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GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION LIBRARY

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION houses a library designed as a reference centre for Gandhian Literature/ Thought.

The collections are diverse ranging from books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, 240 books written by Gandhiji and more than 100 biographies of Gandhiji by different authors. Currently the library maintains a collections of more than 10,000 books.

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Editorial

A LIFE DEDICATED to peace and humanitarian work ended with the death of Jimmy Carter, whose work outside of office was more well-known than his tenure as US President. Unlike many other presidents who go on speaking assignments or play golf, he founded the Carter Centre because he was inspired by the Camp David Agreement, which Prime Minister Menachem Begin and President Anwar Sadat signed. This agreement demonstrated that sometimes the mediator's emotional and personal gestures can achieve what difficult negotiations cannot.

Carter took office during the tumultuous period following the inflation, oil crisis, and Watergate scandal. On the global scene, he assisted in mediating a historic peace deal between Egiypt and Israel, but he found it difficult to handle the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the hostage situation in Iran. He served one term before losing the 1980 election to Republican Ronald Reagan badly. The dismantling of Israeli settlements was the issue that nearly derailed the Camp David peace process. Menachem Begin swore he would never permit the settlements to be demolished. He chose to leave the negotiations because he was firm. He asked Jimmy Carter to sign eight pictures for his grandchildren before departing Camp David. He, Carter, and Sadat were shown in the pictures. Carter took the photographs to Begin and personally signed for each of Begin's grandchildren. After being deeply moved, Begin consented to continue the talks. Finally, a compromise on the settlement issue was reached.

The Carter Centre has supported initiatives to advance democracy, resolve conflicts, and enhance global health. Possibly, he was the most pious president. He reached as many as 125 countries in these capacities. He secured the release of an American in a private capacity by using his goodwill towards North Korea. He also tried ot reach out to Cuba, a well-known and longstanding enemy of the United States, by removing all travel restrictions on Americans to travel to Cuba when the Cold War was still raging. In some cases, the US

government did not approve his diplomatic efforts. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002, primarily for his efforts to advance democracy, human rights, peace, and economic and social development after demitting office.

He became the first US leader to take climate change seriously and pardoned draft evaders of the Vietnam war era. The Carter Centre was established to monitor elections globally, mediate disputes, and advance democracy. Besides involving in projects to reduce stigma for mental health patients and increase crop productivity in Aftica, his centre has been instrumental in controlling and eradicating diseases such as malaria, guinea worm, and river blindness. The Carter Centre has advocated for free and fair electoral procedures by monitoring elections in more than 40 nations worldwide. As a devout Christian, Carter and his spouse volunteered for Habitat for Humanity, a Georgia-based charity that provides clean water and assistance in building and purchasing homes for low-income working people worldwide. The late Nelson Mandela organised the Elders, a group of independent world leaders collaborating on peace and human rights issues, and Carter joined the group in 2007. In addition to writing more that 30 books ranging from political memoranda to poetry, he actively commented on current events in the United States and worldwide, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Finally, he epitomized humility by engaging in manual labour to benefit people experiencing poverty as a mason, painter, and laborer, an example for public men to follow post-retiremet.

This issue of the journal has eight articles. The first article by Abdulrahim P. Vijapur evaluates Gandhi's concept of religion. In the second article, Jeena Ann Joseph discusses the themes of female agency and human rights in Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*. *In the following article,* Banita Mahanandia and Subham Tripathy assess the women's quota system in panchayats. The fourth article by Adoum Idriss Adoum and C. Vinodan dwells on Islamophobia in the Western World. The fifth article by Elena A. Bitinayte, titled *A Living Tree of Religions: M.K. Gandhi's Interpretation,* demonstrates how Gandhi's views on religious unity can be grasped better using the tree metaphor. The sixth article by Bhashkaranand Pant and Yogambar Singh Farswan looks at the contributions made by Ghanshyam Sailani to the Chipko Movement through his folks poems. In article seven, Omprakash Kushwaha uses cartoons to examine the depiction of Gandhi's fight against colonialism. In the final article, Ushasi Banerjee discusses how solidarity promotion was a key ingredient in Gandhian educational experiments.

JOHN S. MOOLAKKATTU, *Chief Editor*

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Redefining and Reconstructing Religions: Evaluating Gandhi's Concept of Religions

*Abdulrahim P. VIJAPUR**

ABSTRACT

Gandhi believed in the unity of all religions, with Muslim Allah, the Christian God, and the Isvara of Hindus being one and the same. He opposed dogmatic, sectarian, and ritualistic religions and opposed institutionalized religion. Gandhi rationally interpreted Hindu religious scriptures and advocated for reinterpreting Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. He believed that every living faith must have the power of rejuvenation to live. This paper aims to understand Gandhi's concept of religion and his views on reforming Indian and non-Indian religions.

Key words: Mahatma Gandhi, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity.

Introduction

RELIGION WAS CENTRAL to Mahatma Gandhi's life, thought and work. Romain Rolland once remarked "[t]o understand Gandhi's philosophy, it should be realized that his doctrine is a huge edifice composed of two different floors or grades. Below is the solid groundwork, the basic foundation of religion. On this vast and unshakable foundation is based his political and social campaign".[1] Therefore, Gandhi's political philosophy and political techniques are only two corollaries of his religious and moral principles. It is a strange paradox that though Gandhi's attitude to religion holds the key to the understanding of his life and thoughts, its nuances and significance have been often missed or underestimated by his admirers and critics. Hence, he has been often misunderstood or deliberately

misrepresented by his political opponents. On Gandhi's seminal contribution to religious and political thought, Sir S. Radhakrishnan, the eminent philosopher and the second President of Indian Republic, wrote in 1939 that "*The greatest fact in the story of man on earth is not his material achievement, the empires he has built and broken, but the growth of his soul from age to age in its search for truth and goodness. Those who take part in this adventure of the soul, secure an enduring place in the history of human culture. …The greatness of Gandhi is more in his holy living than in his heroic struggles*, in his insistence on the creative power of the soul and its life-giving quality at a time when the destructive forces seem to be in the ascendant [italics added]".[2]

Gandhi's "religious message" holds key to the solution of many contemporary socio-religious and political crises the world over. If we adopt the Gandhian approach to religion in our political system, the world (particularly India) will hopefully remain free from religious and ethnic conflicts. "What made Gandhi the centre of so powerful a field of spiritual force was the fact that his ideas were always incarnated in his actions", said John Hick, an eminent British philosopher of religions, writing a Foreword to Chatterjee's book.[3] He lived his religion, i.e., Hinduism. Gandhi does not believe in dogmatic, sectarian, and ritualistic religion. He was opposed to institutionalized / organized religion. He interpreted the Hindu religious scriptures in rational manner. He said, "Nothing can be accepted as the word of God which cannot be tested by reason or capable of being spiritually experienced".[4] "Every true scripture only gains by criticism".[5] Every formula of every religion had to be subjected to the acid test of reason; no scriptural sanction was valid if it resulted in unjust or inhuman practices, like the practice of untouchability or animal sacrifices. Every claim made on behalf of revelation should be capable of being tested "on the anvil of truth with the hammer of compassion". Moreover, religious doctrines must appeal to one's conscience. His agenda of reforms was not confined to Hinduism alone. It applied to other religions also – Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. His faith in religious pluralism springs from the fact that he considers all religions as imperfect. In 1930 he said "… if we are imperfect ourselves, religion as conceived by us must also be imperfect…. Religion of our conception, being thus imperfect, is always subject to a process of evolution and reinterpretation".[6] On this issue, let us look at three statements of Gandhi: (i) "Every living religion", he says, "must have within itself the power of rejuvenation if it wants to survive",[7] otherwise it will become part of history. (ii) He also said: "If a man reaches the heart of his own religion, he has reached the heart of the others too".[8] (iii) "Personally, I think the

world as a whole will never have, and need not have, a single religion".[9] These three quotes of Gandhi capture his concept of religion. Thus, in his quest for religious harmony Gandhi advocated reforms in all religions.

