

## HARMONY AMONG RIVALS: A FEW CASES FROM GANDHI'S LIFE

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### ABSTRACT

*This article is to give remedy to the worsened relationship between two individuals. The author, through this article, attempts to expose how Gandhi retained harmony with his rivals. Three rivals of Gandhi Jinna, Ambedkar and Bose were taken for study and analysis had been done to find out the techniques they adopted for maintaining harmony. The presentation is like a story telling for the readers. The outcome of the analysis done here would help the readers to develop their personalities particularly when they deal with conflicting people.*

**Keywords:** *Harmony, Differences, Conflict, Peace, Rivals, Relationship, Personality.*

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### INTRODUCTION

"You have been a Commissioner, now you are the CEC. When T.N. Seshan was the CEC there was an allegation of one-upmanship. What is the difference you have faced? Is the Commission functioning in harmony?" – These were some of the questions asked to the then Chief Election Commissioner N. Gopalaswamy in an interview which was printed in The Hindu on Apr.6, 2007. His reply was, "...there could be three options on some issue if three people are there, it is a question of resolving the issue, and by and large it has been resolved". His simple message is if there is more than a person, there is a room for different opinions which is quite natural. Therefore, the need is one of converting a conflict and resolving the differences.

### DISCUSSION

If we look at causes of misunderstandings and conflicts, in many cases they might appear to be trivial. Petty differences in ideas and opinions lead

to bitterness and enmity, many a times, if not all times. The basic reason for this is we are not ready to accept other's opinion, if it is different from us. It is important to understand that we, human beings, are not perfect in all senses as we are born and brought up with different customs, traditions and atmosphere. Therefore, it is quite natural that the opinions and thoughts also differ from one another.

When there are two opinions, one person strongly feels that he is right and the other end is wrong. Someone may be wrong in one aspect in which I am right or the same person may be right in the same in which I am wrong. 'All are not right at all times' is the universal truth. If we understand this truth, then there will be no problem. Living on the basis of this truth is an art. If we learn that art, we would be able to lead a peaceful and harmonious life.

The following saying would enlighten us to attain that state:

You are right and I am wrong; Let us go together.

I am right and you are wrong; Let us go together.

Practically speaking, is it possible to work together as CEC said when there are three opinions, yes, definitely possible if we are able to listen and accept other's opinions, if we are able to convince the other and make him accept our's or if we are able to compromise something and arrive at a common point. For this, we must mutually respect and trust the other, we must possess qualities like love, concern and compassion, we must have forgiven and forget attitude, we must have knowledge to understand other and skill to perform.

If anyone thinks that Gandhi was totally accepted by all others, it is totally mistaken. He had difference of opinion with others and he accepted others' opinion sometimes and convinced others at other times, but he never allowed the differences to end in hatred. In his method of conflict resolution, many a times he resolves the differences and thereby establishes harmony. And in sometimes, he keeps differences at a distance and maintains harmony. S.C.Bose, M.A.Jinnah and B.R.Ambedkar were few significant leaders who had differences with Gandhi. Here their cases have been taken for analysis which reveals that Gandhi used various tools to maintain harmony with them despite differences.

#### **Rival 1: M. A. Jinnah**

The vital difference between Gandhi and Jinnah was in the partition of India. While the former was

opposing it, the latter was in favour of it. At the same time they had been trying their best to find a solution. They had quite a number of meetings and good amount of letter correspondence over the issue. Gandhi in his letter on Aug. 11, 1929, wrote to Jinnah assuring him of his readiness to consider any reasonable, specific proposal put forward by him. In Harijan he stated that he had no objection to Britain handing over power to Muslim League. (Aug. 2, 1942) (Goswami, 1971, 181).

In May 4, 1943, Gandhi expressed his wish to Jinnah to have a face to face meeting to find a solution. When he was going to Bombay for talks with Jinnah, picketers, Nathuram Vinayak Godse was one of them, appeared at Sevagram and tried to prevent him. (Aug. 31, 1944). Anyhow he arrived in Bombay and held talks with Jinnah at his residence for 18 days. (Goswami, 1971, 187).

In another attempt, Gandhi met Jinnah at his residence on May 6, 1947. The agreed statement issued from Jinnah's house said, "Mr. Gandhi does not accept the principles of division. He thinks division is not inevitable, whereas in my opinion not only is Pakistan inevitable but the only practical solution". Though the meeting with Jinnah was failed, Gandhi referring to his visit to Jinnah the previous day said at prayer meeting that the talks were held in a friendly spirit although there could never be any argument between them on the question of division of India. (Goswami, 1971, 204).

