CHAPTER VI

MAHATMA GANDHI’S VIEWS ABOUT COMMUNALISM AND HIS PROPOSALS FOR ENSURING COMMUNAL HARMONY

There are many social problems existing in the society which stand as stumbling blocks in the way to development. Poverty, unemployment, pollution, regionalism, illiteracy, criminalism, Alcoholism, violence against women, drug traffic, population growth, child marriage, black money, are all are posing threat to the nation’s development. But above all these social menaces, the rising communal violence in India is emerging to be dangerous of all other social distrusts. Mahatma Gandhi realized the damage which communalism may cause and treated the problem with much importance. He regarded the abolition of communal disharmony and ensuring Hindu-Muslim unity as the essential pre-requisite for ‘Swaraj’. In the early public life itself Gandhi kept alive the idea of communal unity. He lived in South Africa for twenty years in the midst of Muslim friends and they treated him as a member of the family. Realizing the lack of unity between Hindus and Mussalmans in South Africa, he said “I had realized early enough in South Africa that there was no genuine friendship between the Hindus and the Mussalmans. I never missed a single opportunity to remove the obstacles in the way of unity.” 1 The social work of Gandhi in South Africa was revolving round his idea of Hindu Muslim unity. He told in this connection “in South Africa, I have only one duty to bring the

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Hindus and the Muslims together and serve them as a single community.”

Gandhi condemned the idea of communalism. He regarded the practice to attribute everything to the communal spirit as a sign of inferiority complex.

The old concept of communalism and the recent communal problems differ in their nature. Earlier, communal consciousness and keeping away from other’s religion was viewed as communalism. But communalism prevailing in the present society is not of that passive nature and possesses high degree of antagonism towards the other. Mahatma Gandhi understood this danger very early. In his words “communalism of the virulent type is a recent growth. The lawlessness is a monster with many faces. It hurts all in the end, including those who are primarily responsible for it.”

Mahatma Gandhi was very much aware of the essentiality in bringing together the conflicting religions. In a multi-religious nation like India, the enmity between the two communities; Hinduism and Islam grew at the cost of national unity. Divisive thoughts are meaningless and foolish in the eyes of Gandhi which served no purpose. “The Hindu thinks that in quarrelling with the Mussalman he is benefiting Hinduism; and the Mussalman thinks that in fighting a Hindu, he is benefiting Islam. But each is ruining his faith.”

He took considerable effort to educate the people about this fact, because he was sure that as soon as people realize the futility of fighting in the name of religion the communal violence will be vanished.

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2 M K Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Published by The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, Vol-VIII, p.101
3 M K Gandhi, Harijan, 15-9-1940, p.284
Gandhi advised to keep away from the dirt of communalism through the practice of true religion. Religion does not teach to hate or keep ill will. All religions of the world uphold the message of love and peace. The essence of true religious teaching is that one should serve and befriend all. “It is easy enough to be friendly to one’s friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business.”

Gandhi understood the importance of communal harmony in India not only from the religious point of view, but he was sure of its necessity in the socio-political sphere. To Gandhi unity between peoples who holds different faiths was an unavoidable factor in the process of national integration. He held that the suspicion between the Hindus and Mussalmans will only help the British. He believed that no movement in India against the British rule would succeed unless the two communities are united. Gandhi hold the notion that communal disharmony in India was accentuated by the British in order to sustain their rule in India. British were convinced that the unity among Hindus and Muslims would make difficult their efforts to maintain administration. “They can retain their hold on India only by a policy of divide and rule. A living unity between Hindus and Muslims is fraught with danger to their rule. It would mean an end to it.”

Gandhi entered Indian political scenario at a time when separatism was so visible in the national movement. The Hindu reformist movements started by Shradhanarda Saraswathy, Aurbindo and Swami Vivekananda to

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6 M K Gandhi, *Harijan*, 4-5-1940, p.315
awaken the national feelings was viewed by the Muslim community with suspicion. Identifying Hindu festivals and celebrations with national struggle for freedom further alienated the Muslim community from the national movement. The separatist stands of Muslim League and their decision to attain the patronage of British rule virtually made the scene more vulgar. It was at this crucial time Mahatma Gandhi entered into the Indian political scenario. Gandhi’s life was then dedicated to the Hindu-Muslim unity for the next three decades till his martyrdom. He put the blame on the British policy for the growth of communalism in India. He said “I am firmly of the opinion that there is no unity because the third party is there to prevent it.”

Gandhi made it his mission of life to unite the two communities. His words reflect the determination behind his decision: “that there are two things to which I am devoting my life–permanent unity between Hindus and Mohammadens and satyagraha.” Gandhi’s words further reconfirm his firm decision. He was ready to sacrifice his life in the efforts to unite Hindus and Muslims. “I am trying to become the best cement between the two communities; my longing is to cement the two with my blood.” Gandhi had clear solutions for every communal problem. Between Hindu and Mussalman and he saw a lot of things in common and find nothing to be lived in enmity. The champion of communal unity who dedicated his life for it was having answer for every question asked about communal harmony.

Mere shake hands and performances on the stage could not bring communal unity. Surface level unity does not serve the purpose. Gandhi

7 M K Gandhi, *Harijan*, 24-5-1942, p.162
8 M K Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* Vol. XV, Published by the Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, p.296
9 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 25-9-1924
meant Hindu-Muslim unity as a state in which both parties think and act on common interests “it consists in our having a common purpose, a common goal and common sorrows. It is best promoted by co-operating to reach the same goal by sharing one another’s sorrows and by mutual toleration.”

“It means an unbreakable heart unity.”

Conflicts between individuals should be seen as conflicts between the citizens of India. If two parties, one Hindu and another Muslim is in conflict regarding any issue; it should be viewed as two Indians in conflict. Taking such conflicts to the level of a religious issue is contrary to the spirit of communal harmony. “When a Hindu or Mussalman does evil, it is evil done by an Indian to an Indian and each one of us must personally share the blame and try to remove the evil. There is no other meaning to unity than this... And in this sense, we are Indians first and Hindus, Mussalmans, Parsis and Christians after.”

Gandhi raised the principle of National Unity above all other divisions. To him Nationalism was much greater than sectarianism. Upholding the Nationalist spirit and negating the divisive thoughts would ensure an atmosphere of communal unity. Considering the religious identity above all other identities and regarding religion as the basic factor of determining social relations are inherent nature of communalism. As religion is used as catalytic agent by the communal forces to generate communal antagonism, a clear and distinct view about religion is necessary for understanding the Gandhian principles of communal harmony.

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10 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 25-2-1920, p.3
12 M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 26-1-1922, p.22
Gandhi’s Concept of Religion

Several wars were fought in history in the name of religion. A lot of blood was shed for the propagation of religions. Today also atrocities in the name of religion are still continuing. All the sins done in the name of religion is because of the ignorance about true religion. Mahatma Gandhi understood the reason behind the communal hatred. He wanted to bring communal harmony through better understanding of one’s religion. All religions of world preach love, compassion, peace and morality. Even if all the religions contain these virtues, religion has been deliberately used as a tool to spread hatred. In India, were the peoples are deeply religious in nature; it is easy to spark communal tensions. Gandhi held that “Religions are not for separating men from one another, they are meant to bind them, it is a misfortune that, today, they are so distorted that they have become a potent cause of strife and mutual slaughter.”13

Religion for Gandhi was something which cannot be separated from life. He said no man can live without religion. It was not that customary religion, which Gandhi valued, but the religion which goes with morality and ethics. Every aspect of the religion should be based on morality. “I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality. I tolerate unreasonable religious sentiments when it is not immoral.”14 “True religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in soil.”15 “Moral ethics and religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house built on sand. And religion

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13 M K Gandhi, *Harijan*, 8-6-1940, p.207
14 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 21-7-20, p.4
divorced from morality is like sounding brass good only for making a noise and breaking glass.”

The external performances and rituals do not form the essentials of good religion. Truth, love, compassion, innocence and moral values are the essence of religion. When we lose the moral base in life, we cease to be religious. “There is no religion higher than truth and righteousness.”

“To revile one another’s religion, to make reckless statements, to utter untruth, to break the heads of innocent men, to desecrate temples or mosques, is a denial of God.” Religion in its real sense should be a platform for the spiritual upliftment of men. There is no room for separatism or sectarianism in the practice of religion. “By religion, I do not mean formal religion or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions which brings us face to face with our maker.” Every religion should be viewed as a tool for the purification of one’s soul. More emphasis is given to the morals and ethics of the religions than rituals and practices.

Religion in Gandhi’s concept is one which guides all the activities of man. All the actions including social, political and personal should have to be based on religious principles. “Religion should pervade every one of our actions; here religion does not mean sectarianism of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supercede them. It harmonizes them and gives

16 V T Patel, New Dimensions and Perspectives in Gandhism, Inter India Publications, New Delhi, 1989, p.171
them reality.”

Gandhi insisted the bondage of man to God in the practice of religion. As a man values his religion others than anything, Gandhi wanted to center all the actions of a man from religious teachings. In his words “Every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion because religion means being bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath.”

Usual religious practices like going to the temple, prayers and chanting of mantras or daily reading of religious books were not enough requirements for Gandhi’s belief in God. He believed in the indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything and his religion was firmly based on his faith in God. By equating truth to God, he laid full emphasis on the importance of religious men to follow truth and act according to truth. He regarded religion as a medium for self purification and search for truth. Gandhi explained his concept like this: “Let me explain what I mean by religion, it is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religious, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one’s very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. And which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the maker and itself.”