The objectives of this paper are to understand Gandhi's views on reforming Indian religions, including semitic religions. Our aim here is to explore answers to the questions such as: What were the sources of Gandhi's thoughts on reforming religions? Why and how did Gandhi reconstruct Hinduism? How he tries to reconcile the concept of "violence" in Gita, justification of varna system and the practice of untouchability, and the duty of cow protection? Does he support proselytizing? What reforms he suggests in other religions of India? Why did he believe in religious pluralism and in the principle of respect for all religions? What criticisms were advanced by his contemporaries on his religious thoughts and how did he silence them? What is the Gandhian concept of religion and what is its significance?

Sources of Gandhi's Religious Thought

Gandhi grew up in a devout and educated Vaishnavite family in a religious atmosphere. In his formative years, he was exposed to strong Jain influences. An uncle of Gandhi's mother was a Jain. Gandhi's father, being a public official, had numerous visitors to the house – Muslim, Jain, Christian, and Hindu; Gandhi's closest companion in early experiments with truth was a Muslim classmate. In fact, he was administered vows by a Jain monk, who was a close acquaintance of Gandhi's, while he was leaving for England. His mother belonged to a Pranami sect, followers to the Gujarat saint, Mahamati Prannath, who taught equal respect for Hindu and Muslim beliefs, synthesizing the two. The Pranami temples had no images. Pranamis worshipped God without form. An 18th century report indicates that at the centre of Pranamis' worship was a bed with a turban on it and on either side a stool with the Quran and a stool with the Puranas. Till the age of twenty, his knowledge of Hinduism was extremely limited. He had not even read the Gita until persuaded to do so in England by theosophists, when they invited him to read Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Song Celestial*, the English rendering of *Gita*. He also came across another book of Sir Edwin's, *The Light of Asia*, which told the story of Buddha's life, renunciation, and teachings. It was also in England that a fellow vegetarian enthusiast introduced young Gandhi to the Bible. The New Testament, particularly, the Sermon on the Mount, went straight to his heart. He was highly influenced by the verses of Bible, which said: "But I say unto you that Ye resist not evil but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any

man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also". In his autobiography, he said that "the idea of returning love for hatred and good for evil captivated me".[10]

Gandhi said that in shaping his religious attitudes for reforms in religions, three 'moderns' had influenced him most – Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin and Rajchandra (Gandhi used to call him as Rajchandrabhai). Tolstoy's book, *The Kingdom of God is Within You,* had influenced him deeply. In his classic work, Tolstoy had exposed the contradictions of organized religion, which helped Gandhi to fend off the proselytizing missionaries in South Africa. Ruskin's book, *Unto the Last*, which was given to him by his friend Polak, also left a lasting impression on him. He learnt the value of a life of simplicity and the dignity of manual labour from this book. Later, he translated this book in Guajarati as "Sarvodaya" (The Welfare of All).

It was Rajchandrabhai who had given a sense of direction to Gandhi's religious quest. He was a Guajarati Jain, Mumbai jeweller; Gandhi was in close touch with him and admired him for his renunciation. In fact, he was Gandhi's mentor on his conception of religions. "I never saw him tempted by objects of pleasure or luxury in the world…He disproved the prevalent idea that a man who is wise in the sphere of dharma will not be wise in the affairs of practical life. As a student of philosophy of religion, he tried to practise what he believed.[11] Rajchandrabhai, who was older to Gandhi by just two years and died at young age of 33, taught him that it is the way a man lived, not the recital of a verse or the form of a prayer which made him a good Hindu, a good Muslim, or a good Christian. Though he was a Jain, he restored Gandhi's faith in Hinduism. He also explained "the doctrine of the many sidedness of religious truth". He regarded different faiths like any walled enclosures in which men and women confined themselves. On the meaning of religion, he said "Dharma does not mean any particular creed or dogma. Nor does it mean reading or learning by rote books known as *shastras* (sacred texts) or even believing all that they say" rather Dharma is the quality of the soul present in every human being. Dharma is the means by which we can know ourselves. No organized religion is a special repository of dharma. We may accept this means from wherever we get it whether from India or Europe or Arabia".[12] So, Rajchandrabhai enabled Gandhi to find the answer to the question he had been struggling with since his childhood, i.e. "Which was the one true religion that he could adopt and reject the other as false". To answer this Rajchandrabhai said "Religion is not an 'ism' and it is not merely intellectual knowledge or belief in any set of doctrines, but an innate attribute of the soul. It enables to define the human duties in life and

establish correct relationship with the fellow beings. Religion is the means of the self-realization or realization of the true nature of self".[13] He used to say that the real test of spiritual progress was the extent to which one could translate one's belief in day-to-day life. The influence of Rajchandrabhai was greatest on Gandhi as far as his concept of religion was concerned. In fact, Gandhi's idea of "religion which underlies all religions" has its source in him.

Gandhi's Concept of Religion

Gandhi's notion of religion was unique. It transcended all historical religions. The most representative statement which captures his basic religious ideas reads:

> Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion, which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and whichever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression 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.[14]

This Gandhian manifesto on religion contains five main points: religion transforms our nature, it binds us with Truth, it purifies us, it establishes the "correspondence" between us and our "Maker", and it transcends all historical religions. Gandhi's idea of religion transcends sectarian boundaries. It is a living spiritual experience which cannot be conceptualized or verbalized. "The one religion," writes Gandhi "is beyond speech".[15] In essence, to Gandhi "true religion is not narrow dogma. It is not external observance. It is faith in God, and living in the presence of God, it means faith in future life, in truth and in ahimsa. There prevails today a sort of apathy towards these things of the spirit. Our temples appear today to be meant only for the simple and the ignorant. Few visit the real temples of God. *Let the educated class take up the work of reform in this direction* [italics added]".[16] Thus, Gandhi expands the horizons of religion with an endless vision of the 'All Serene' and advises to nurse the living spirit of God present within each one of us in the society. The central focus of Gandhian framework of religion is always man. The wellbeing of man is the touchstone of effectiveness of religion. He went so far as to say that the only way to find God was to "see Him in His Creation and be one with it".[17] If religion is an awakening, it embraces humanity.

Gandhi and the Reconstruction of Hinduism

Before Gandhi many eminent persons like Raja Rammohan Roy (founder of Brahmo Samaj) and Dayanand Saraswati (who founder of Arya Samaj) attempted to reform Hinduism. Gandhi appreciated the Brahmo Samaj movement for its crusade against sati and polytheism and the campaign for the widow remarriage. He felt that it brought all the good from the Christianity and the Islam. In fact, it rationalized and liberalized Hinduism. It has cultivated toleration for the other faiths.[18] Gandhi was highly critical of Arya Samaj movement. He wrote:

> I have read Satyartha Prakash, the Arya Samaj Bible…. I have not read a more disappointing book from a reformer (Dayanand Saraswati) so great. He had claimed to stand for truth and nothing less. But he has unconsciously misrepresented Jainism, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism itself. One having even cursory acquaintance with these faiths could easily discover the errors into which the great reformer strayed. He had tried to make narrow one of the most tolerant and liberal faiths on the face of the earth. And an iconoclast though he was, he has succeeded in enthroning idolatry in the subtlest form. He has idolised the letter of the Vedas and tried to prove the existence in the Vedas of everything known to science.[19]

He was critical towards Arya Samaj for erecting blocks between communities and paving way for communal disharmony. Although its success was greater, its appeal was limited by its very belligerence and sectarianism.

But Gandhi's reformist agenda was far more comprehensive than that of any of his predecessors. He was very radical in certain matters. He was convinced that Hindu society needed moral regeneration, "a new system of ethics". He was certain that this new framework of ethics could not be developed out of the available resources of Hindu traditions alone. Some of its fundamental values were sound and represented its greatest contribution to mankind. However, they have been traditionally defined in negative, passive and asocial terms and required reinterpretation and reform. According to Gandhi, Hinduism could, therefore, greatly benefit from the moral 'insights' and 'truths' discovered by other religious traditions including Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity.[20] Thus, Gandhi adopted a liberal, rational method to radically redefine, deconstruct and reconstruct the orthodox Hindu traditions.

