will trickle down to the masses.

In 1920, Gandhi warned his countrymen: "Divided we must remain slaves. This unity cannot be a mere policy to be discarded when it does not suit us. We can discard it only when we are tired of *swaraj* (self rule). Hindu Muslim unity must be our creed to last for all time and under all circumstances."<sup>2</sup> In *Young India*, 1920, Gandhi asks: What then does *Hindu-Mohamedans* Unity consist in and how can it be best promoted? He then answers; it consists in having a common purpose, a common goal and common sorrows. It is best promoted by cooperating to reach the common goal, by sharing one another's sorrows and by mutual toleration. We have a common goal. We wish this great country of ours to be greater and self governing. We have enough sorrows to share. And today seeing that the *Mohamedans* are deeply concerned on the question of *Khilafat* and their case is just, nothing can be more powerful less than winning *Mohamedan* friendship for the Hindu as to give his whole-hearted support to the *Mohamedan* claim. No amount of drinking out of the same cup or dining out of the same bowl can bind the *Hindu-Mohamedans* Unity in the *Khilafat* question. Mutual toleration is the need for all time and for all races.<sup>3</sup>

Gandhi in a letter on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1920, Bombay to Srinivasa Sastri, said, "*Hindu- Mohamedan* Unity in its essence and from a political and religious standpoint as an unalterable article of faith. This contemplates mutual help, mutual toleration and recognition of the sufferings of one section to be the sufferings of all." Infact, this has led to the official programme of the Muslim League for "the Unity propaganda by means of interdining and intermarriage and will include vigorous cooperation on the *Khilafat* question". Gandhi, in his discussion with his friends, once said that he will not bother to ask for official recognition of his creed for civil disobedience and that he did not belong to any party and wanted to make the League an organization which could help all honest men who are capable of doing justice to the service irrespective of party.<sup>4</sup>

On 6<sup>th</sup> October, 1920, Gandhi said: "I believe that, in the midst of all the bloodshed, chicane and fraud being resorted to on a colossal scale in the West, the whole of humanity is silently but surely making progress towards a better age. And India by finding true independence and self-expression through an imperishable *Hindu-Muslim* unity and therefore non-violent means, i.e., unadulterated self-sacrifice, can point a way out of the prevailing darkness".<sup>5</sup>

*Hindu-Muslim* unity received a helping hand after the Balkan wars and the struggle of Turkey in the years preceding the First World War which aroused anti-British feeling among Indian Muslims and when Gandhi lent his support to the cause for the preserving the Caliphate and the territorial integrity of Turkey. During 1919-20, the *Hindu-Muslim* unity reached its zenith. The *Khilafat* movement became a central issue in the nationalist movement. But in 1924, a jolt was given to

Gandhi's idea of peace.<sup>6</sup> It was during this period Gandhi dubbed the newspaperman as 'a walking plague who spreads contagion of lies and calumnies.'<sup>7</sup>

In a letter on 12 March 1922, Sabarmati jail, to Hakim Ajmal Khan (Physician and politician who took leading part in the *Khilafat* movement and President of INC, 1921) said: "A staunch *Mussalman*, you have shown in your life what *Hindu-Muslim* unity means. We all now realize that without that unity, we cannot attain our freedom and I make bold to say that, without that unity, the *Mussalmans* of India cannot render the *Khilafat* all the aid they wish. Divided, we must ever remain slaves. This unity, therefore, cannot be a mere policy to be discarded when it does not suit us. We can discard it only when we are tired of *Swaraj*. *Hindu-Muslim* unity must be our creed to last for all time and under all circumstances. Nor must that unity be a menace to the minorities, the Parsis, the Christians, the Jews or the powerful Sikhs."<sup>8</sup>

Gandhi had the firm belief that the unity among people is attainable until we adopt non-violence as a firm policy.