Jinnah declined to join in Interim Government and he and his lieutenants pronounced that they

would take what they wanted by force. In addition to that, Jinnah had called the Hindus enemies which hurt Gandhi. With all these differences, instead of hating Jinnah, Gandhi appealed, in Dec. 9, 1939, to Jinnah and Muslims to desist from observing "Day of Deliverance" from Congress rule in view of unity talks. Ultimately, Gandhi convinced Jinnah to join in the Interim Government. The differences between them were innumerable, but irrespective of them they maintained decent and good relationship that should be recalled ever.

Leave alone the ideological differences. They were totally different in nature. Jinnah was always serious, rarely smiled, had no faith in his own religion, and used to drink and take beef, not transparent, always suspected others as enemies and a man of ego. Gandhi was entirely different in comparison.

The Congress met at Nagpur in 1920. By then it had become customary to refer to Gandhi as 'Mahatma' Gandhi. Jinnah, in the course of his speech, referred to Gandhi as Mr. Gandhi, and not Mahatma Gandhi. Maulana Mohammad Ali, a famous Muslim divine and leader of the Khilafat Movement, objected to this, and requested Jinnah to refer to Gandhi as Mahatma. Many delegates also shouted and asked Jinnah to say Mahatma Gandhi. As Jinnah persisted, a section of the audience started shouting 'Sit down'. The president of the Congress, Vijayaraghavachari then requested Jinnah to respect the sentiments of the audience. Still Jinnah persisted. Gandhi then stood up and said: "I am not a Mahatma. I am an ordinary man. By

coercing Jinnah Saheb to a particular choice of word, you are not doing me honour. We cannot win real freedom by forcing our views upon others. As long as there is nothing objectionable or derogatory in a man's language he is at liberty to think or say whatever he likes about others." Though Jinnah was persistent in not using the word 'Mahatma', Gandhi pronounced him as 'Saheb'. That makes difference in the realm of Harmony. (Varma, 2001, 27).

In 1939, upon the outbreak of the war, the Viceroy invited Gandhi and Jinnah to his palace. Gandhi offered to come to Jinnah's house to fetch him. Jinnah welcomed it but he refused to go in Gandhi's car. They both rode in his. Subsequently, when they conferred, Jinnah insisted that the meetings take place in his home. Gandhi, who was completely indifferent to such considerations, gladly complied. Louis Fischer observes, "Vanity, jealousy and dislike undoubtedly play a major role in politics. He further said some of the great political feuds of history were personal before they became political. Gandhi's humility and friendly nature did not give space for such feuds (Louis; 2006, 487). This happened in history. For example, while Jinnah was practicing law in London, he despised and hated Nehru. In turn, Nehru had imprudently said at a private dinner party that "Jinnah was finished". Outraged, Jinnah packed up and sailed back to India at once just to "show Nehru". This was the history. Louis Fischer pointed out that the Hindu-Moslem problem, to be sure, would have existed Jinnah or no Jinnah; his intensity and hates blew on the coals

and brought forth flames. If Nehru would have not uttered that word, Jinnah would have been in London and the Hindu-Muslim problem would have not been worsened so. Jinnah gave lot of chances to Gandhi to hate him. But he did not give a space for it. That is why he was able to build harmony among people.

When Louis Fischer questioned Gandhi what did he learn from his eighteen days with Jinnah, Gandhi replied, "I learned that he was a maniac. I have never regretted my talks with him. I could not make any headway with Jinnah because he is a maniac". To another question, he said that Jinnah was incorruptible and brave. (Louis; 2006, 544) Gandhi was conscious in highlighting the virtues, while he pointed out others' shortcoming. Even though Gandhi had differences regarding 'Partition' with Jinnah, he was ready to accept him as a Prime minister.

Of course, there was a big gap between their understanding, yet they particularly Gandhi never allowed them to be a cause for the conflict. The history proves many of the global problems were raised from the personal conflicts and multitude as political conflicts.