Gandhi rejected Religion devoid of truth and Ahimsa. He gave utmost value to truth and said “to me religion means truth and Ahimsa or rather truth alone, because truth includes Ahimsa, Ahimsa being the

20 M K Gandhi, Harijan, 10-2-1940, p.445
21 M K Gandhi, Harijan, 2-3-1934, p.23
22 M K Gandhi, Young India, 12-5-1920, p.1070
necessary and indispensable means for its discovery.”\textsuperscript{23} He held the concept that no man can live without religion. The atheists, according to Gandhiji were rejecting the religion and beliefs because of ignorance. He rejected their denial of God and stated in this connection that “it is like a man saying that he breaths but he has no nose.”\textsuperscript{24} The atheists admitted the existence of truth and by doing so they are admitting the existence of God and religion. Religion which is contrary to practical affairs in its observance was not acceptable to Gandhi.

Religion should be synonymous with practical affairs. Faith diverting the faithful to misery is opposite to the spirit of religion. “Religion which takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion. And that is why I am putting a religious matter before you in a practical form.”\textsuperscript{25} In every aspect of Gandhi’s religious concept, we can see this practical side. Gandhi’s religious teachings from various faith of the world contain a practical approach. He declined to be bound by an interpretation, however, learned it might be, if it was repugnant to reason or moral sense. Any teaching which appeared to be against pursuing a truthful life was not acceptable for him. Gandhi tested his faith with conscience “I apply the test of Truth and \textit{Ahimsa} laid down by these very scriptures for interpretation. I reject what is inconsistent with it.”\textsuperscript{26}

Gandhi hesitated to accept religious performances and actions, which appeared to be against the well being of the believers. Almost all of his ideologies in the social and political life were derived from religions.

\textsuperscript{25} M K Gandhi, \textit{Young India}, 7-5-1925 , p.164
\textsuperscript{26} M K Gandhi, \textit{Young India}, 7-5-1925
Every one of Gandhi’s actions had a touch of religious teachings from one faith or another. Even if he was a deep admirer of religious ideologies, he rejected some of the religious theories and practices owing to their unpractical approach “if any action of mine, claimed to be spiritual is proved to be unpractical, it must be pronounced to be a failure. I do believe that the most spiritual act is the most practical in the true sense of the term.”

“I do not advocate surrender of God given reasoning faculty in the face of ancient tradition. Any tradition, however ancient, if inconsistent with morality, is fit to be banished from the land.”

Gandhi’s rejection of the Hindu practice of untouchability, animal sacrifice, sati, etc and the adoption of fasting, prayers, self-suffering, non-violence, truth, etc in the political and social life can be viewed in this sense.

Religion should also be a medium for service to the society. Wearing religious clothes and sitting legs crossed in the solitude away from the burning problems of the masses, appeared to Gandhi, religion of lazy men. He was inspired by the ‘Bhagavatgita’s principle of ‘karmayoga’ and dedicated his spiritual life in the service of humanity. He repeatedly said, “indeed religion should pervade every one of our actions”. “He did not know any religion apart from human activity; the spiritual law did not work in a field of its own but expressed itself through the ordinary activities of life. To be truly religious, one did not have to retire to the Himalayas nor shrink into the security of the home or a sect.”

Mahatma Gandhi’s revolutionary act of bringing religious values into the service of society is a unique thing. Every scholar, every teacher, every saint was sure of the

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27 M K Gandhi, Harijan, 1-7-1939, p.181
28 M K Gandhi, Young India, 22-9-1925, p.139
goodness of religious principles. Gandhi replanted these religious virtues from holy places to the midst of society. To him true religion was the service to humanity and he served the masses spreading the light of spiritual values. “To be true to such religion, one has to lose oneself in continuous and continuing service of all life.”

To Gandhi religion was the sum total of morality, spirituality, service to humanity and belief in the unseen power. A deep religious man like Gandhi lived and preached the essence of religion, i.e. peace and love. Even if Gandhi declared himself as a *sanatanic* Hindu who accepted the scriptures and admitted idol worship, he tried his maximum in his life time to eradicate evil practices from Hinduism. Gandhi’s novel views about religion make him unique among the scholars of religion. The interpretations about religions coined by Gandhi from extensive study of various scriptures and texts are answers to critics who blame religion for the communal problems.

**Mahatma Gandhi’s Religious Interpretations against Communalism**

Gandhi was termed as a ‘saint among politicians and a politician among saints’. Upholding the moral values and introducing religious ideas in the political field made him different from other political leaders of that time. Realizing the inefficiency of violent methods used in the struggle for freedom, he asked the masses to act non-violently to resist the oppression and exploitation. After two decades of social work in South Africa, when Gandhi reached India, the political and social atmosphere were some what polarized on the basis of religion. He did not attempt to wipe out religions from the political field to bring about a resolution for the communal problems.

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30 Raghavan Iyer ed *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1991, p.159
problem, instead he tried to spiritualize politics and thus to purify the political scenario.

Gandhi’s approach to the problem of communalism in India was that it was of recent origin. He did not accept the theory that from the very advent of Islam invasions in India the communities were fighting each other. There was no traditional animosity existed between the two communities. Gandhi rejected the doctrine of inborn enmity between the two communities. While admitting the fighting which has happened in the past and the strained relations for the time being, both the communities ceased to quarrel and lived in peace for a long time. “The Hindus flourished under Muslim sovereigns and the Muslims under the Hindus. Each party recognized that mutual fighting was suicidal…. Both parties therefore decided to live in peace. With the English advent, quarrels recommenced.”31 The British policy of divide and rule was cleverly implemented in the Indian society. To him there is nothing in Hinduism or Islam to keep the two apart from one another. He rightly saw the motives of the British and some political aspirants behind the rivalry between two religions. Gandhi was very much convinced about the importance of unity between Hindus and Muslims. Instead of asking the masses to keep aloof religion from their politics, he preached the principles from various beliefs to educate them about the futility of keeping religious antagonism. He always advocated that “religion is not for separating men from one another, they are meant to bind

them. It is a misfortune that, today, they are so distorted that they have become a potent cause of strife and mutual slaughter.”

In order to separate the masses from the ongoing practice of communal politics, Gandhi advocated the spiritualization of politics. For a living unity among the religions, the shadow of political communalism has to be removed. The introduction of religious values in the field of politics and making people get self purified through real practice of religion was the plan. As he was convinced about the malpractices in religion which contribute to the rise of communal problems, he insisted on a political work based on religious ethics. He said, “for me politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt ever to be shunned. Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns after God and truth.”

Religion and politics cannot be separated in compartments. Every action, of an individual should be based on religion. A man cannot be religious in his personal life and irreligious in politics and social work. Gandhi underlined the concept saying “I do not conceive religion as one of the many activities of mankind… There is no such thing for me therefore as leaving politics for religion. For me, every, activity is governed by what I consider to be my religion.” While answering to a question regarding the meaning of spiritualizing the political life, Gandhi clearly said that political life must be an echo of private life and that there cannot be any divorce between the two. Gandhi’s religion may be characterized as ethical spiritualism.

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To him any religion without a moral foundation ceased to be a religion. In his understanding, moral laws should govern actions of all men. To Gandhi, religion “means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe.” Religion and morality were two faces of the same coin. To maintain morality in the political field and to ensure the fairplay, spiritualization of politics was essential to Gandhi. Through this process he envisaged to eliminate the dirt and purify the vast area of politics and through this he looked forward to check communalization of politics. Gandhi practiced politics with religion in a balanced manner. Rejecting all the prevailing dogmas about religion and showing the true religion of non-violence love and toleration, Gandhi evolved a new culture of political work. “For me there is no politics without religion-not the religion of the superstitions and the blind, religion that hates and fights, but the universal religion of toleration. Politics without morality is a thing to be avoided.”

If the political life of a person is not in balance with religious principles, it cannot be said as a pure life in the service of public. A true religious man cannot keep away religion from politics. “Every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because means being bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath.”

Gandhi wanted to show the world that religion is not separated from any sphere of life. It should pervade all actions of life. Political life too, had no exception. His description about the concept of religion further

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36 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 27-11-1924, p.390
clarifies the idea “you must watch my life, how I live, eat, sit, talk, behave in general. The sum total of all those in me is my religion.”

_Sarvadharmasamabhava, the idea of religious tolerance_

Gandhi has been the greatest apostle of religious tolerance. He was convinced of the equality of all religions very earlier in his life. From youth onwards Gandhi took efforts to understand the real truth of all religions in the world. The notion in one’s mind about the superiority of his faith and inferiority about others cause problems in society. Gandhi realized this fact and he devoted his life in propagating the principle of equality among religions.