He says: "I call it a policy because it is limited to the preservation of that unity. But it follows that thirty crores of Hindus and *Mussalmans* united not for a time but for all time can defy all the powers of the world and should consider it a cowardly act to resort to violence in their dealings with English administrators. We have hitherto feared them and their guns in our simplicity. The moment we realize our combined strength, we shall consider it unmanly to fear them and therefore, ever to think of striking them. Hence, am I anxious and impatient to persuade my countrymen to feel non-violent not out of our weakness but out of our strength. But you and I know that we have not yet evolved the non-violence of the strong and we have not done so because the *Hindu-Muslim* union has not gone much beyond the stage of policy. There is still too much mutual distrust and consequent fear. I am not disappointed. The progress we have made in that direction is phenomenal. We seem to have covered in eighteen months' time the work of a generation. But infinitely more is necessary. Neither the classes nor the masses feel instinctively that our union is necessary as the breath of our nostrils."

For this consummation, Gandhi said, "we must, it seems to me, rely more upon quality than quantity. Given a sufficient number of *Hindus* and *Mussalmans* with almost a fanatical faith in everlasting friendship between the Hindus and the *Mussalmans* of India, we shall not be long before the unity permeates the masses. A few of us must first clearly understand that we can make no headway without accepting non-violence in thought, word and deed for the full realization of our political ambition."<sup>9</sup>

For Gandhi, "*Hindu-Moslem* unity means home rule. There is no question more important and more pressing than this," so saying he announced a fast for twenty-one days. A Hindu, he chose to fast in the house of Mohammed Ali, his Muslim friend, with a Christian missionary, Charles Freer Andrews, as his nurse. He subsisted entirely on water, reserving the right to add salt as plain water nauseated him. In a series of short messages, Gandhi told his followers that instead of working for a change of heart among Englishmen, they must for the moment address themselves to creating a change of heart among Hindus and Muslims. "Before we dare to think of freedom we must be brave enough to love one another, to tolerate one another's religion, even prejudices and superstitions." A week after he began fasting, three hundred representatives of the Muslims and Hindu faith convened a "unity" conference in Delhi. With heightened concern for the health of the Mahatma, they passed a number of resolutions and reconciliation. On the twenty-first day, Gandhi broke his fast "for the cause of brotherhood."<sup>10</sup>

In a *Bunch of Old Letters*, by Jawaharlal Nehru on 23-4-1926, Gandhi said: Hindus and Muslims are going more and more away from each other. But this thing does not disturb me. Somehow or other, I feel that the separation is growing in order only to bring them all closer later on.<sup>11</sup>

The compulsion and violence cannot solve the problems between Hindus and Muslims; Gandhi retorted by saying that rather voluntary action on part of both was significant to strengthen for a broader cause of nationalist movement.

Gandhi sees no conflict between the interests of Hindus and Muslims.<sup>12</sup> He claims to be a friend of both the communities, even as he claims to be the friend of all communities and at the same time to be an "orthodox Hindu." This, an orthodox Hindu cannot understand. To a Muslim Leaguer, Gandhiji being an orthodox Hindu, must work for the good of the Hindus only. This must necessarily conflict with Muslim interests. The Muslim Leaguer could not understand that one may love one's community and yet be fair, and even generous to the other communities. On the other hand, the Hindu communalists accused Gandhiji of sacrificing Hindu interests to the cantankerous, intransigent and unreasonable demands of the Muslims.<sup>13</sup>

In *My Dharma* (G.) Navajivan, 20 December 1925, Gandhi said, the Hindu-Muslim problem is, today, like the lump of clay on the potter's wheel. The Almighty alone knows what kind of pot will emerge. However, having regard for the unparallel popular awakening, the present developments, though painful should surprise no one. All the dirt has come up to the surface and therefore, it is all that we see. What today the Hindus and Muslims cannot be persuaded to do, they will be forced to do sooner or later by the pressure of circumstances. They have no choice but to become united, and so I am not worried on that score. If Fate has decreed that we should fight a few battles among ourselves, let us. This will not be the first instance of such fighting in the annals of the world. Brothers sometimes fight with one another, but unite again. When the era of peace dawns upon us, wars will seem barbaric. Today, however, fighting is looked upon as civilized.<sup>14</sup>