#### **Rival 2: Dr. B. R. Ambedkar**

Ambedkar and Gandhi had taken a different stand as far as the problem of untouchability was concerned. Ambedkar wanted to separate his community from Hindus and wanted to have a separate electorate, so that the problem could be eradicated. In contrast, Gandhi wanted the

untouchables to remain in the Hindu religion and persuaded caste Hindus to get rid of the evil practice of discriminating others in the name of caste. He did not want the Untouchables to remain as such in perpetuity and moreover he did not want the people to be divided in the name of caste. So he opposed Ambedkar's approach. He argued at Round Table Conference that separate electorate and separate reservation would perpetuate the bar sinister. He believed that Ambedkar was wrong. That is why he said, "With all my regard for Dr. Ambedkar and for his desire to see the Untouchables uplifted, with all my regard for his ability, I must say in all humility that here the great wrong under which he has laboured and perhaps the bitter experiences that he has undergone have for the moment warped his judgment". And he further said in the Conference that he could not understand Ambedkar. Even when he opposed Ambedkar, we must see the words he used that shows his respect for Ambedkar. The reason given by Gandhi outside the Round Table Conference was that the separate electorates would throw "the apple of discord between the Untouchables and the orthodox" (Ambedkar; 1991, 70). Gandhi strongly felt that it would not give a good result. And he said, "I have the highest regard for Dr. Ambedkar. He has every right to be bitter...but the separate electorate he seeks will not give him social reform" (Ambedkar; 1991, 71). But Ambedkar criticized him stating that Gandhi had entered into a secret pact with the Muslim delegates on Oct. 6, 1931 and he described it as "A diabolical Plot" (Ambedkar; 1991, 74).

Finally to oppose the Communal Award (separate electorate) offered by the British, Gandhi went on fast unto death in Sep 1932. Ambedkar issued a statement on Gandhi's vow of fast in which he said, "I am unable to understand the ground of hostility of Mr. Gandhi to the Communal Award" (Sep 19, 1932). Thus, the two of them believed that they were right. However, there was a direct discussion of the problem between Gandhi and Ambedkar on Sep 22, 1932. The venue was the Yervada Jail. During the discussion, Gandhi said: "I want to serve the Untouchables. That is why I am not at all angry with you. When you use derogatory and angry words for me, I tell myself that I deserved that. I will not get angry even if you spit on my face. I say this with God as witness (Busi, cit, 199).....I do not like it from the beginning that the community should be divided into two groups.... You spoke the truth when you said that the welfare of the Untouchables is dearer to you than my own life. Now be honest and stick to it. You should not care for my life. But do not be false to Harijans" (Varma; 2001, 458). There were only two choices before Ambedkar. One was being adamant in his stand and let Gandhi die; the second was to compromise something for the life of Gandhi. At long last, both of them came to an amicable agreement with little compromises on both ends that shows Ambedkar had concern for Gandhi's life. In return, with all these differences, Gandhi had great respect for Ambedkar. That is why when some of the Congress leaders were opposing Ambedkar's

entry in Constitution Drafting Committee, Gandhi was supporting him. In July 11, 1936 Gandhi said that whatever label Dr. Ambedkar wears in future, he was not the man to allow him to be forgotten.

To find out a solution to Separate Electorate issue, Ambedkar and his friends suggested something new: primaries in which only Harijans would vote. In those primary elections, a panel of three Harijan candidates would be chosen for each reserved seat. Then in the final or secondary elections, Harijans and Hindus would vote jointly for one of those three Harijan candidates. When the negotiators conveyed it to Gandhi, he expressed his displeasure with the scheme: why should only some candidates for the reserved Harijan seats be elected in the Harijan primaries? Why not all? The negotiators were overjoyed. Thus Gandhi was offering Ambedkar more than Ambedkar had already accepted. Then both of them came to an agreement called 'Poona Agreement' or 'Yervada Pact'. In a conference at Bombay, Ambedkar praised Gandhi's conciliatory attitude. He further spoke, "I must confess that I was surprised, immensely surprised, when I met him, that there was so much in common between him and me. In fact whenever any disputes were carried to him- and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru has told you that the disputes that were carried to him were of a very crucial character - I was astounded to that the man who held such divergent views from mine at the Round Table Conference came immediately to my rescue and not to the rescue of the other side. I am very grateful to Mahatmaji for having extricated me

from what might have been a very difficult situation" (Louis; 2006, 396). Earlier (In 1931) Gandhi opposed Harijan reserved seats in the Hindu block because it divided the two communities. But this time (1932), he had accepted the idea of reserved seats as an unavoidable and, he hoped, passing evil. Ambedkar stated in the same speech, "My only regret is why did not Mahatmaji take this attitude at the Round table Conference? If he had shown the same consideration for my point of view then, it would not have been necessary for him to go through this ordeal". From these incidents, one can understand how the leaders showed respect over others though they had differences. Even in such a conflicting situation Ambedkar did not fail to praise Gandhi. The term he used 'Mahatmaji' is also to be well noted here. Gandhi on his part compromised himself and accepted Ambedkar.