A nation with all its faith enjoying equal freedom and tolerance towards each other can have less room for communal hatred. “I do not expect India of my dream to develop one religion, i.e., be wholly Hindu or wholly Christian or wholly Mussalman, but I want it to be wholly tolerant with its religions working side by side with one another.” He considered this attitude to be adopted as a necessary requirement for “Swaraj.” The hindrance to Swaraj was the communal hatred or any disunity prevailing in the country. The reason for the communal disharmony lies in the attitude of viewing each other’s religion with suspicion. He told the masses about the equality of religion in ‘Hind Swaraj’ that religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal. “All faiths constitute a revelation of truth, but all are imperfect, and liable to error. Reverence for other faith need not blind us to their faults. We must be keenly alive to the defects of

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37 Nirmal Kumar Bose, ed. _Selections from Gandhi_, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahamedabad, p.257
our own faith also, yet not leave it on that account but try to overcome these defects. Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only hesitate, but would think it our duty, to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths.”39

The Gandhian principle of tolerance towards religions is a living bondage of faiths and not a passive state of not harming the other faith. The imperfection of every faith should be accepted and at the same time it should also be kept in mind that every one considers their faith good enough for them. “No one faith is perfect. All faiths are equally dearer to their respective votaries. What is wanted therefore is living friendly contact among the followers of the great religions of the world and not a clash among them in the fruitless attempt on the part of each community to show the superiority of its faith over the rest.”40

Gandhi firmly believed that all religions bears the essence of truth and understanding the essence of every religion makes the word toleration meaningful. Gandhi openly revealed his dislike for the term toleration in connection with the approach towards other religions. Because “tolerance may imply a gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one’s own, whereas Ahimsa teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of other as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter.”41 Every religion revealed the same truth but through different media. Irrespective of those media, the realization of the truth is considered vital. By tolerance, mere toleration of the neighbouring

religious faith is not enough, but viewing other faiths with reverence and paying respect to their moral teachings makes toleration a positive matter. Misunderstanding about other’s faith and viewing it as inferior is the reason for religious animosity. Gandhi writes: For me, all the principle religions are equal in the sense that they are all true. They are supplying a felt want in the spiritual progress of humanity.”

Gandhi’s concept of *sarvadharmasamabhava* means the positive state of toleration towards other religions, which in a way is love and respect for them. Men are imperfect beings and religion as understood by them is also imperfect. So an attempt to make a comparison between the religions should be avoided. As everyone considers his own religion as dearer to him like one considers one’s own nation close to heart, there is no fault in regarding one’s faith as good. It is like one considering his mother beloved to him. This act of loving one’s mother does not mean hating other one’s mother. At the same time refusing to pay respect to other’s mother and abusing her does not increase the greatness of one’s mother. Equal respect paid towards all religions ensures a state of communal harmony and this is considered the duty of every religious men. “True knowledge of religions breaks down the barriers between faith and faith. Cultivation of tolerance for other faiths will impact to us true understanding of our own.”

Conscious reverence towards one’s own religion and those of others is not possible unless one understands one’s own religion at its highest and deepest and tries to understand other religion also in a similar way. This process is blessed with the knowledge of the essential equality of religions. Misconceptions cease to exist after such an attempt sincerely

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42 M K Gandhi, *Harijan*, 6-4-1939
made to explore the core of other’s religion. When the adherents of every faith realize the oneness of all religious teachings, there will not be any breeding ground for communalism. Gandhi has constantly reminded about the folly of looking up on one religion as better than another.

Gandhi stressed the need for spreading the spirit of *sarvadharmasamabhava*. The positive and creative aspect of Gandhi’s concept of toleration, *sarvadharmasamabhava* could become the sole remedy for India’s communal problems, if understood and accepted by the masses in its exact meaning. “In Sanskrit, ‘*samabhavana*’ means equal outlook. But in Gujarati, ‘*samabhava*’ means sympathy. Gandhi evidently uses the word in the latter sense though the former is not excluded from it.”\(^{44}\)

He simply put the idea before the masses through a simile. “Even as a tree has a single trunk but many branches and leaves, so there is one true and perfect religion but it becomes many as it passes through the human medium. The one religion is beyond all speech. Imperfect men put it into such language as they command, and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect. Hence the necessity for tolerance, which does not mean difference to one’s own faith, but a more intelligent and purer love for it.”\(^{44}\) Gandhi was very keen in declaring the equality of all religions. His writings, speeches and conversation carried the message of equality of religions. Atrocities in the name of religion, according to Gandhi, was the result of ignorant man defining religious principles “for me the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden or the branches of the

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same tree. Therefore they are equally true, through being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect."46

In Gandhi’s concept of *sarvadharmanasamabhava*, every faith reveals truth in one sense or in another. As it is received through the imperfect media i.e. imperfect individuals, it is liable to error. Reverence to another faith or belief in one’s own faith does not involve blindly accepting the fault in each religion. Equality lies in absorbing the goodness of every religion, viewing every religion in the same manner with which one sees his own religion. The real meaning of toleration lies in Hindus becoming better Hindus, Muslims becoming better Mussalmans and so on. Gandhi narrates two instances of positive and active religious toleration from his experience. The first one was in South Africa where Gandhi set up the phoenix settlement. In phoenix, the inmates were having daily prayers in which Mussalmans and Christians were taking part along with Hindus. A Muslim friend of Gandhi, Shet Rustomji and his children attended the prayer meetings and Rustomji was fascinated by the Gujarati ‘Bhajan’ which means- ‘Dear, dear to me is the name of Rama’. Once while involving in the prayer Sheth Rustomji suggested to say the name of ‘Hormazad’ instead of the name ‘Rama’. The suggestion was readily and cheerfully accepted by all the inmates and thereafter whenever Sheth was present, and sometimes in his absence also, the name of Hormazad was put in place of Rama. Similarly, Joseph Royeppan, who often visited the phoenix settlement liked the hymn ‘Vaishnavajana’-meaning ‘He is a Vaishnava (servant of the God) who succours people in distress’. He loved the song and once sang this hymn saying ‘Christian’ in place of *Vaishnava*.

The others accepted the change joyfully and accompanied him in singing. The two instances show how toleration can be observed in the daily life.

As all the religions are imperfect, there should be difference of opinions. There cannot be only one religion in the world. So, religious tolerance is the law to be followed for the survival of humanity. “Belief in one God is the corner stone of all religions. But I do not foresee a time when there would be only one religion on earth in practice. In theory, since there is only one God, there should be only one religion. But in practice, no two persons I have known have had the same and identical conception of God. Therefore, there will perhaps always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climate conditions.”

“Differences of opinion should never mean hostility.” It is difficult to find two persons who had no differences of opinion among themselves. Intolerance towards another faith means difference of opinion with the other. If one sees error in another religion, he should not point it out and decry other religions. “The only possible rule of conduct in any civilized society is therefore mutual toleration.” The differences of opinion will be there as long as the world is there. So toleration is the virtue to be practiced by all societies to make sure harmony among religions. Everyone understands religion in various ways like the narration of seven blind men about elephant. Seven of them were having seven experiences about elephant. Similarly, realization of God and belief in faith naturally differs. Maturity keeps men away from fighting each other. “Those who do not like things that do not coincide with their notions need

48 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 17-03-1927, p.82
49 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 23-09-1926, p.333
not patronize them. But it is ungentlemanly to behave like less than men when things are not to their taste.”

**Inter-religious Studies**

Ignorance and misconceptions lead to suspicion and animosity between the followers of different faiths. Knowledge about the teachings of other religions help to avoid misconceptions. Once Gandhi was asked a question ‘why do you ask the Hindus to study Quran also? Is it not enough for the study of their own religion’ Gandhi replied “It is the duty of everyone to study the scriptures of religions other than his own. This enables people to keep their religion pure and rid it of blemishes. Moreover, we have Christians, Mussalmans, Parsis and followers of other religions among us. It behoves the Hindus to study their religious books if they regard them as brothers.” Being a strong believer in the goodness of every religion, Gandhi championed the cause of inter-religious studies. Ignorance and misunderstanding about other religious teachings give way to suspicion and hostility. This is the basis of communal disharmony. The interpretations of ill-informed religious leaders about the neighbouring religion further complicate the situation. Gandhi readily recommended the reverent study of other’s religious books to get out of the existing misconceptions. He made it clear that it is the duty of every religious man to study the scripture’s of other religions also. Because he believed that no religion stands contrary to another. “I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions. I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the stand point of the

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followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at the bottom all one and were all helpful to one another.”52 Through the study of several religious books of various faiths, Gandhi got strengthened in his belief that the moral and spiritual teachings of all religions were essentially similar to each other. The respectful study of other religions, according to Gandhi will impart to one a truer understanding of one’s own religion. The moment one come to know about the values of all religions as the same, communal disharmony cease to exist. Antagonist thoughts aroused from distorted interpretations about the faiths can only be remedied through the reverent study of all religions scriptures. “True knowledge of the faith breaks down the barriers between faith and faith.”53

In his ashrams, Gandhi was having inmates of all faiths, which were relevant in India. It was a routine in the ashrams to read the holy books of different religions, at the time of prayer. Gandhi called himself a Sanatani Hindi or Orthodox Hindu. Even then he held the view that it is the duty of every Hindu to read the scriptures of other faiths. He regarded his reverent study of the Bible, the Quran, and other scriptures to the wholly consistent with his claim to be a Sanatanic Hindu. “He is no Sanatanic Hindu who is narrow, bigoted and considers evil to be good, if it has the Sanction of antiquity and is to be found supposed in any Sanskrit book… My respectful study of other religions has not abated my reverence for or my faith in the Hindu scriptures. They have indeed left their deep mark on my understanding of the Hindu scriptures. They have broadened my view of life. They have enabled me to understand more clearly many an obscure

52 Krishna Kripalani (Ed.) All Men are Brothers by Mahatma Gandhi. Navajivan Publishing House. Ahamedabad, 2002, p.79
53 Narain Desai, My Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House Ahamedabad, 1999, p.120
passage in Hindu scriptures.”\textsuperscript{54} There is nothing false stated in any religion regarding the grasping of other religious principles. Broadmindedness to view other religions scriptures as valuable and taking the good portions from it to life is not contrary to any religious beliefs. Gandhi did not consider any religion as false. To him all of them have served the mankind and are now even serving their purpose. Gandhi observed that “….. I have come upon this inestimable boon that all that is permanent in ancient Hindu culture is also to be found in the teachings of Jesus, Budha, Zoroaster and Muhammed.”\textsuperscript{55}

Gandhi, while calling for the reverent study of other faiths, ensured the believers that there is nothing to be scared about the inter-religions reading and understanding. The study will not weaken nor shake one’s faith in one’s own. He gives the Hindu religions sanction in the act. It is guaranteed that the Hindu philosophy regards all religious as containing the elements of truth in them. There is no matter of weakening one’s own faith in doing so. Study and appreciation of other religions do not weakens the belief in one’s faith, rather helps to extend regard for other religions.