Gandhi makes a distinction between the idea of religion, which is timeless, and religion as institution, which is time bound. It was the institution of religion which he wanted to reform as it had evolved many social practices like the practice of untouchability, animal sacrifice,

lower status to women etc., which had no scriptural sanction. He reshaped and redefined the time-honoured concepts of Hinduism.

It must be kept in mind that Gandhi does not recognize the sole authority of the modern-day Shankracharyas (successor to the original Sankara) and shastris – the traditional interpreters of the Hindu scriptures – to interpret the scriptures. He did not think that they were meeting the criterion of "experiencing the truth" that they were interpreting. In his view they did not practice the necessary virtues – truth, non-violence, celibacy, and detachment – in sufficient degree. Their status as gurus therefore could no longer be recognized. It was a rare thing today, he remarked, to find in them a combination of purity of life and depth of learning. The "millions" therefore have to go without their help.[21]

Gandhi's first major attack on Hinduism was with regard to the practice of untouchability. He considered it as a heinous crime against humanity. He emphasized that caste had nothing to do with religion. It was a later excrescence on what originally been basically the principle of division of labour and of duties. For him untouchability had no sanction in Hindu scriptures. When B. S. Mooneji, the Mahasabha leader, tried to prove that untouchability was an integral part of Hinduism, Gandhi retorted: "Happily for me, my Hinduism does not bind me to every verse because it is written in Sanskrit… in spite of your literal knowledge of the Shastras, yours is a distorted kind of Hinduism. I claim in all humility to have lived Hinduism all my life".[22] On a visit to Hrishikesh Gandhi discussed the significance of the sacred thread and the Shikha (tuft of hair which orthodox brahmins have) and said that the right to wear the sacred thread could only come after Hinduism had purged itself of untouchability.[23]

Similarly, on the position of women, his views were far ahead of his time and were similar to those of modern women reformers. He brought a large number of women into public life, which neither Lenin nor Mao was able to do. "Woman is the companion," he affirmed as early as 1918, "with equal mental capacities… and she has the same right of freedom and liberty." He advocated equal legal status and the right of vote for women. The oft-quoted text, "for women there can be no freedom", ascribed to Manu, he dismissed it as an interpolation, and if it was not an interpolation, he could only say that, in Manu's days, women did not have the status they deserved.[24]

Gandhi also opposed animal sacrifices and described it as irreligious. Wherever popular religion was on the wrong track in his opinion, Gandhi did not hesitate to speak out boldly. On the occasion of the Calcutta Session of the Congress Party in 1901 he visited the Kali temple and was repelled by the sight of goats being slaughtered

leading to "rivers of blood", saying that he considered this to be "positive irreligion" and that he did "not consider it to be part of Hinduism".[25]

The most innovative interpretations of Gandhi pertain to his understanding of Gita or the story of Mahabharata. His interpretations were novel, unorthodox and based on reasoning, morality and common sense. No book, however sacred, he said, could be limited to a single interpretation irrespective of time and place; the meanings of great writings were subject to a process of evolution. Gandhi put forward the view that the epic, the Mahabharata, was an allegorical and not a historical work. The real object of the Gita, as he understood it, was to point to the goal of self-realization and to show that *nishkam karma* (detached activity) was the way to achieve the goal. He did not accept the traditional interpretation of the Gita as the poetic presentation of Lord Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna, the warrior, to go forward and meet his cousins in combat; the battlefield of Kurukshetra was only a symbol of the battle between good and evil which rages in every human heart, Duryodhan and his party being the baser impulses in man, Arjuna and his party the higher impulses, and Krishna "the dweller within". To those who insisted on taking the story of Mahabharata literally, Gandhi pointed out that if the story was taken at its face-value, the Mahabharata had demonstrated the futility of violence: the war had ended in universal devastation in which the victors had been no better off than the vanquished. Thus, Gandhi does not agree with the interpretation that Gita believes in violence.[26]

Gandhi challenged age-old notions and prejudices with impunity. He had a healthy aversion to occult phenomena and never encouraged superstition in any form. When asked about miracles he said that "What was the good of overturning nature? He did not think of God in anthropomorphic terms as Truth for him was God" and God's law and God were not different things or facts in the sense that an earthly king and his law were different.[27]

When Gandhi's interpretations were called in question, he dismissed his critics by suggesting that the text on which they relied could be an interpolation. However, he did not make any claim that his interpretations are infallible. He wrote: "The opinions I have formed, and the conclusions I have arrived at are not final. I may change them tomorrow".[28]

In sum, Gandhi's concept of religion had little in common with what generally passes for organized religion: dogmas, rituals and rites, superstitions, and bigotry. Indeed, shorn of these accretions, his religion was simply an ethical framework for the conduct of daily

life. True or pure religion, to Gandhi, transcends but does not supersede organized religions. He reduced Hinduism to a few fundamental beliefs: in the supreme reality of God, the unity of all (life)) and the value of ahimsa (love) as a means of realizing God. In this bedrock religion there was no scope for exclusiveness or narrowness. It was in his view a beauty of Hinduism that: "in it there is a room for the worship of all the prophets of the world. It is not a missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the word…Hinduism tells everyone to worship God according to his own faith or Dharma and so it lives at peace with all religions".[29] He considered that in Hinduism there is enough room for Jesus, Mohammed, Zoroaster and Moses. For him the different religions were beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they were branches of the same majestic tree. Thus, he considered all religions truly equal.[30] To buttress his analysis he compares the fact of existence of many religions with the story of "Seven Blind Men and the Elephant". He stated: "The seven blind men who gave seven different descriptions of the elephant were all right from their respective points of view, and wrong from the point of view of one another, and right and wrong from the point of view of the man who knew the elephant. I very much like this doctrine of the manyness of reality".[31]

Gandhi on Other Religions

For Gandhi, all the major religions in the world are equal in the sense that they are all true. They are supplying a felt want in the spiritual progress of humanity. He assigns divinity to all religions. No religion is perfect. He said: "… if we are imperfect ourselves, religion as conceived by us must also be imperfect…. Religion of our conception, being thus imperfect, is always subject to a process of evolution and reinterpretation".[32] Gandhi advocated reforms in other religions of the world. He wanted that the followers of different religions should reinterpret the precepts of their beliefs in the light of rationality and should get rid of any interpolations that have crept into their faiths. He rejects the claim of maulvis (Muslim theologians) and Christian clergy to give final interpretation to the messages of Islam and Christianity. Both these messages have to be interpreted in the lives of those who are living these messages in silence and in perfect dedication. Let us examine how did Gandhi perceive or interpret other religions.

Gandhi on Buddhism

Gandhi does not regard Buddhism as an independent religion. He considers it as a part of Hinduism. In his view Buddha did not give

the world a new religion; he gave Hinduism a new interpretation. Buddha made the most daring effort to reform and revitalize the sanatan Hindu tradition of India. Gandhi saw it as the most revolutionary attempt to propagate the doctrine of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, in its widest sense.[33] Buddhism, according to his interpretation, was a movement welcomed by some of the Hindus as their own.[34] He saw the Buddha as one of the greatest reformers of Hindu dharma who taught us truth and ahimsa, self-purity, sacrifice and renunciation, and faith in the ultimate morality, which Gandhiji called God.[35] Gandhi was not in favour of reviving Buddhism in India. Instead, he said that whatever 'revival' was necessary could take place by the purification of oneself.[36] Revival of Buddhism is possible if one supports conversion of Hindus (like B.R. Ambedkar) to Buddhism.