### **Rival 3: Subhash Chandra Bose**

Subhash Chandra Bose had difference with Gandhi's basic ideology of nonviolence. His statement from Rangoon was: "I am convinced that if we do desire freedom we must be prepared to wade through blood" (Bose; 1997, 301). Thus, Gandhi and Bose had become divided over the strategy which should be used to achieve Indian Independence, and to some degree the form which the post-Independence state should take: Gandhi was hostile to industrialization, whilst Bose saw it as the only route to making India strong and self-sufficient.

When Bose was elected the first time as President of the Congress, Gandhi sent his congratulations to

Bose (Jan 25, 1938). But when the differences went beyond the limit, in the next election, Gandhi was against his re-election. He was instrumental in inducing Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya not to withdraw his name as a candidate, but somehow he was defeated by Bose.

Gandhi admitted his opposition and said, "I am nothing, if I do not represent definite principles and policy". At the same time he said that he was glad of Bose's victory. From this incident we could understand that Gandhi never opposed any one for personal reason, but when the same person turned against his principles, he never hesitates to oppose. Some of the leaders within the Congress were not comfortable with Bose and started troubling him. For them Gandhi advised to come out of the Congress, "not in a spirit of ill-will, but with a deliberate purpose of rendering more effective service". (Feb. 4, 1939). He did not stop peace efforts with merely an appeal, but also held negotiations between Congress President Bose and the leaders who had resigned from the Working Committee during Tripura Congress meeting. (Mar. 8, 1939). That time, Bose was suffering from pneumonia and he refused to go to hospital. Gandhi advised him to conserve his health and energy. This shows that though they had differences in many aspects, both of them maintained good relations with each other. Knowing all the differences, Bose offered his services at the disposal of Gandhi for Satyagraha movement. But it was rejected by Gandhi on the ground of "vital and fundamental differences". It

came to light when the Gandhi-Bose correspondence was released on Feb, 22, 1941.

On Mar. 31, 1941, the Indian soldiers contacted Gandhi during his morning walks and engaged him in talks at Urli Kanchan. He said to them, "I know there is a new ferment; a new awakening among all the army ranks today. Not a little of the credit for this change is due to Netaji Bose. I disapprove of his method but he has rendered a signal service to India by giving the Indian soldiers a new vision and a new ideal". Though Bose criticized Gandhi as an old, useless piece of furniture, he did not hate Bose and loved him.

Even though Bose had difference with Gandhi, he was the one who had first given the title of *Father of the Nation* to Gandhi in a radio broadcast from Rangoon in 1944. (Bose; 2006) Even two years earlier, Gandhi called Bose the "*Prince among the patriots*". Gandhi himself wrote that Bose's patriotism was second to none" (Varma; 2001, 135). He also said in a prayer meeting, "Netaji was like a son to me". (Apr. 7, 1946).

Though Bose and Gandhi were different in many aspects, they never had personal enmity. For example, when Gandhi went on Dandi March to break the salt rule, familiarly known as 'Salt satyagraha', Bose compared the Salt March to 'Napoleon's march to Paris on his return from Elba' (Louis; 2006, 337).

## CONCLUSION

Gandhi was arrested for writing three seditious articles in *Young India*. The judge Broomfield, after

sentencing Gandhi to six years imprisonment said, "Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble and even saintly life" (Louis; 2006, 260). It proves that one may be different with others in his ideology, at the same time others will accept him provided there is no gap between his practice and ideology.

Gandhi took from a person that which was congenial to him and discarded the rest. He respected and befriended his fiercest antagonists. In fact he used to encourage dissidents and help them. Opponents found comfort in the knowledge that he could reverse himself on even the most important political issue in order to give the alternative policy a fair trial.

All the above narrations of Gandhi reveals the fact that an affinity exists or can easily be established between people who are different or think themselves different. Love and affection between the unlike are greater virtues than between the like.