Gandhi cautions every one who intends to read the religions scriptures of other faiths. In order not to get mislead or misunderstood in this regard, one should be beware in selection of the religious books. Gandhi states like this – “There is one rule, however, which should always be kept in mind while studying all great religions and that is that one should study them only through the writings of known votaries of the respective religion. For instance if one what to study the ‘Bhagavata’ one should do

\textsuperscript{54} K L Sheshagiri, Rao, \textit{Gandhi and Comparative Religion}, Motilal Banarasidas Publishers, New Delhi, 1990, p.100
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, p.101
so not through a translation of it made by a hostile critic, but one prepared
by a lover of the Bhagavata. Similarly to study the Bible one should study it
through the commentaries of devoted Christians.”56 The study of other
religions is a sacred duty of every one according to Gandhi. This study of
other religious principles helps one to understand the unity of religions
which prevents the believer from keeping ill will and hostility towards
various faiths.

Even if being a deeply religious man, Gandhi was the greatest
apostle of secular ideas. From his very young ages onwards he showed the
taste for understanding different religions practices. His study in England
and his life in South Africa were instances of Gandhi’s contacts with other
faiths. At this time he got the opportunity to read the holy books of
Christians, Muslims, Zoroastrians and also their interpretations by eminent
persons. His attitude towards other religious beliefs can be credited to the
knowledge gained from these scriptures. Gandhi wrote “when I was turning
over the pages of the sacred books of different faiths for my own
satisfaction, I became sufficiently familiar for my own purpose with
Christianity, Islam Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Hinduism. In reading these
texts, I can say I was equiminded towards all these faiths, although perhaps
I was not then conscious of it.”57

The quarrel between Hindus and Muslims will end when both the
communities take effort to read the scriptures of others. The propagandas
against each religion by the fanatics will have no reflect on the masses if
they understand the virtues contained in these religions. Gandhi advised in

56 M K Gandhi, Young India, 6-12-1928, p.406
57 M K Gandhi, From Yervada Mandir, Translated by V.G. Desai, Navajivan Publishing
House, Ahamedabad, 1957, p.46
a speech at the prayer meeting on January 18th at New Delhi “the Hindus and the Sikhs to read the Quran as they read the Gita and the Grant Saheb. To the Muslims, I will say that they should read the Gita and the Grant Saheb as with the same reverence with which they read the Quran. They should understand the meaning of what they read and have equal regard for all religions.”

**Gandhi’s Views about conversion**

Attempts to conversion have always been a reason of dispute between followers of various religions. From the beginning of twentieth century onwards, conversion has caused many communal riots in India. The change of one religious adherent to another faith caused severe damage to the concept of communal unity. Everything associated to religion is viewed very microscopically in India, as the multi-religious society is very keen about every religion. Muslims and Hindus co-existed in India for several centuries. Muslims in some parts merged with the culture of Hindus and some sections of Hindus either accepted Islam culture or converted to Islam. It was not a matter of conflict in those periods. But the advent of British and the revivalist movements of Hindus as a part of nationalist awakening strained the relations between the Hindu and Muslim communities.

The term conversion is normally understood “as formal or ritualistic affiliation of a person to a different faith by one means or another, say by preaching merely or even by force or fraud or material inducement.” The two communities began to give up many practices which were inherited

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59 R K Gupta, *Gandhi Marg Gandhi on Conversion*, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, New Delhi, April– June 2000, p.69
from time to time. Hindu revivalist groups asked to get out of all practices relating to Muslim culture. On the other side Muslim fundamentalists called on to reject all practices which appeared to have a colour. *Shudhi* and *Sangathan* movements by the Hindu revivalist organization and *Tabligh* and *Tanzim* by Muslim were common among the conversion activities. The *Arya Samajists* engaged in reconverting those Hindus to Hinduism who was converted to Islam and the Muslim community viewing it a deliberate attempt against them, countering through by way of ‘*Tabligh*’, worsened communal situations. Communal unity in India is generally considered as a unity between Hindus and Muslims. The movement of ‘*shudhi*’ and ‘*Sangathan*’ lead by Hindu reformist and the Muslims responding it by the acts of ‘*Tabligh* and *Tanzim*’ created acute polarization in the society.

Mahatma Gandhi did not approve the practices of both the religions. He had a clear view about how the problems arising from conversion can be controlled. He did not ask for a total abstention from conversion. Neither had he approved conversions that were going on. He stated clearly: “it is impossible for me to reconcile myself to the idea of conversion after the style that goes on in India and elsewhere today.”60 “I am against conversion, whether it is known as *Shudhi* by Hindus, ‘*Tabligh*’ by Musalmans or proselytizing by Christians.”61 To Gandhi conversion is a heart process known only to God. Conversions carried on in the name of religions are irreligious acts putting shame on one’s own religion.

Gandhi did not oppose all sorts of conversions. The means adopted for the change and the purity of purpose was questioned. “I am then not against conversions. But I am against the modern methods of it. Conversion nowadays has become a matter of business like any other. I remember having read a missionary report saying how much it cost per head to convert and then presenting a budget for ‘the next harvest’.” Gandhi did not object conversions, if the process is a real transformation of a man. If a person wishes to come out of his sinful life, by purifying himself to live a meaningful life and considers conversions from one faith to another, a necessary requisite, it cannot be denied. Gandhi quoted… “those who believe in it have a perfect right to follow their own course without let or hindrance, so long as it is kept within limits i.e., so long as there is no force no fraud nor material inducement and so long as the parties are free agents and of mature age and understanding.” “Cases of real honest conversion are quite possible. If some people for their inward satisfaction and growth change their religion let them do so.”

Gandhi did not regarded conversion as a supplement to religions. Conversion is the change of heart from sin to God, which is to be carried on by God only. The practices going on in the name of religions irritated Gandhi. He warned the questionable means of conversions using force and material inducement. The views Gandhi held about religion exhibits the irrelevance of conversion in religions matters.

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63 Ibid, p. 616
64 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 19-1-1928, p. 21
i) all religions are true

ii) all religions have some error in them

iii) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith; therefore no thought of conversion is possible.”

By declaring his opinion regarding religion and conversions, the emphasis is laid on the baselessness of the propagandas made by communal organizations and leaders about the necessity of conversion in uplifting one’s religion. If one considers all religions as true religions and admits the presence of some error in every religion, the cry for conversion will disappear. Gandhi himself a scholar in Hindu religion and proclaiming himself a Santanic Hindu underlines the absence of any such idea in Hindu religion. Change from one compartment to another without a moral thought and religionist using force and shedding blood in the name of conversion are actions against God. Ridiculing the on going Shudhi movement Gandhi said “The real Shudhi movement should consist in each one trying to arrive at perfection in his or her own faith.” Shudhi is a concept of reconverting those who were previously converted to some other faith. This movement had no religious sanction in Hinduism because such a practice is evidently absent in the religious scriptures relating to Hinduism. “Gandhi maintains that there is no need to reconvert a person who has gone over to some other religion and who now repents his having done so. He comes to belong to

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65 Krishna Kripalani (Ed.), *All Men are Brothers*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahamedabad, 2002, p.78
66 Ibid, p.149
his original faith by the very act of repentance.” The communalist who make hue and cry over their religion being in crisis blaming the dominance of other are cleverly ignoring and hiding the malpractices prevailing in one’s own faith. The uncivilized practices of untouchability, caste discrimination, the superstitions, imposing of barbarian punishments by religious courts are all maladies which are to be eliminated. Those who argue for conversion should primarily attempt to reform one’s own faith.

In Gandhi’s experience there is no sanction in Islam to use force in propagating the religion. He quotes several verses from Quran denying the use force in spreading religion. Gandhi reminds the attempts of Muslim and Christian rulers on who used sword for the propagation of their respective faith and this created a false notion about the two faiths in the following period. Pointing on the methods of conversions Gandhi says that “The influences exerted in our times are far more subtle than that of the sword.” Going through the religious books made him convince that there is no place for force in conversions. “There is nothing in the Koran to warrant the use of force for conversion. The Holy book says in the clearest language possible: There is no compulsion in religion. No Mussalman to my knowledge has ever approved of compulsion. Islam would cease to be a world religion, if it were to rely up on force for its propagation.” Those who attempted forcible conversion were severely criticized by Gandhi. The Maplas of Malabar who engaged in converting Hindus to Islam and killing those who resisted committed serious crimes against religion according to him. Islam as a whole does not approve such acts and whenever attempts

67 R K Gupta, *Gandhi Marg* “Gandhi on Conversion”, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, New Delhi, April – June 2000, p.73
68 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 6-10-1920, p. 4
69 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 29-9-1921. p. 307
have been made to convert by force, responsible Mussalmans have repudiated such conversions.