Hinduism resents any attack upon the Vedas. It regarded the new interpretation (of Buddha) as such an attack. Buddha taught Hinduism not to take life (as animal sacrifice was very common then) but to give life. True sacrifice was not of others but of self. Buddha suggested some reform in the Hindu religion. His piety greatly affected the minds of the Brahmins, and the killing of animals for sacrifice was stopped to a great extent. Gandhi considered the Buddha as the greatest preacher of peace. He wrote: "I have the greatest veneration for the Buddha. He is one of the greatest preachers of peace. The gospel of the Buddha is the gospel of love".[37] Buddha understood Nirvana (salvation) in a different way. "Nirvana is undoubtedly not utter extinction. So far as I (Gandhi) was able to understand the central fact of Buddha's life Nirvana is utter extinction of all that is base in us. Nirvana is not like the black dead peace of the grave, but the living peace, the living happiness of a soul which is conscious of itself and conscious of having found its own abode in the heart of Eternal".[38] Buddhist contribution to humanity lies in its teaching to regard for all life. Sanctity of life – whether human or animal – was upheld by Buddhism. This aspect of Buddhism attracted Gandhi much.

King Ashoka sent missionaries to different lands for the propagation of Buddhism, and spread that religion in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), China; Burma (Myanmar); and other countries. A distinctive beauty of Hinduism was revealed during this process: no one was converted to Buddhism by force. People's minds were sought to be influenced only by discussion and argument and mainly by the pure conduct of the preachers themselves. According to Gandhi, the Hindus regarded Buddha's new interpretation as an attack on their religion. Therefore, while it accepted the central truth of Buddha's teaching, it fought against Buddhism and regarded it as a new and anti-Vedic cult.

Many people say that India's downfall dates from her acceptance of Buddha's teachings. Gandhi disagrees with such criticism. He says that it is his unalterable belief that India has fallen not because it accepted Buddha's teaching, but because it failed to live up to it. The reformation that Buddha attempted was remarkable. He taught us to defy appearances and trust in the final triumph of Truth and Love. According to Gandhi this was his matchless gift to Hinduism and to the world.[39]

Gandhi on Christianity

Gandhi tells us in his autobiography how certain aspects of Christianity % the life and death of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount and the crystalline purity of some Christians appealed to him. The verses of New Testament, concerning the Sermon on the Mount, went straight to his heart, which read: "But I say unto you that ye resist not evil but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law and take away the coat, let him have thy cloak also". He appreciated the beauties of Christianity. He called Jesus the "Prince of Satyagrahis",[40] as he employed non-cooperation against the hypocrites, the liars and men drunk with pride. He opposed, all alone, the mighty Roman Empire for the sake of moral principles. Christianity has had a very considerable influence on Hinduism. Christian priests imparted education of a high order and pointed out some of the glaring defects in Hinduism, which paved way for the birth of great social reformers / teachers like Kabir, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Devendra Tagore and Dayanand Sarswati and others.[41]

Despite his great love for Christianity, Gandhi had many objections to the prevailing orthodox understanding of this belief. He reinterpreted and rediscovered the original creed of Christ. He could not subscribe to the view that Jesus was the only begotten Son of God and only those believing in him could attain salvation. He said God cannot be the exclusive father and that he cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. According to him, Jesus was one like Krishna or Rama, the Buddha or Mohammed and the belief that Jesus was the only son of God is an invention of the theologians. Gandhi says that this invention contradicts Jesus' own teaching implied in the words spoken to his hearers: I go to your Father and my Father", and the emphatic declaration of John: "Now are we the sons of God".[42]

Gandhi's criticisms of Christianity were influenced by his readings of the works of Tolstoy and Edward Maitland and Anna Kingsford. Like Tolstoy, Gandhi does not accept the immoral doctrine of vicarious atonement. He does not think that it was ever taught by Jesus, it was

interpolated by the Jewish writers who were used to the idea of a scapegoat. There is no basis whatever for moral responsibility in the belief that one's sins can be forgiven through the suffering of someone else and such an idea implies injustice in the Godhead we are supposed to worship. Gandhi clearly perceived the serious danger of such a teaching. On his objection to the doctrine of vicarious atonement, he wrote in his autobiography "If this be the Christianity acknowledged by all Christians. I cannot accept it. I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek redemption from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall be content to be restless".[43]

Gandhi also opposed the doctrine of proselytization. He chided Christian missionaries for their "irreligious gamble" for converts. He opposed conversion from one religion to another. Mirabehn (Miss Slade) was never converted to Hinduism. Similarly, Richard Gregg, who wrote extensively on non-violence and stayed in his ashram, was called Govind, but never became a Hindu. He disallowed conversions in his Ashrams. The reason why he opposed proselytization was because he recognized that all faiths are true and divinely inspired. Gandhi believed that Jesus and his message did not belong only to Christians or to any community; He and his lessons belonged to the whole world. Once he had told Mrs. Polak that to be a good Hindu was to be good Christian and that there was no need to "become" a Christian to be "a believer in the beauty of the teachings of Jesus or to try to follow his example".[44]

According to Gandhi, "God, Allah, Rama, Narayan, Ishwar, Khuda were descriptions of the same Being". And "God's grace and revelation were not the monopoly of any race or nation". It logically followed from this that no one religion could claim that it alone was true or superior and that others were false or inferior. He rejected the idea of conversion from one religion to another because all religions are one and the same.[45]

Gandhi on Islam

Gandhi appreciated Islam for its two distinctive contributions to India's national culture –one, for its unadulterated belief in the oneness of God and second, for its practical application of the truth of the brotherhood of man for all believers. Gandhi opined that in Hinduism the spirit of brotherhood has become too much philosophized. He said: "though philosophical Hinduism has no other god but God, it cannot be denied that practical Hinduism is not so emphatically uncompromising as Islam".[46] Gandhi read a translation of the Quran and the life of the Prophet Mohammed and was struck by the

humiliations and hardships heaped upon him and his followers. In fact, Gandhi had advised Mirabehn, his English disciple, who had been reading the Upanishads, to read the Quran, and assured her that she would find many "gems" in it.

When Gandhi was told that Islam and its Prophet had prescribed the use of sword in certain circumstances, Gandhi replied: "I suppose most Muslims will agree. But I read religion in a different way. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan derives his belief in non-violence from the Koran… I derive my belief in non-violence from the Gita, whereas others who read violence in it. [Even] if I came to the conclusion that the Koran teaches violence, I would still reject violence…. It is enough that my non-violence is independent of the sanction of scriptures".[47] At another place Gandhi expressed his view that in the Quran, "non-violence is enjoined as duty, violence is permitted as a necessity".[48]

Gandhi on Conversions

Gandhi's strong views on proselytization needs to be studied in the context of his quest or advocacy for redefining or reconstructing all religions. He opposed religious conversions. He made a strong statement in this regard: "If I had the power and could legislate, I should stop all proselytizing".[49] He did not only oppose proselytization, but also expressed his incomprehension towards conversion in the sense of an individual converting from one religion to another: "I cannot understand a man changing the religion of his forefathers at the instance of another".[50] He did not support any Hindu converting to another religion like Christianity, Islam or even Buddhism. He even objects to the practice of *Shuddhi* that the 19th century Hindu reform movements had introduced in order to "re-convert" Muslims and Christians to Hinduism:

> My Hindu instinct tells me that all religions are more or less true. All proceed from the same God, but all are imperfect because they have come down to us through imperfect human instrumentality. The real shuddhi movement should consist in each one trying to arrive at perfection in his or her own faith. In such a plan character would be the only test. What is the use of crossing from one compartment to another, if it does not mean a moral rise?[51]

Here, *shuddhi* is described as a process whereby the individual achieves a greater moral perfection "in his or her own faith" and which is incompatible with crossing from one religion to another.[52]

Gandhi wants that people should remain within their own religions, as they all are true religions, and if there are any wrong

practices like sati, devadasi system or practice of untouchability (Gandhi finds such wrong and unjustifiable practices in other religions), they should reform their religions from within rather than converting to other religions, which in no way will lead to their moral or spiritual rise. According to Gandhi, since all great religions are bearers of excellent moral guidelines and capable of internal improvement, conversion to another religion is unnecessary and divisive. Conversion to another religion is justified only in so far as it makes an individual morally superior compared to before.[53] Since all religions, according to Gandhi, were true and also that all of them had some error, there is need to purify them from such errors. If the "faith" one belongs to is defiled by impurities, these should be transformed.[54] If you purify, reform, or modify the ill practices or impurities existing in your religion, that process, according to Gandhi, can be considered as "conversion". Thus, the "equality of all religions" is the foundation of Gandhi's reasoning on religious conversion.