Gandhi did much more than demonstrates his friendship by his frank criticism and by treating Hindus and Muslims alike. When the time of suffering came for the Muslims after partition of the sub-continent rose towering to their defense and staked his life on the issue of Muslims being able to live respectably in India. Gandhi wrote in *Harijan* in 1946: "We must not cease to aspire, inspire of wild talk, to befriend all Muslims and to hold them as prisoners of our love." A few weeks before his death, in one of the post-prayer speeches, Gandhi reminded his Hindu audience: "Delhi is poorer for the disappearance of the exquisite workmanship of the Muslims. It is a miserable and miserly thing for the Hindus and the Sikhs to take away from them their means of livelihood....In this great city of ours there is room for all....The condition of keeping me in your midst is that all the communities in India live in peace with another, not by the force of arms but that of love than which there is no better cement to be found in the world."<sup>15</sup>

Gandhi in 1947 was quite certain that the *Hindu-Muslim* enmity was a base manufacture which was destined to die of inanition. However, it was pity that the malaise had invaded the intelligentsia. It made the intelligentsia disrespectable and some of them would live to see the dawn of sanity when they would laugh at their own folly. Gandhi had a hope till last that the British would resist the temptation to stay in India in order to give her peace. He desired that he convince them that they never give the blessing of peace to India. It was, as Lord Halifax, when he was Viceroy as Lord Irwin, had said on a memorable occasion, "the peace of the grave."<sup>16</sup>

According to Rudolphs, Gandhi's charismatic leadership was itself in part 'historically determined', rooted in the aspects of tradition he interpreted for his time....he used traditional symbols and language to convey new meanings and to reconstitute social action.<sup>17</sup>

Gandhi's assassin, N.V. Godse, was a member of *Hindu Mahasabha* and a former member of Hindu-rightist body the *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh* (RSS). Gandhi had done everything possible to stave off partition. He fell victim to *Hindu-Muslim* communalism. Yet Gandhi never lost faith in reason and humanity.

With stockpiling of nuclear weapons and its test on Japanese people at Nagasaki and Hiroshima led to the common man of the world to be afraid of a probable world holocaust which is based on 'Fear'. Gandhi's philosophical essence for human beings to emulate was to be fearless, i.e., by adopting absolute path of non-violence. Meaning thereby 'only love can dispel hatred, as sun dispels the mist.'<sup>18</sup> According to Holmes, Mahatma exercises mightier influence over a larger number of human beings than any single individual alive upon this planet. And this influence is not merely cultural and

spiritual but political, being directed straight at the accomplishment of independence for his people.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Gandhi held up before all mankind the image of what every human being could be; he held up before us all, so to say, a mirror reflecting the spiritual heights all of us could scale. Subconsciously, we all saw in him our better self.<sup>20</sup> War or conflict, according to Gandhi, has its roots in the individual, and his local, national and international environment. And, therefore, an integrated approach to world peace should aim at the more or less simultaneous reform and regeneration of the individual and his milieu. Peace is a natural corollary and culmination of his ethical, political, economic and educational philosophy.

The non-violent method of *hartal* (strike) was a potent weapon used by Gandhi. The 6 April, 1919 *hartal* against Rowlatt Act, the response was extraordinary. "Almost the whole of India was closed down. Business and government, even in the smallest villages, were paralyzed for twenty-hours. In the big cities millions marched in seemingly endless parades. One of the most encouraging things to Gandhi, and conversely one of the most disheartening to the government, was what a British publication acknowledged to be 'the unprecedented fraternization between the Hindus and the Moslems'".<sup>21</sup>

The paradigm of interdependence is important for Gandhi, there is nothing in the Universe that is independent of all else. Everything-every human-is interconnected and interdependent. It is therefore impossible for anyone to gain by harming another or harming society or nature. If interdependence is the condition of one's existence, there can be no irreconcilability of interests. All or the interests of all are interconnected, and one who seeks one's own welfare has to realize that one's welfare is dependent on the welfare of the others. Violence, greed, exploitation, the desire to dominate is therefore instruments of self-injury as they are manifestations of the anti-social forces.<sup>22</sup>

Independent and free India becomes Gandhi's way to world peace. With overwhelming logic Gandhi vowed: 'I who belong to subject nation did not know how I could work for peace except by working for freedom, if India could be helped to win freedom through peaceful means it would be a contribution for peace.'<sup>23</sup> Gandhi's peculiar approach, all these details are relevant; and they fit into the emerging pattern of peace.

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