Compelling one individual to accept Islam ruins the good will of the religion. Any recitation of religious hymns unwillingly and without full heart is meaningless. Regarding the recitation of ‘Kalma’, the Islamic verses to be uttered declaring ‘Allahu’ as the one God and Mohammed as the last prophet Gandhi said force used to make one do so is against Islam. Gandhi states, if some one recite Kalma due to fear of life or property takes not the name of God, but of satan. He without doubt presented his conviction at Shrirampur in the prayer meeting. “As I understand Islam, it has never prospered, nor can prosper by means of force. Any man pretends to serve Islam in this manner only does a disservice to the noble religion.”70 In connection with the compulsion used in reciting ‘Kalma’, Gandhi told that “forcible repetition of a formula cannot make a non Muslim into a Muslim. It only shames Islam.”71

In a period when forcible conversions and conversion made through material inducements are happening around us, the Gandhian concepts of conversion has great relevance. The necessity of conversion do not exists in any religion as far as the devotees try to understand their religion in depth. Propagation of religion shall not be through conversion of one man from one faith to another. The real propagation lies in influencing people through living a chaste and noble life. “According to Gandhi we do not need to proselytize or do Shudhi or Tabligh through our speech or writing. We can only do it really with our lives.”72 In leading such a life, one

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70 M K Gandhi, Harijan, 1-1-1947, p.213
71 M K Gandhi Harijan, 26-11-1946, p. 414
72 M K Gandhi, Young India, 8-12-27, p. 413
understands the unity of all religions and meaninglessness of conversions. The work every religious person should undertake is to convert a Hindu to better Hindu, Muslim to better Muslim, Christian to better Christian and so on. The proselytization efforts of Christian missionaries by means of monetary and other favours were also a wrong method of conversion. It was against Gandhi’s views and “he was fundamentally opposed to proselytization particularly with a view to raising the numerical strength of a community.”

Apart from practical efforts to convert, Gandhi even forbade the thoughts in one’s mind about converting another to his faith. He believed in the quality of all religions and belief in one God as the corner stone of all religions. “How can I even secretly harbour the thought that my neighbour’s faith is inferior to mine and wish that he should give up his faith and embrace mine? As a true and loyal friend, I can only wish and pray that he may live and grow perfect in his own faith.” Talking to others praising one’s religion with an intention to make one convert is also not recommended. Gandhi made it clear that faith does not admit of telling. Even if a Christian approaches and say he was captivated by the reading of Bhagvat and so wanted to declare himself a Hindu, Gandhi said “I should say to him: No what Bhagvat offers the Bible also offers. You have not made the attempt to find it out. Make the attempt and be a good Christian.”

74 Krishna Kripalani (Ed.), All Men are Brothers, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahamedabad, 2002, p.78
75 D G Tendulkar, Mahatma, Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Vol.IV, Publication Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1951, p.121
Gandhi’s criticism of Christian missionaries in spite of identifying and admitting their services to the society is notable. He contemns the practice of missionaries in such a way that they render humanitarian service in medical and educational field with an eye to proselytize the benefited person. He considers this questionable means to convert as equal to using force. Gandhi clarified his stand regarding the proselytizing efforts of Christian missionaries through an article in young India. He wrote:

“If instead of continuing themselves purely to humanitarian work such as education, medical services to the poor and the like, they would use these activities of their for the purpose of proselytizing, I would certainly like them to withdraw. Every nation considers its own faith to be as good as that of any other. Certainly the great faiths held by the people of India are adequate for her people. India stands in no need of conversion from one faith to another.”

Conversion for Gandhi is possible only through self purification and self realization. He considered the ongoing practices based on getting monetary benefits as a curse Gandhi asked everyone to realize the futility of conversion without a clean heart and without heart change. He considered his son’s conversion too as one action without the involvement of heart change. At the same time Gandhi say that he would be happy of his son’s change was a real change from early bad stage to a new spiritual one.

True understanding about the concept of conversion through the teachings of Gandhi and viewing it not as an essential factor helps to make it not a matter of dispute. Realizing the equality of all religions through

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going deep into them proves the uselessness of conversions. Avoiding forcible conversions and not attempting to reconvert a person using force can ensure a harmony among faiths. It is not the outward expressions and rituals which decide one’s conversion, but it is the change of mind from evil to good, untruth to truth and selfishness to selflessness.

**Cow Slaughter and Mahatma Gandhi’s Interpretations**

Communal harmony between Muslims and Hindus were often at challenge whenever the issue of cow slaughter arouses. The Hindu’s reverence for the cow and the Muslims claim for the slaughter of cow has always been a reason for communal tensions. Many scholars describe this problem as a result of the contradicting religious beliefs and viewed it as a dead-knot. But Gandhi approached this problem and put forward resolution of the issue through peaceful settlement. He appealed both the Hindus and Mussalmans to settle the issue not by resorting to force, but by through mutual trust and understanding.

Hinduism is committed to cow protection, Gandhi also took the issue cow protection but he rejected any violent action to protect the cow as contrary to the spirit of Hinduism. Like any other Hindu Gandhi also valued the need for cow protection. To him “cow protection is the dearest possession of the Hindu heart. It is the one concrete belief common to all Hindus. No one who does not believe in cow-protection can possibly be a Hindu…. Cow worship means to me worship of innocence. Cow protection means the protection of weak and helpless… cow protection means brotherhood between man and beast.”

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77 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 6-8-1921, p.182
Gandhi held that cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world and it is the duty of every Hindu to protect the cow because it means protection of the weak, the helpless, the dumb and the deaf.”78 From the early ages cow has been a part of the Indian civilization. People depended on cow for sustaining life. Moreover the Hindu religious scriptures are having sanctions for its reverence. Cow is a symbol of worship in almost all parts of the country. The Muslims when trying to slaughter the cow as a part of their religious observances, the Hindu followers view it as an attack on their faith and clashes originates. The forceful actions of Hindus preventing a cow being slaughtered by the Muslims are even now a reason for communal hatred. Gandhi realizing the need of cow- protection and avoiding violence in the so called attempt, asked Hindus to be peaceful. He rejected every method of violence and force used to secure cow-protection. He warned the Hindus that “it is futile to expect that our violence will ever compel Mohammadens to refrain from cow-killing.”79

There were instances when a Mussalman is seen having a cow or goat in his custody, he was forcibly dispossessed of the animals. Such acts of violence to protect the cow often lead to Hindu-Muslim clashes. He said that those Hindus, thus resorting to violence are enemies of the cow and Hinduism. “To attempt cow protection by violence is to reduce Hinduism to Satanism and to prostitute to a base end, the grand significance of cow protection.”80 Gandhi doubtlessly declared that it is not Hinduism to kill fellow men even to save the cow. Gandhi did not wanted to make the right of Hindu’s cow protection to be a matter of religious animosity. He openly

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80 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 5-18- 1921, p.156
declared to the Hindus that no Hindu can be successful in the process of cow-protection without the heart change of Mussalman. As far as the Muslims considering no sin in slaughtering a cow, cow-protection cannot be imposed on them. Ensuring the protection of cow through the sword appeared to Gandhi a mere contradiction.

Gandhi had the belief in the good sense of Mussalmans that he asked the Hindus to stop quarrelling with them and start negotiating in the matter of cow-protection. If the Hindus really want to save the cow from being slaughtered they should cease to use forces against Mussalman. The use of force does not change the mind of a Muslim who do not regard cow killing as sinful. To nurse enmity against the mussalman for the sake of saving the cow is a sure way to kill the cow and is doubly sinful. Hinduism will not be destroyed by a non-Hindu killing a cow. “The Hindu religion consists in saving the cow, but it can never be his religion to save the cow by a resort to force towards a non-Hindu.”

Gandhi observed that the cow protection is possible only by means of satyagraha. He asked not to kill a Mussalman to protect a cow but to offer oneself a sacrifice in the act of protecting the cow. This sacrifice will open the eyes of Mussalman and raise their conscious against cow-slaughter…. “The only method, I know of protecting the cow is that I should approach my Mohammaden brother and urge him for the sake of the country to join in protecting her. If he would not listen to me, I should let the cow go for the simple reason that the matter is beyond my ability. If I

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81 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 9-18-1924, p.311
were overfull of pity for the cow, I should sacrifice my life to save her but not to take my brother’s. This I hold is the law of our religion.”82

The rate of cow slaughter can be seen increased when the Hindus give more stress on the matter of cow-protection. So to ensure the protection of cow, Gandhi asked the Hindus to hold open discussion with them. The advent of cow-protection societies were another factor which made the issue of cow-protection more complicated. In the name of the so-called societies, fanatics began to forcefully object the Muslims from killing the lows. The action resulted in counter actions and more killing of cows even if the Muslim followers in normal condition did not want to kill a cow. In this circumstance Gandhi blamed the acts of cow protection societies as cow killing societies. Gandhi regarded these cow protection societies as cow killing societies. Gandhi asked to approach the Muslims in the matter with a positive approach. “If Muslims are coerced, they will kill more cows, but if they are persuaded, the cows will be protected by them. No cow protection society necessary for doing this. That body should be preaching Hinduism to Hindus.”83

Mahatma Gandhi considered satyagraha as the best way to end the dispute in the name of cow-protection. Taking the sword and threatening the Mohammaden brothers is not cow-protection. Self-sacrifice and self suffering for a noble cause like the protection of cow will never fail. It will help to open the eyes of these who try to kill cow. Gandhi had no other alternatives for cow protection. He said…. “there is one and only one means open to a Hindu to protect the cow, and that is that he should offer

83 Ibid
himself as a sacrifice if he cannot stand its slaughter.”

Cow slaughter and man slaughter are in my opinion the two sides of the same coin and the remedy for both is identical, i.e., that we develop the *Ahimsa* principle and endeavor to win over our opponents by love. The test of love is *tapasya* which means sufferings.”