Gandhi's philosophical opposition to conversion stemmed from the conviction that it presupposes a hierarchy of faiths, at least on the part of those who proselytize, just as it presupposes that those who are candidates for conversion have a poor understanding of the spiritual resources of their own faith.[55] Therefore, he advocates that instead of engaging oneself in an attempt to convert another person to one's own religion/faith, our prayer should be that a Hindu should be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim and a Christian a better Christian.[56] Another reason why he was opposed to conversion was that Hinduism is not a proselytizing religion. There is no provision of becoming Hindu by conversion. If one wants to be a Hindu, he/she should take birth in a Hindu family.

It is paradoxical to know that while Gandhi strongly opposed any programme/mission of conversions, yet he is willing to accept conversion if it is purely a matter of change of heart and reason. His following statements illustrate this.

Gandhiji had visited Rawalpindi to meet Hindu refugees and Muslims of Kohat, where forceful conversion of Hindus to Islam was carried out during Kohat riots. He spoke on 19-3-1925 at Tirupur:

> I would personally like the stopping of all conversions and shuddhis. One's faith is a personal matter with oneself. It is open to any person of mature age to change his or her faith when and as often as he or she wishes. But if I could do so, I would stop all propaganda except through one's conduct. Conversion is a matter of heart and reason. An appeal to heart and reason can only be made through conduct.[57]

At another place Gandhi says that proselytization has done more harm than good. Though it is regarded as a matter purely of the heart and one between the Maker and oneself, it has degenerated into an appeal to the selfish instinct.[58] In an article he published in 1931, Gandhi stated that his position had been misrepresented, and he went on to affirm: "I am, then, not against conversion. But I am against the modern methods of it. Conversion nowadays has become a matter of business, like any other".[59]

Religious Pluralism: Equal Respect for All Religions

Religion was viewed by Gandhi as the cementing foundation of the human community; for he believed that various religions were beautiful flowers from one garden or branches of the gigantic tree that all of them were equally true. "The Allah of Islam", Gandhi wrote in 1938 in *Harijan*, "is the same as the God of the Christians and the Isvara of the Hindus. Living faith in this God means equal respect for all religions. It would be the height of intolerance – and intolerance is a species of violence – to believe that your religion is superior to other religions". In fact, he could claim, with little seeming contradiction, that being an adherent of the *sanathana dharma* (eternal religion) he could be a Hindu, a Muslim, and a Christian at the same time.[60]

Gandhi believed that each major religion defined a distinct understanding of God and focused on his various features. Christianity was the religion that most fully and movingly created the concept of God as a loving Father and the focus on unconditional love, forgiveness, and unremitting suffering that went along with it. Gandhi was unable to determine whether such understanding is unique or whether it is present in other religions. Nevertheless, the presentation is special. Austere and rigorous monotheism, the rejection of intermediaries between human beings and God, and the spirit of equality were 'most beautifully' articulated in Islam. The clear distinction between the impersonal and personal conceptions of God, the emphasis on non-attachment to the world while remaining active within it, the principle of the unity of all life, and the doctrine of non-violence were unique to Hinduism. For Gandhi, every religion had a distinct moral and spiritual ethos and represented a wonderful and irreplaceable 'spiritual composition'.[61] He said institutional religions were roads that led to the same destination.[62] Or, they were the rivers that flowed into the same ocean.[63] In reality, Gandhi said, there are as many religions as there are individuals.[64]

Gandhi was highly influenced by the Jain theory of *anekantavada*, the many-sidedness of the reality. He applied this theory to his concept

of religion. That is why he said that many religions exist because there is many-sidedness of truth. All of them are equal in the sense that no single religion has the absolute or exclusive truth. Gandhi quoted the saint Narasimha that the different shapes into which gold was beaten gave rise to different names and forms; but ultimately it was all gold. God's grace and revelation were not the monopoly of any race or nation; they descended equally upon all who waited upon God. The one true religion, he asserted, subsequently became many "as it passed through the human medium".[65] In other words, God had revealed himself to the whole of humanity. At the same time, humanity expressed the meaning of the received revelation differently, depending on language and culture. The unity of religious truths was guaranteed because of their divine source, but their diversity became unavoidable because of culture, and the philosophical or theological systems that arose from them.[66] So, Gandhi opined that no religion was absolutely perfect. In fact, all religions are equally imperfect or more or less perfect.[67] Gandhi says that religious pluralism is part of Indian culture, as we read in Rig Veda: "To what is One, sages give many a title". According to Gita humans could approach God by different paths: "In whatsoever way any come to Me, in that same way I grant them favor".[68]

Equal respect for all religions recognizes the equality of all religions (*sarvadharma samanatva*). Gandhi saw two great values in the theory of religious pluralism. In the first place, it provided an objective basis for religious toleration within the state, and in the second place it supplied the foundation for the dialogue between religions.[69] Moreover, as Gandhi wrote "Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only not hesitate, but would think it our duty, to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths".[70] Elaborating his concept of unity of all creations and religions, Gandhi said: "If all religions are one at source, we have to synthesize them. Today they are looked upon as separate and that is why we kill each other. When we are tired of religion, we become atheists and then, apart from the little self, nothing not even God, exists. But when we acquire true understanding, the little self perishes and God becomes all in all".[71] "My approach to other religions", he wrote, "therefore, is never as a fault-finding critic but as a devotee hoping to find the like beauties in other religions and wishing to incorporate in my own the good, I may find in them and miss in mine".[72]

For Gandhi, every religion was inescapably partial and constrained since God was limitless and the limited human mind could only comprehend a "fraction" of him and that too inadequately.[73] This also applied to faiths that claimed to have had direct revelation from him

because they were communicated through human language, which was naturally flawed and revealed to fallible humans. Therefore, there was much that different religions might contribute to one another, and this was advantageous. Gandhi adopted the attitude of *sadbhava* (goodwill) towards other religions, rather than mere respect or even tolerance towards them. Tolerance suggested that other religions were erroneous, even though one was prepared to tolerate them for a variety of reasons, and that one's own faith was "true" and had nothing to learn from them, thus leading to 'spiritual arrogance'. Respect was a more positive attitude, but it too implied both an unwillingness to learn from others and a desire to keep them at a safe distance. By contrast *sadbhava* implied 'spiritual humility', a 'feel for other religions', and a willingness to see them flourish and learn from them.[74]

Gandhi's New Year message to his Hindu readers in 1907 advocating religious tolerance in *Indian Opinion* sums up his thoughts on religious pluralism. His message read:

> If the people of different religions grasp the real significance of their own religion, they will never hate the people of any religion other than their own. As Jalaluddin Rumi has said, or as Shri Krishna said to Arjun, there are many rivers, and they appear different from one another, but they all meet in the ocean. In the same manner there may be many religions, but the true aim of all is the same . . . Hence, if we look at the aim, there is no difference among religions.[75]

According to Gandhi all religions are essentially identical because (a) it is the truth /God that inspires all religions; (b) all seek truth; they are different paths to the same goal; (c) all believe in moral order / a universe governed by moral law; this law is truth / god; (d) all affirm the same fundamental morality; and religion is essentially morality (non-violence, truth, love); (e) all respect a higher power; (f) all religions have served in embellishing mankind, all have produced great saints – i.e., self-sacrificing persons. The Buddha, Christ, Mohammad, Guru Nanak all lived lives of self-sacrifice and renunciation. So, there was an underlying unity in all religions. The time has passed when the followers of one religion could stand up and say, ours is the only true religion and all others are false. Gandhi said, "I don't believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas. I believe the Bible, the Koran and the Zend Avesta to be as much divinely inspired as the Vedas".[76]