Harmony between the individuals is an imperative for a harmonious society. On many occasions, individual conflict leads towards social conflicts. Quarrels at individual level may attribute to riots. To prove this statement, an incident which happened in history is cited here. On 17 April, 1938, three Hindus and a Moslem were sitting on their haunches in the Northbrook Gardens in Bombay and playing cards. They quarreled over the game. 'Rumours of a Hindu-Moslem disturbance', reads an official report, 'spread in the city resulting in panic which was taken advantage of by hooligans and stray assaults,

stabbing and stone-throwing commenced. Sporadic assaults continued for a few days and altogether there were fourteen deaths and injuries to ninety-eight persons and 2,488 persons were arrested. (Louis; 2006, 591)

We all cannot agree with a person in all aspects or with all in certain aspects. Differences and disagreement are inescapable. But we have to tolerate other's difference. Even Gandhi did not expect all to agree with him. Let us see one more incident. In the latter part of his life when he was in New Delhi, he asked, each evening, his prayer congregation whether anybody objected to the reading of some verses from the *Koran*. Usually there were two or three objectors. Then he asked whether the other worshippers would harbour any ill feeling for the objectors. They said they would not. Would the objectors remain quiet during the *Koran* readings? They would. Then he read the verses. (Louis; 2006, 600) Therefore, what he expected from his fellow beings was for all to remain tolerant and non-violent despite disagreements.

The problem with us many a times is we treat the persons who have difference with us as an enemy. This is to be avoided totally. While Gandhi was speaking in his prayer meeting at Delhi, a hand-made bomb was thrown at Gandhi from the nearby garden wall. In his next day prayer meeting, he said, "The young man should realize that those who differ with him are not necessarily evil". (Louis; 2006, 623) This is the greatest lesson we should learn from him as far as the difference is concerned.

No doubt he is a role model to the present generation in all walks of life, as he maintained harmony with all despite the differences they had. At this point, it is quite natural if someone ask why Gandhi and Godse were not at harmony with differences and the latter went on even to assassinate him. Regarding this let us see one incident. In 1944 at Panchagni, there was an attempt to kill Gandhi. A person was running forward towards Gandhi with a knife with an intention of killing him. He was no one but Godse. The knife from his hand was confiscated by one whose name was Pisare. He gave witness in the court also. Then Gandhi came to know about Godse's intention and difference. To resolve the difference and to put forward his thoughts before Godse, Gandhi called him, but he refused. His denial ruined his life as well as Gandhi's. There is nothing wrong if you feel that you are right and other is wrong. But there would be a solution if we sit together and share our views. Denial to listen to others and hatred would never give a solution.

It is worthy to remember Peace Scientist Hans Ucko who says, "If we are to love peace, it must be a peace that allows for Difference" (Ahimsa Nonviolence, 482). There is nothing wrong in having different opinions or thoughts. The wrong lies in not listening to others' view point and not accommodating to any dissent that creates all disharmony and frictions. There must be a place for disagreement but it should be based on mutual respect. Let the differences be many but they should be dealt with as they are and not personally. If there

is a place for civilized debate, no difference will lead to bitterness and conflict; on the contrary it will lead to harmony and peace.

At this present disturbed stage, there is an urgent need to build a civilized society where others' opinion is respected. Hope, the narrations of Gandhi's harmonious nature of living with others particularly with the so called difference of opinion would curb the growing violence in the human heart, and promote the resolution of conflicts through conversation.

Gandhi's last writing was to cement the two hearts. Prime Minister Nehru and Patel had differences with each other and they did not see eye to eye. They were temperamental opposites. There had been friction between them. It worried Gandhi. Indeed, things had come to such a pass that Gandhi wondered whether Nehru and Patel could work together in the Government. In the end, Gandhi decided that Nehru and Patel were indispensable to one another. The Government would be seriously weakened if it lost either. Gandhi accordingly wrote a note in English to Nehru saying he and Patel 'must hold together for the good of the country'. (Louis; 2006, 626). At 4 P.M. on 30 January (an hour before his assassination), Patel came to see Gandhi in Birla House to hear the same message. This is the message not only to Nehru and Patel but also to all who have differences with others.

The above mentioned case studies reveal that a person who has difference with others can work or live together, if he is able to understand and accept others' opinion, able to convince others and make them accept his/her opinion and able to compromise

something and finding a common point. The prerequisite for them are: Mutual respect, Love, concern and compassion of others, Forgive and Forget attitude and Knowledge and Skill to understand others opinion.

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