The way of suffering adopted by the Hindu and appealing to the reason of the Muslim brother could bring and end to the dispute. Provocation, quarrelling, threatening and use of force should be replaced by love, *Ahimsa*, toleration and belief in the goodness of human being. Gandhi advised to abstain from all sort of violent actions to prevent Muslims from cow-slaughter. Befriending Muslims and acquiring their trust will lead to the abstention of Muslims from cow-slaughter. As long as there is nothing sinful in Islam slaughtering a cow, the Hindus shall not compel them not to do so. “If we wish Muslims not to kill the cow, we should bring about a change of heart in them. We shall not succeed by force. We should reach their heart with prayer and entreaty and achieve our purpose by awakening their sense of compassion.”

“Any moment started by Hindus for protecting the cows, without whole hearted Mussalman co-operation is doomed to failure.” Gandhi in this context also criticized the Hindu attitude against mussalman. He says that “The very Hindus who quarrel with Muslims because they slaughter the cow for the beef she gives are not ashamed to accept the mastery of the English who are known to be beef-eaters in a sense in which the Muslims

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84 M K Gandhi *Young India*, 5-7-1919
86 M K Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XIV, Published By The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, p.2
87 Ibid, Vol-XX, p.192
never are.” He asks the Hindus to stop quarrelling with Muslims in the matter of cow-slaughter, when several ‘goshalas’ are in the brim of destruction due to lack of attention. Not having responsibility in fulfilling duties and at the same time trying to teach Mussalman religious discipline is not religious act in Hinduism.

Taking into consideration the importance of cow protection and the need to stop communal clashes in this connection, Gandhi asked the Muslims to voluntarily abstain from the act of killing cows. He made an appeal to the Muslims that Islam in India cannot make a better gift to the Hindus than this voluntarily self-denial. Islam does not compel cow-slaughter and it does compel its followers to spare and respect to the full, the feelings of their neighbours whenever it is humanly possible Gandhi found that the abstaining of one party from the dispute will put an end to the dispute. He opined that either Muslims should keep aloof from killing cows or the Hindus should not on any account prevent Muslims from killing cows. Voluntary suffering and toleration added with self-restraint and mutual trust is essentially needed for the elimination of communal hatred in the name of cow-slaughter.

**Noise and Music before Mosque**

It has always been a matter of concern that music in front of mosque has adversely affected regarding the communal Harmony between Hindus and Muslims. The Music played in front of a mosque and the forceful prevention of the act has caused several communal riots in the past. Even if it is not as worse as before, still it is a factor which can trigger communal tensions in the highly communally polarized Indian society. Unnecessary

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emphasis on religious rituals causing disturbance to followers of other
religions always ends in communal clashes. Nowadays also, the actions
from the part of fanatical groups who lay stress on some aggressive
religious philosophies annoying other religious followers endanger the
relation between religions. Undue insistence on certain matters, which if
avoided is forwarded aggressively and it result in communal riots.

The main issues in the past were the music before mosques and
performing of ‘arti’ when Mussalman commence their prayer. Gandhi
gave clear directions to avoid problems due to above causes. He
considered the problem of music before mosque and cow-slaughter as
serious issue to be tackled to ensure communal unity. Gandhi admits that
not a single Hindu ceremony can be performed without music. But at the
same time he does not consider it a necessary requirement to proceed it in
front of the mosque. The Mussalman also have no right in the opinion of
Gandhi to stop the music being played through the streets using force in a
violent manner. Gandhi viewed it as unnecessary to continue the music
even while it is passing near by a mosque.” 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 the music. It is not a
matter of vital importance for him to play music whilst passing a
mosque.”89 “As a Hindu I will certainly advice the Hindus without any
bargaining spirit to consult the sentiments of their Mussalman nieghbours
and wherever they can, accommodate them.”90

89 M K Gandhi, Young India, May 11-5-1921, p.148
90 R K Prabhu, ed India of My Dreams by M K Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House,
Ahamedabad, 2004, p.246
In order to avoid a collision with the Muslims, Gandhi asked the Hindu brothers about the necessity of music in front of mosque. “Is continuing playing of music even while passing mosques at prayer time, always a religious necessity? What about the charge that the fashion nowadays is to organize过程ions purely for the sake of irritating Mussalmans, and to utter ‘Ramanama’ not because it is held religiously necessary but in order to create an occasion for a fight?”

Gandhi spoke in prayer meeting regarding the need for silence during Namaz and prayers at Raniganj on November 16th 1946: “Culture and good breeding requires that we should observe silence when others say their prayers. There should be mutual respect. All worship the same God whatever their religion.”

Gandhi advises to leave all sorts of provocation to bring harmony between the communities. It should be understood that the Mussalmans are having sentiments of having solemn silence near a mosque, the whole of the twenty four hours. Gandhi said only by mutual understanding and trust among the communities and frank discussion regarding this issue could only solve the problem. “Every semblance of irritation must be avoided. A mutual understanding should be sincerely sought.”

The attitude of Muslims should also have to be changed in this matter according to Gandhi. A mental change rooted in the utmost belief that Hindus are the brothers of Islam and the thought that co-existence of two communities is an essential requirement, should come from the Mussalmans. By obtaining this mental change through self-restraint and befriending the Hindu-followers by winning their good will and trust can

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91 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, Oct 22 1925, p. 360
bring long lasting solution for this communal problem. Islam is a religion which preaches communal problem. So nothing which is against peace should happen. If Muslims are able to success in winning the confidence of Hindu brothers, they will surely stop playing music before music and disturbing prayers. On the other hand if compulsion is employed from the side of Mussalmans to stop the music before the mosque, the issue will continue for ever. Use of compulsion is not taught in any religion. Gandhi spoke in this connection: “And just as the Hindus cannot compel the Mussalmans to refrain from killing cows, so can the Mussalmans not compel the Hindus to stop music or ‘arati’ at the point of the sword. They must trust to the good sense of the Hindus.”94 Gandhi repeatedly said that the use of force in stopping the music before the mosque or to protect a cow is not beneficial to both communities. Yielding to the threat of other religious follower in the matter of one’s beliefs is considered as a surrender of one’s self respect and religious conviction. Many religionists consider it better to fight and die rather than yielding to the threat. So Gandhi advised that inorder to avoid possible communal confrontations. “A person who never will yield to threat would always minimize and, if possible, even avoid occasions for causing irritation.”95

The Hindus, according to Gandhi, should refrain from all sorts of provocations. Provocations lead to counter actions. Gandhi advised Hindus to take into consideration the sentiments of their Mussalmans brothers. He criticized the actions of some people, deliberately provoking the Mussalmans by purposely performing ‘arati’ just when Mussalmans start their prayers. Gandhi added… “This is an insensate and unfriendly act.

95 M K Gandhi, Young India, May 29-5-1924, p.182
Friendship presupposes the utmost attention to the feelings of a friend."96 He condemned it as an act to boost communal feelings and asked to avoid all sorts of such provocations. At the same time he asked the members of Muslim community to keep aloof from using force. There is no need of violence when things can be obtained through peaceful moves. A courteous request could bring result. Gandhi also made it clear that submission to violence is an act of irreligion. “Submission to courteous request is religion. Submission to force is irreligion. If the Hindus stop music for fear of beating from the Mussalmans, they cease to be Hindus.”97 Gandhi recommended to the Hindus who want to take it a religious necessity, the performance of music and arati and chanting of Ramanama near the roads to mosques, to do them without hatred. Through this act, one should be ready to face all the counter actions non-violently and unarmed, not even having a ‘lathi’ with them. Self suffering and self sacrifice without any violence and submission to the violence of the opponents will lead to good results. Apart from resorting to violence, voluntary self suffering from the side of Hindus will appeal to the good sense of Mussalmans and they will gradually realize the fault and refrain from forcible prevention. This will definitely create an atmosphere of peace which inturn can lead to discussion regarding the lasting solution for the problem. “And if a complete stoppage of music before the mosque will be the only thing, that will spare the Mussalmans feelings, it is the duty of the Hindus to do so

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97  M K Gandhi, Young India, 9-18-1924, p.312
without a moment thought. If we are to reach the unity of hearts, we must each be prepared to perform an adequate measure of sacrifice.”

**About Religions Misconceptions and Indifferences**

The communalists had always tried to compartmentalize the majority and minority community, i.e. Hindus and Muslims. The hidden and vested interests, which may flourish for the communalists, if and only if the cleavage is more widened. For this purpose they highlight the differences between two communities and try to establish that the two cannot co-exist. Toleration and harmony between Hindus and Muslims were a threat to the political aspirations of the respected elites. Misleading the illiterate masses through indoctrinating them, with distorted and misinterpreted concepts, religious rivalry is kept in momentum.