Gandhi's concept of religious pluralism was inclusive, as it included atheists also along with all religions. He recognises that atheists have right to be atheists. On this Margaret Chatterjee says: "he does not even speak out against atheism, for he finds in many atheists that

very desire for truth which he himself believed was identical with the religious impulse".[77]

Gandhi's belief in religious tolerance and opposition to conversion to another religion flows from his statement that: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my houses as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any".[78]

Critics of Gandhi

Gandhi had many critics. Among the British critics were Archbishop Cosmo Lang and Lord Reading, the Viceroy of India. The former described him, in a letter to Lord Irwin, as "a mystic, fanatic and anarchist", and the latter wrote after his first meeting with Mahatma that "Mr. Gandhi's religious and moral views are… admirable, but…difficult to understand the practice of them in politics".[79] The leaders of the Muslim League, the protagonists of the two-nation theory, maligned Gandhi who insisted that the function of religion was to unite rather than divide people, and religion was an unsatisfactory basis for nationality. Three left-wing critics – M. N. Roy, R. P. Dutt and E.M.S. Namboodripad – have accused Gandhi of exploiting religion to rouse the masses, and then deliberately curbing their political consciousness in the interest of the Indian bourgeoisie. Many of his own supporters were uncomfortable with the moral constraints he imposed on the struggle with the British. Finally, some latter-day historians have advanced the thesis that by using Hindu symbols, Gandhi contributed to the communal polarisation which culminated in the division of India.[80]

M. N. Roy, a communist and Radical Humanist, who had been sharply critical of Gandhi's 'religious approach to politics', confessed later that he had failed to detect the secular approach of the Mahatma beneath the religious terminology and that essentially Gandhi's message had been "moral, humanist, cosmopolitan".[81] The greatest contribution of Gandhi is that he strengthened the concept of secularism in India. Though he was a deeply religious person, he said that he would have opposed any proposal for a state religion even if the whole population of India had professed the same religion. He looked upon religion as a personal matter. He told a missionary later: "The State would look after your secular welfare, health, communications, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody's personal concern", he wrote.[82]

Concluding Observations

Gandhi was one of the outstanding religious pioneers of all times.

Several Christian leaders have spoken of him as the greatest since the time of Jesus.[83] His first biographer, Joseph Doke, wrote that his religious views were too closely allied to Christianity to be entirely Hindu, and too deeply saturated with Hinduism to be called Christian. His sympathies were so wide and catholic that the formulae of sects appeared meaningless.[84] In his lifetime he was variously labelled, a *Sanatanist* (orthodox), Hindu, a renegade Hindu, a Buddhist, a theosophist, a Christian and a "Christian Muhammadan". He was all these and even more. Such novel comment was possible only because he was constantly redefining and reconstructing his religious beliefs and also assimilating from other religions.

Gandhi advocated redefining and reconstructing all religions only by their respective followers. He favoured reforms from within. Let us recall here his two statements in this regard: (i) "Nothing [in religious text] can be accepted as the word of God which cannot be tested by reason or capable of being spiritually experienced". (ii) "Every true scripture only gains by criticism". To him all religions are imperfect and contain certain wrong practices, like Hinduism's practices of untouchability, animal sacrifice, sati, etc. For him religion should be a lived experience. Religion, for him, is to be searched out in the service of mankind, and not in rituals. He dedicated and devoted his whole life to the service of the masses, which, in fact was the essence of his religion. By religion, Gandhi did not mean any conventional religion but 'universal religion' which is at the root of all religions and that this fundamental religion harmonises the historical religions and makes them valid. The soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. Therefore, he believes in religious pluralism and mutual respect of religions and religious tolerance. He believes in the unity and equality of all religions.

The resolution on fundamental rights passed by the Karachi Congress in 1931 with Gandhi's cordial approval, affirmed the principle of religious freedom and declared that "the State shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions". This doctrine of secularism was enshrined in the constitution of free India even after the Muslim League waged and won the campaign for the partition of the country on the basis of religion. Louis Fischer, Gandhi's American biographer, noted the strange paradox that Jinnah, who had grown up as a secular nationalist in his younger days and who apparently had little interest in religion, founded a State based on religion, while Gandhi, wholly religious, worked to establish a secular State.[85]

Two scholars – Vinay Lal and Unto Tahtinen – summarize Gandhi's concept of religion and his reformative agenda very well. The former said: "in the matter of religious belief and conduct, Gandhi was

unusually reflective, practical, and wise – all at the same time. He emphasized reason, a need to understanding all faiths, and the freedom of religious conversion. He came to the realization that 'Truth is God' and had an unshakeable conviction that it was not possible to have a religion without politics or a politics without religion".[86] The Concept of universal religion as propounded by Gandhi is best summarised in the words of Tahtinen: "Gandhi's religiousness does not exclude or reject the criticism of religion, since the recognition of the fundamental equality of all religions does not destroy the distinction between religion and irreligion. We must not tolerate irreligion. Sanctifying a cruel custom is not religion, but irreligion. Religion which does not take the practical things of life into account and does not try to explain them is not true religion".[87]

Although we may feel at the end of our study that now we understand Gandhi's conception of religion better, in conclusion, "we must admit that paradoxes remain", to quote Jordens, who said, Gandhi, Hindu to the core, was rejected by orthodoxy; believer in tolerant relativism, he was stubbornly dogmatic in his personal view of religion; fanatically non-violent, he accepted that sometimes violence may be a sacred duty; mercilessly ascetic, he was overflowing with tenderness. It was in his life and his actions that these paradoxes resolved themselves as on the loom of his life he doggedly criss-crossed the warp of asceticism with the weft of love. It was by looking at his actions that we discovered under the homespun shawl a giant who in our age gave active witness to the reality of the divine.[88]

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Navigating the Blizzard: Female Agency and Human Rights Discourse in Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*

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ABSTRACT

Türkiye sits at the confluence of Europe and Asia, but this unique position produces a sense of cultural disquiet rather than vibrancy, opines the Nobel Laureate, Orhan Pamuk. Türkiye has been engaged in the process of modernization since the creation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Unsuccessful in unifying the entire population through secularization, Türkiye is still caught between the drive to become a secular, modern society and the pull to maintain traditional Islamic culture. The ambivalent existence of women is just one aspect of this Turkish Identity crisis. Though Kemalist reforms claim to have liberated Turkish women, majority are still under the clutches of a male-dominated society. The study "Navigating the Blizzard: Female Agency and Human Rights Discourse in Orhan Pamuk's Snow" is an attempt to delineate the paradoxical existence of Turkish Women and the question of agency in the so-called 'modern, secular, democratic' Türkiye with reference to Orhan Pamuk's Snow.

Keywords: *Human Rights, Türkiye, Veil, Unveil, Liminal Existence.*

Introduction

THE CONCEPT OF Human Rights has taught us that human beings are born equal in dignity and rights. And as discussed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Human Rights are rights derived from the inherent dignity of the human person. Thus, Human beings are entitled to certain basic rights that are inalienable and inherent in all individuals, irrespective of any discrimination such as caste, creed, colour, sex, cultural differences or any other consideration. Yet, discrimination based on gender is blatant is all societies, be it the

West or the East. Since time immemorial gender inequality arising out of the unequal distribution of power has been the blight of the so-called 'Other' sex. Gender, a social construct, shaped by relations of power has always been instrumental in stereotyping women and their role in the society. As Simon de Beauvoir states in her introduction to *The Second Sex*, "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute — she is the Other." [1] This process of Othering is maneuvered through various institutions like religion, culture, caste, race, etc., established by the society. As a result, the stereotyped existence of women as 'the second sex' becomes problematic, especially in an Islamic cultural framework. And when you focus on Türkiye "so deep is the imprint of Islam on the Turkish society"[2] that it forms one of the primary markers of Turkish women's identity.