The scriptures of both communities were analyzed in the wrong way and baseless interpretations were spread. Gandhi rightly saw these misconceptions, a cause for the repulsion of two communities. As a scholar of the religious philosophies, being a dedicated student of the scriptures and religious books of Hindus and Muslims, Gandhi himself realized the need of eradicating these misunderstanding between the two great faiths. The question of believer and ‘Kafir’ was a common thing spread against the Islam. The propaganda spread among the Hindus that Islam does not tolerate a ‘kafir’, i.e. non-believers. It was a common notion among the Hindus that Islam sanctions killing of the kafirs. Gandhi through his speeches and writings tried to remove this misconception. According to Gandhi, *kafir* denoted in the Koran means one who is a not believer and Hindus are not *kafirs* because they essentially believe in God. In his words

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98 M K Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Vol.35 Published by the Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, p.437
“kafir means a non-believer – Hindus are not kafirs because they believe in one God.”99

The propaganda against Muslims are given the sanctions of history by the communalist quoting the killings during the Muslim ruler’s wars for invasions Gandhi points out his life as an example to deny the false propaganda. By rejecting the assumption that Koran preaches killing of kafirs, Gandhi says “I have been in the midst of Mussalmans all my life no one has ever suggested that, I should be killed as a kafir. I had been in the midst of moulavis in Noakhali. Learned Muslims have told me that the meaning of the particular verse of the Quran is that, God will take to account that so called non-believer. But that he will do to the mussalman also. He judges men by their deeds and not by their words.”100 Gandhi, after the dedicated study of the life of the prophet and Koran has come to the conclusion that the teaching of Koran is in favour of non-violence. “Non-violence is better than violence it is said in Koran. Non-violence is enjoined as a duty, violence is permitted as a necessity.”101 The poisoned minds of the Hindu masses about the intolerant, violent, aggressive, fundamentalist nature of Islam stood as a hindrance of communal unity. Gandhi rejected the so called propagandas and gave the masses, a new interpretation about Islam. He told “Islam means peace. That peace cannot be confined to the Muslims. It must mean peace for the whole world.”102

The idea of oneness of God has been a matter of dispute between Hindus and Muslims. Even today, the arguments are going on regarding the

101 M K Gandhi, Harijan, 13-7-1940, p. 193
102 M K Gandhi, Harijan, 22-9-1940, p. 294
monotheist nature of Hinduism. Islam worships the one and only God. The Hindu worship of Gods symbolized through several names, Gods and Goddesses are pointed out as contrary to the belief one God. This contradiction is cleverly used by communal conscious men as to widen the gap between communities. He stated that Hinduism is essentially a monotheistic religion. “But it belief in one God and the race of his prophets in a never ending chain is sufficient for Islam, then we are all Mussalmans, but we are also Hindus and Christians.”

Moreover, all Hindus accept the upanishadic message: ‘Ekam sat, Vipra Vahuda Vadanti’, that is the Supreme Being is one, wise men describe the supreme by different manifestations. Gandhi held the view that Islam keeps the oneness of God as their primary faith. Hinduism also believes in the oneness of God. The philosophy of ‘Advaita’ is shown as an example. To compare and compartmentalize the two faiths in the basis of oneness of God is something baseless to Gandhi. To him, “All religions enjoin the worship one God who is all pervasive. He is present even in a droplet of water or in a tiny speck of dust.” Gandhi rejected the theory that there are uncompromising principles in Hinduism and Islam- Explaining about this, he wrote: “A Muslim friend told me that Hindus and Muslims cannot be one, for whereas the Muslims believe in one God only, the Hindus worship trees stones and animals. If this is so, it is still a better argument in favour of unity. For all these have been created by God and hence we worship them particles are mixed with particles his creation is manifold.”

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103 M K Gandhi, *Young India*, 5-6-1924, p.185
Idol worship among the Hindus was regarded as something which Islam fully rejects. Gandhi declaring himself a sanatanic Hindu proclaims that the worship of idols cannot be excluded from the Hindu beliefs. Through his interpretations about idol worship, Gandhi tries to defend the practice of idol worship in Hinduism as not as some thing uncivilized. He states that the idol worship prevailing in Hindu culture is not a contradiction to Islam. The allegation against Hindus regarding idol worship according to Gandhi is baseless. He explains … “But it is not the stone image which they worship but the God within, without whom not a particle of matter exists. If a devotee sees God in an image, it is not a thing for anyone to cavil at.”

“The idol worshipers see God in the stone image. God is omnipresent. If it is wrong to seek God in a stone, how is it right to seek him in a book called the Gita, the Granth Saheb or the Koran? Is not that idol worship? By cultivating tolerance and respect, they will be able to learn from all.” Gandhi opined that the idol worship practiced commonly in India by the Hindus is not against the religious principles of Islam. So destruction of idols and desecration of temples does not serve Islam. Gandhi realized the thirst of mankind for symbolism. They like to symbolize the unseen powers in images and idols. To answer those who blamed temples as places of idol worship he asked, “Are not Masjid or Churches in reality the same as ‘Mandirs’?” He justified the practice of idol worship in Hinduism and said there is, in a sense a bit of idol worship in every faith. “We are all idolaters. We all want temples churches, mosques and synagogues for our spiritual development, and to strengthen our faith in God. Some want images of stone or metal,
others an alter or book or even a picture, to inspire feelings of devotion towards God.”

“Images are an aid to worship. No Hindu considers an image to be God.”

He distinguishes idolatry and idol worship. Idolatry in uncivilized and on bad but idol worship is not like that. There is only one God, so associating sacredness to particular places and objects are not bad. “An idol worshipper sees God’s existence (in everything) and even in a stone and, therefore takes the help of a stone to establish his union with God……. This play of imagination is permissible and healthy………”

‘Jihad’ is a concept widely misunderstood by Muslims and non-Muslims. It is commonly understood that the followers of Islam are permitted to launch assaults on the believers of other religions. The term used by some religious leaders in the wrong context and the conscious efforts of the communalists about fearful stories regarding Jihad is a factor which often creates antagonism in Hindus. Gandhi after deep study of Koran revealed that it sanctions violence if and only if invaders attack holy places and injure women and children. On seeing the practice of calling for Jihad even for the sake of simple matters, Gandhi stated “The Koran says that there can be no heaven for one who sheds the blood of an innocent neighbour.” Gandhi said in connection with Jihad that misusing of the term may create long lasting effects on two communities. According to saying of the prophet, the most excellent Jihad is that for the conquest of the self.

110 M K Gandhi, Young India, 6-10-1921, p.318
112 Ibid, p.68
Hinduism is not a religion encouraging any sort of violence. It is a tolerant obligation which welcomes every faith to its soil. Only a century after the death of Jesus Christ, Christianity reached India. Islam was also embraced and several other faiths landed and flourished in India. This shows the insusive and non-violent nature of Hinduism. The arguments put forward by some fundamentalists by showing number of wars fought in the religious scripture, are arising out of ignorance. Gandhi rejected such interpretation and said “it is contented that the Mahabharatha advocated the way of retaliation. I do not agree with this interpretation. The lesson of Mahabharatha is that the victory of sword is no victory. The great book teaches that the victory of Pandavas was an empty nothing.”

The wars fought in Ramayana and Mahabharatha are picturised as physical warfare and bloodshed. But Gandhi interpreted it as the fight between good and evil and the fulfillment of duty. “The author of Mahabharatha has not established the necessity of physical warfare; on the contrary he has proved its futility. He had made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries.” Gandhi strongly criticized the practice of dragging religious scriptures to evoke violence against the opponents. The mis interpretation was done to justify act of goondaism. Those who quote the verses from epics to flare up communal passions are doing so not in the religious sense. They are doing it deliberately to reach their material ends.

Gandhi believed the essence of non-violence present in Islam. In the words of Gandhi, “My associations with the noblest of Mussalamans has

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113  M K Gandhi, Harijan, 11-17-1946, p.401
trust me to see that Islam has spread not by the power of the sword, but by the prayerful love of an unbroken line of its saints and fakirs. Warrant there is in Islam for drawing the sword; but the conditions laid down are not capable of being fulfilled by everybody.”  

The shouting of the slogan *Allah-O-Akbar* by the Mussalman is a thing viewed by Hindus with fear. In communally sensitive areas, the joint shouting of the slogan could create a tense atmosphere when the Hindus react in counter shouting ‘*Bharat Mata Kee Jai*’ or ‘*Vandemataram*’. Gandhi described both the slogans as non-provocative and peaceful. The meaning of the Soul-stirring religious cry *Allah-O-Akbar* means nothing but ‘God only is great’. There is no need of objecting it only because of the reason it is in Arabic. Gandhi finds out the reason for aversion to this slogan. “It often terrifies the Hindus because sometimes, the Muslims in anger come out of the Mosques with this cry on their lips to belabour the Hindus.” Gandhi also makes it clear that the cry has no such association in any other parts of world. There is nothing to be feared about the Muslim’s shouting of *Allah-O-Akbar* because it is only praise to God. Similarly the Muslim’s objection to the singing of the national song ‘*Vandemataram*’ and shouting of the slogan is out of misconceptions.

“Hindu should not object to the shouting of *Allah-O-Akbar*, nor should the Muslims object to *Vandemataram*. The two slogans are however some what different. One of them is in political and other religions. *Allah-O-Akbar* means God is great. What does it matter if the slogan is in Arabic? Is it sinful because it is in a foreign language? And

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‘Vandemataram’ means a bow to our beloved mother India. Is anything wrong in it… if your hearts are one, I suggest that Mussalman should be free to worship mother Kali and Hindus should go to the Masjid with equal freedom.”