This study endeavours to delineate the ambivalent existence of Turkish women as manifest in Orhan Pamuk's political novel *Snow*. Orhan Pamuk, the recipient of the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature, has etched a name for himself in the contemporary literary scenario within a short time. He is the first Turkish literateur to receive the Nobel Prize, and he is noted as a writer who writes in Turkish and sets all his novels in Turkey. Though set in Turkey, his novels touch upon universal issues. In his novels of disguises and transformations, Pamuk hints at the futility of attempts to regain one's self when a nation's identity is lost. He reflects on the texture of life in Istanbul, its labyrinth of ancient streets, and its history. As Pamuk mentions in *The Black Book,* living in an oppressed, defeated country is to be someone else. The million-dollar question seems to be: How to be oneself? Pamuk very well understands and tries to make his readers understand that only by solving this mystery can we hope to save our people from destruction, enslavement, and defeat. According to Pamuk, it is our failure to find a way to be ourselves that people are being dragged into slavery, degeneracy, and nothingness. And his novels are testimonials of the same. Pamuk's novels emerge as representations of Turkish history and existential angst as he takes up "writing" to escape the confines imposed on the self and society. Therefore, Pamuk's writing process can be seen as an act of redemption amid demanding policies.

The Turkish raconteur, Orhan Pamuk has eleven novels to his credit including *Cevdet Bey ve ogullari: roman* (1982; *Cevdet Bey and His Sons*), *Sessiz ev: roman* (1983; *Silent House*), *Beyaz kale: roman* (1985, *The White Castle: A Novel*), *Kara kitap* (1990, *The Black Book*), *Yeni hayat* (1994, *The New Life*), *Benim adym kyrmyzy* (1998, *My name is Red*), *Kar* (2002, *Snow*),

Masumiyet Muzesi (2008, *The Museum of Innocence*), *Kafamda Bir Tuhaflýk* (2014; *A Strangeness in My Mind*), *Kýrmýzý saçlý kadýn* (2016; *The Red-Haired Woman*) and *Veba gecelerý* (2021; *Nights of Plague*).The present study focuses on the English translation *Snow* published in 2002.

The Turkish Dilemma

Türkiye is often described as the only modern, secular, democratic country in the Islamic Middle East since the creation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The Treaty of Lausanne of 24th July 1923 led to the international recognition of the new Turkey and its borders. Mustafa Kemal, re-elected as the assembly president in August 1923, was elected as the first president of Turkey in October 1923. The assembly proclaimed Turkey a republic and made Ankara the new state's capital while retaining Istanbul as the seat of the Caliphate. By establishing a republic, the Kemalists rejected the foundations on which the older order rested. Though the monarchy was abolished due to the Sultan's tactical errors, many nationalists preferred Turkey to be ruled by a symbolic figure, formerly the sultan-caliph, now the president-caliph. Thus, those who wished to maintain the caliph as the president of the republic went on to form the Progressive Republican Party in 1924. The government was urged to retain the Caliphate as an institution treasured by the Islamic world, a Muslim pope who would project Turkey's worldwide influence. But Ankara responded by arresting the dissidents and went to the extreme of abolishing the Caliphate on 3rd March 1924. This event marked the beginning of the campaign to introduce modernity and secularism, which continued virtually until Ataturk's death. The new regime was finally secure as the nationalist conservatives and the former unionists were overpowered. By 1926, Mustafa Kemal was so confident that he went on to unveil his statue in Istanbul, an iconoclastic gesture in a society where the representation of human form was considered a sin. The ideology that came to be known as Kemalism or Ataturkism, launched in May 1931, consisted of six fundamental and unchanging principles which were incorporated into the constitution in 1937. The principles became the Republican People's Party's six arrows; its emblem symbolized Republicanism, Nationalism/Patriotism, Populism, Statism, Laicism/Secularism, and evolutionism/Reformism. However, the interpretations of these principles were fluid and pragmatic and kept on changing according to the needs of the bourgeois. The Kemalists thus introduced state-controlled Islam (laicism) and not secularism, which meant religion separate from politics.

The 'traditional wall' between modernity and tradition dates to the Ataturk years when Türkiye underwent revolutionary changes in

all spheres, as he aimed to elevate Türkiye to European standards. Hence, the political, social, and cultural changes from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic are vital to the Ottoman and Turkish identity question. This transformation forms one of the most important determinants of the Turks' sense of their place in the world. Mustafa Kemal's radical Westernizing reforms took Türkiye closer to the West culturally while moving it further from Western democratic practice. He aimed to strengthen the state rather than the constitution; and as stated earlier, the Caliphate was abolished on 3rd March 1924. More secularizing measures followed, such as the abolition of the office of the mufti at the head of the Ottoman religious hierarchy, the *sharia* courts, and the madrasas. Instead, a new Directorate of Religious Affairs was created and placed under the Prime Minister. By 1928, Türkiye amended its constitution and eliminated the clause assigning Islam as the state religion. The modernization of Türkiye, and especially the secular law that assigns equality to all, challenged the status disparities that the *sharia* put forth. Many crucial changes were brought in, like the international calendar that replaced the Ottoman religious and solar calendars and the international clock adopted in 1925 instead of the *alturka* time by which the day began at sunset. The dress revolution witnessed another move to minimize the differences between Turks and Europeans. In 1925, the men were ordered to wear western-style hats rather than the *fez*, and the women were discouraged to wear the veil, though it was not officially banned. Later, Türkiye adopted the metric system, changed the call to prayer from Arabic to Turkish, and even changed the weekly day off from work from Friday to Sunday. As the *sharia* courts were shut down in 1924, legal reforms resumed with the adoption of legal codes borrowed from various countries like civil (Swiss), penal (Italian), and commercial (Italian and German). As the Swiss Civil Code prescribed equal rights to men and women, women were given the right to vote in municipal and national elections in 1930 and 1934, respectively. Family names were made mandatory instead of traditional address titles like *effendi* and *bey* for men and *hanim* for women. As a result, in 1935, Mustafa Kemal took the surname Ataturk, 'Father Turk'. These laicizing reforms brought about revolutionary changes in Turkish culture, and this crucial makeover underlies all of Orhan Pamuk's works. An in-depth analysis of Pamuk's novels reveals how delicately he portrays this conflict between individual freedom and rigid social norms, and the search for meaning and values in a secular society. [3]

The Predicament of Turkish Women

Reforms moved beyond dismantling official Islam into various social and cultural transformations. As a result, many crucial changes crept into the social make up of Türkiye, and one major change was the emancipation of women. Women were emancipated and given the right to vote. With this, Türkiye became the only Islamic country that provided women with social, legal, and political rights. But the question is- how far did this move improve the lives of Turkish women? As far as gender relations are concerned, Islamic laws define them in terms of complementarity and not equality, assigning rights and duties to both sexes. Unfortunately, the process of Europeanization remains restricted to the elite section of society, which is evident from the fact that many women still do not enjoy the rights provided by the legal system. Moreover, in the 1990s, due to the resurgence of political Islam, a reversal to Islamic dress and Islamic rules for gender roles can be perceived. This incomplete Europeanization has led to the creation of two categories of women in Türkiye, namely "the open, western, emancipated women and the closed, traditional, unliberated women."[4] The status of women can be seen as one of the important criteria to measure the extent and success of modernization. Turkish women are expected to fulfill the conventional female homemaker role and are seen as a mechanism for protecting cultural boundaries. Thus, we can decipher that women are seen just as "guardians of tradition and collective identity"[5] and the fact that Türkiye is an Islamic society "increases the symbolic value of women as the differentiating element between West and Non-West."[6] As Muftuler–Bac points out "the most visible line of demarcation between the two opposing camps (secularists and Islamists) is the Turkish women."[7]

Apart from the religious reforms, the dress revolution aimed to minimize the differences between Turks and Europeans. The westernization of women's bodies and dress triggered criticism among the conservatives, and consequently, 'to veil or not to veil' became a controversial question. The veil is thus not only symbolic of the physical differences between men and women but also the borderline between Islam and secular modernity. The extent to which Turkish women can expose their bodies and also get involved in public life is an ongoing debate. Various forms of oppression and subjugation against women, like economic and social inequality, domestic violence, sexual harassment, assault, rape, and torture, are prevalent in Turkish society. Still, an additional dimension that intensifies their distress is the 'push and pull' between Islamists and secularists.