Gandhi makes it clear that it is not a religious cry and in its complete sense, a political cry. It is only an ode to mother India. The song ‘Vandemataram’ is said to have some verses in it against Islam. But Gandhi reminds the days when Muslims and Hindus of Bengal without any hesitation accepting the song Vandemataram in their struggle against British. A suggestion is put forward by him. ‘I plead that it should be sung together by all on due occasion. It should never be a chant to insult or defend the Muslims. It is to be remembered that, it is the cry that had fired political Bengal. Many Bengalis have given up their lives for political freedom with that cry on their lips.”

In order to attain a complete state of communal harmony, Gandhi advised not to criticize the religion of the neighbour. Study of the scriptures other than one’s own is a necessity for communal harmony. But abusing other religious beliefs, quoting from their holy books or scripture is to be avoided. One can point out the merits and greatness of the neighbouring religion, and even absorb the good preaching to his life, but he hasn’t got the right to abuse or criticize other’s religion. “No propaganda can be allowed which reviles others religion… The best way to dealing with such propaganda is to publicly condemn it.”

Gandhi was of the opinion that one should limit religious criticism only to his own faith. He has not the right to extend it to others. The efforts of reformation should be left to

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118 M KGandhi, Young India, 29-5-1924, p.180
believers of the respective faith. He rejected issuing reckless statements or untruth about another religion as it invites counter criticism, which may lead things beyond everyone’s control. He made it clear “…but it is no business of mine to criticize the scriptures of other’s faiths or to point out their defects. It is and should be, however my privilege to proclaim and practice the truths that there may be in them.”

Mahatma Gandhi’s answer to minority –majority problem

The minority–majority dispute which was always been a matter of dispute often took shape of religious fundamentalism. Communal politics is largely depended nowadays on the vote banks of minorities and majority communities. In every election, mobilization of such minority feelings or consolidation of majority community consciousness is witnessed. The deliberate effort to hold such a minority and majority feeling among Muslims and Hindus by the communal minded people often spark communal outbursts. Gandhi considered minority majority problem as the insecurity of Muslims about majority domination and the Hindu distrust in Muslim’s patriotism. In his opinion “many Hindus distrust Mussalman’s honesty. They believe that swaraj means Mussalaman raj…Mussalaman on the other hand fear that the Hindus, being an over whelming majority will smother them.”

Gandhi believed it will be futile to please minorities by giving them separate electorates as it will accentuate separatism. Giving such privileges to the minorities will only help to strengthen their minority consciousness and resulting in greater Hindu antagonism. The resolution of issue rested in

120 M K Gandhi, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.35 Published by The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India., p. 90
mutual trust and friendship between two communities. The anxiety of Muslim minority in India can be grasped from the words of Gandhi “the Mussalmans fear the Hindu majority, because the Hindus, they say have not always treated them with Justice, have not respected their religious prejudices and because, they say, the Hindus are superior to them in education and wealth.” Gandhi understood the anxieties of the Muslim minorities. The number of Muslims against number of Hindus was so less and this formed the substance of their fear. Moreover the hostile attitude of a group of majority community towards minorities strengthens their insecurity feeling and this eventually leads to polarization.

The Hindus blamed Muslim community for their non–participation in the national movements and nation building activities. They saw minorities as a creed of invaders and feared that if they become powerful in economic and political sectors, repetition of the past may happen. The real solution according to Gandhi could be brought only through whole hearted understanding of two communities. If majority community views the majority with fear the problem will continue. He said “The Hindus if they want unity among different races must have the courage to trust the minorities. Any other adjustment must leave a nasty taste in the mouth.”

It is the duty of the majority community to consider the minority’s causes. They should do the needful to eliminate fear from the minds of minorities. As soon as the fear about the dominance of majority is removed, mutual trust and co-operation will be ensured. “The majority must therefore, make the beginning and thus inspire the minorities with

confidence in their bonafides. Adjustment is possible only when the more powerful take the initiative without waiting for response from the weaker.\textsuperscript{123}

The lasting solution for the problem of minority-majority rift, in the opinion of Gandhi is the self denial on the part of Hindus of all rights and privileges to win over the minorities. The fight is not for air and water and only for achieving political ends and all these only through democratic process. For lasting peace Gandhi put forward the formula “that voluntary surrender on the part of either community – preferably by the majority community – of all rights and privileges would immediately effect this unity.”\textsuperscript{124} Mahatma Gandhi’s view about the harmony between minority and majority is based on such non-violent actions. His method which is contrary to the present way of championing the cause of majority or minority for political gains can only bring an end to the antagonism between the two.

**Gandhi’s Insistence on Secularism**

Gandhi in spite of an ardent follower of Hinduism and a deeply religious person championed the principle of secularism throughout his life. Through the preaching of “\textit{sarvadharmasamabhavana}”, Gandhi advocated religious toleration. Respect for all religions and non-injuring of others religious feelings took the centre theme of Gandhi’s secularism. He had a clear vision about the secular government that was to be formed after independence. Even though the country was partitioned and a separate Muslim nation was formed, Gandhi was determined about the multi-religious secular character of free India. “Bapu told: a nation does not belong to any

\textsuperscript{123} M K Gandhi, \textit{Young India}, 29-5-1924, p.1821

\textsuperscript{124} M K Gandhi, \textit{Young India}, 12-3-1931, p.32
particular religion or sect. It should be absolutely independent of either
religion or sect. Every person should be free to follow the religion of his
choice.”125 Adopting any policies deviated from secularism would lead the
nation to disaster of communal violence. Realizing this fact Gandhi told
“India, free India will be a secular state and it will have nothing to do with a
particular religion. That is your private matter. Affairs which are social,
political, economic will be dealt with the state, not your personal matters.
Even if India had been inhabited by members of one community only, even
then India should be a secular state.”126

The uniqueness of Mahatma Gandhi among the national leaders was
his attempt to spiritualize politics. He was called a ‘saint among politician
and a politician among saints’. He introduced religious principles to politics
which was beneficial to the society and tried to purify the political scenario
through introducing the fruits of religion to politics. The greatest weapon
used in the freedom struggle was satyagraha and Gandhi insisted that true
believers of God and religious men can only perform satyagraha as the
force behind it is to be derived from the divine spirit. Gandhi wanted
religion to be a guiding force in political activities yet he adamantly
declared that undiluted secularism was necessary. Gandhi emphasized the
importance of religion to be separated from state function

Gandhi had clear views about the secularist characters of the state.
Separation of religions matters from public affairs and exclusion of state
from funding religions bodies at the same time freedom and equality of all
religions formed the nucleus of Gandhian secularism. Gandhi repeatedly

125 ManuBehn Gandhi, The Miracle of Culcutta, Navajivan Publishing House,
Ahamedabad, 1959, p.37
126 N Radhakrishnan ed Gandhian Perspective of Nation Building for World Peace, Konark
Publishers, New Delhi, 1992, p.60
said that even if the country is having only one religion even then the question of state religion will not arise. The identity of every citizen in India is not primarily of religions identity “the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Christians, the Paris and the Jews should be Indians first and Indians last. Religion is the personal affair of each individual. It must not be mixed up with politics or national affairs.”\textsuperscript{127} The term secular in Gandhi’s idea differs from that of the west. Unlike the western concept of keeping away religion from public life, Gandhi vehemently asked for enacting religious principles in the public life. This according to him would purify the political sphere and ensure a state of harmony. Being deeply religious person having much caring for Hinduism, he rejected the idea of getting patronization to religion. He underlined the idea by declaring like this. “I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The state has nothing to do with it. The state would look after your secular welfare, Health, communications, foreign relations currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody’s personal concern.”\textsuperscript{128}

Gandhi had the foresight about the dangers that may happen in the event of state promoting religious education. He strongly opposed the idea of religious education aided by the state. Religious education, according to Gandhi was the sole concern of religious institutions. “The state should undoubtedly be secular. Everyone living in it should be entitled to profess his religion without let or hindrances, so long as the citizen obeyed the common law of the land. There should be no effort with missionary effort, but no mission could enjoy the patronage of the state as it did during the

\textsuperscript{127} M K Gandhi, \textit{Harijan}, 7-12- 1947, p.459
foreign regime.”

He further emphasized his opinion by stating that an institution or group which depends on state funds for the purpose of religious teaching is strange to true religion.

Gandhi was a religious person. He called himself a “Sanatani Hindu” and was proud of being a Hindu. He criticized the defects of Hinduism and respect others religion at the same time. “He was indeed a true Hindu, a true Indian, and a truly secular person. For Gandhi, public life without spirituality, without religious faith, and without truth, non-violence, compassion and sacrifice was barren: It would only generate ‘Adharma’. He was spiritual and secular at the same time.”

The all round knowledge about the communal situation and relation between Hindus and Muslims equipped Gandhi to prescribe lasting solution for the communal problem. His attitudes towards quelling communal tensions were not based on the laws prevailing at that time. Instead he advocated active self suffering voluntary surrender mutual trust and cooperation. Neglecting religions mis-interpretations and absorbing the goodness of all religions makes identification of specific causes for communal clashes have helped Gandhi to formulate remedies for the cure of communal hatred. The great visionary through his dedicated hard work for attaining swaraj recognized the need for unity between the communities. His answers for the communal questions are rightly suited for the Indian situations were religion is used for attaining selfish political ends and thousand of innocent peoples massacred in that attempt.

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