Meltem Muftuler-Bac identifies various agents of oppression over women in Türkiye: the influence of Mediterranean culture that

propagated male supremacy; the dominant religion-Islam- that confines women to the private sphere and the Kemalist ideology which aimed at integrating women into the public sphere, but as asexual, self-sacrificing Turkish women. How these agents of oppression set fire to the lives of women is evident through the 'headscarf issue' discussed at length in Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*. In *Snow*, Pamuk delicately portrays the conflict between individual freedom and rigid social norms, as well as the search for meaning and values in a secular society.

To Veil or Unveil

Pamuk's political novel *Snow*, set in the city of Kars in northeastern Türkiye, paints the visit of an exiled Turkish poet Ka, who has officially taken up the duty to cover the municipal elections and the suicide epidemic of young women. But to his dismay, Ka finds himself cut off from the outside world by the snowstorm and a military coup. The city of Kars turns into a theater where all sociopolitical issues in Türkiye merge in an onstage revolution. As McGaha says:

> Taking the form of a political thriller, *Snow* vividly portrays the cruelty and intolerance of both the Islamic fundamentalists and the representatives of the secular state…Pamuk has created believable, sympathetic characters representing both sides and has given an eloquent voice to their anger and frustration.[8]

In Kars, Ka, the poet protagonist, pens down a revelatory collection of poems titled Snow. The snow always reminded Ka of innocence; it always spoke to him about purity, but after his first day in Kars, it no longer did so. The snow foreshadowed strange and powerful loneliness; it was as if the whole world had forgotten Kars/Türkiye. The snow that once stood for purity and innocence now turned out to be tiring, irritating, and terrorizing. He realized that the snow in his memories can longer be found; instead, it spoke of hopelessness and misery. Though Kars is not a hotbed of political Islam, Pamuk chose Kars as the setting of the novel since Kars was emblematic of remoteness, poverty, and provincial isolation. Therefore, Kars, known for its long and bitter winters, symbolizes Turkey's predicament compared to the Western world. Ka, experiencing writer's block, suddenly finds his imagination running wild as soon as he reaches Kars. He has now regained his memories, poetic skill, lost love, belief in God, and so on, and the snow seems to witness all these changes. Each time a new poem comes to him, the image of the falling snow is somehow or the other connected to it. At times, snow relates to happiness, at times, it horrifies him. He even writes a poem

titled "Snow" which he later declares to be his life writ small. It is noteworthy that Ka identifies some kind of connection between himself, his poems, his emotions, and the symmetrical structure of a snowflake. This can be understood from the diagrammatic representation of his poems, which fit together neatly with the six-pointed snowflake. His short spell of happiness with his beloved, Ipek, makes him discover that his poems were all part of a grand design. Thus, he places each of the nineteen poems he has written in Kars on the three axes of Imagination/Poetry, Logic/Philosophy, and Memory/History on the spiritual snowflake map of his life (See Fig below).

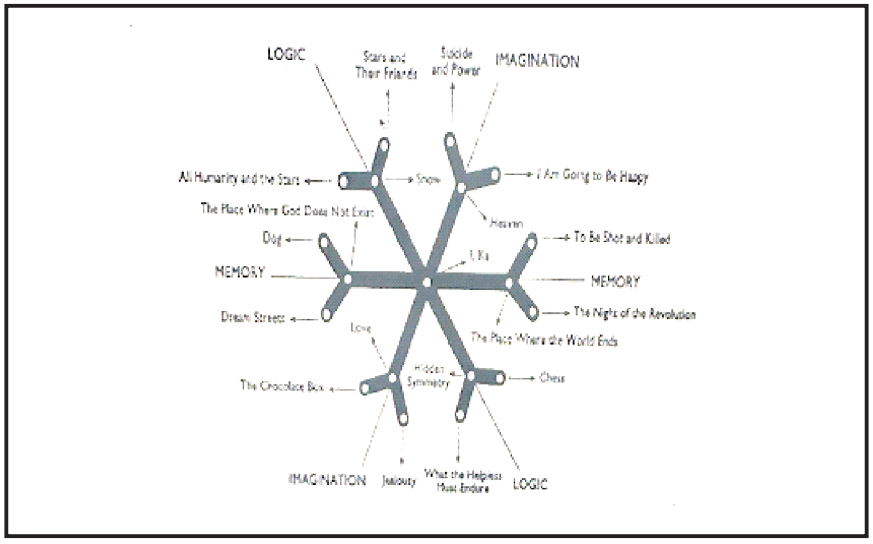

Fig: The Snowflake- The nineteen poems written by Ka in Kars placed on the three axes of imagination, logic, and memory of the spiritual snowflake map of his life (as given in the novel on page 267).

The poem, 'Suicide and Power', placed on the axis of imagination, is reflective of Ka's investigation of the suicide epidemic discussed in the novel, which in turn portrays the extent of oppression of women in Türkiye. We are told about a series of suicides as the narrative progresses, but all Ka could gather from their families was that their daughters never gave them any cause for concern. What shocked Ka wasn't the poverty or helplessness or the constant beatings or the conservatism of their fathers or the constant surveillance of their husbands or lack of money but the abrupt manner in which they

committed suicide. We learn about various forms of torture meted out on Turkish women as seen in other patriarchal societies. One commits suicide as she had been forced into an engagement with an elderly tea-house owner, another girl was battered by her father for squabbling with her siblings, and another was a depressed soul who was terrorized by the beatings of her unemployed husband and so on. All these girls were unhappy and killed themselves, though Islam prohibits suicide. Initially, these suicide stories came from a place named Batman, but it worsened when a girl from Batman who visited her family in Kars committed suicide on the day she had to return. Her uncle exposes the fact that she was forced to do household work from morning till night and was constantly harassed by her mother-in-law for failing to conceive a child, and finally, out of depression, she committed suicide. In the narrative, Kars also gets infected with this suicide mania as the 16-year-old cousin of this very same girl commits suicide as her teacher accuses her of not being a virgin. Here, we understand that the chastity of women is an important control mechanism over women. *Namus* or sexual purity, is important as women's sexual behavior is a measure of both the society's and the state's dominant values. In Türkiye, such matters are not personal; they involve society and the state. Hence the result of not being a virgin leads to social alienation and marginalization. So, once the rumour spread, the girl's engagement was called off, and this led to her death, though later, she was found innocent.

The most crucial suicide depicted is the suicide of the headscarf girl. Pamuk deliberately deals with this 'headscarf' issue at length to highlight the severity of the predicament of Turkish women. In the narrative, the state had outlawed wearing headscarves in educational institutions, but some refused to comply. Teslime was influenced by her school friends who were campaigning against the banishment of covered women from the institute. They taught her to think of the headscarf as a symbol of political Islam, and she refused to remove her headscarf even though her family expressed their concern regarding the issue. Her bitter experiences made her lose hope in life, and she committed suicide. Kadiffe, the leader of the head scarf girls, justifies Teslime's suicide, though prohibited by the Holy Koran. She voices the trauma that Turkish women endure when they are suddenly told to "take off those scarves, because that's what the state wants you to do"[9] after abiding by religion and tradition for long. For Teslime, the headscarf symbolized God's love and proclaimed her faith and preserved her honour, but she succumbed to the pressure from her family and teachers. Similarly, another girl, Hande, too thinks of suicide but ultimately takes off her headscarf for the sake of her parents. It

becomes evident that the girls are trapped in a maze comprising of faith, state policies, and their families. These incidents highlight the extent to which women are still bound to the same gender roles dominant in Turkish Islamic culture. It is noteworthy that through his female characters, Pamuk foregrounds the predicament of Turkish women and points out the challenges that arose along with the social transition from an Islamic country to a secular democratic one.

The narrator, Orhan, reveals the recorded conversation between the Director of the Institute of Education and the stranger who kills him. The Director complied with the orders of the State and denied schooling to girls who covered their heads as dictated by the religion. This instigated the traditionalists and, consequently, a stranger who introduces himself as the "nameless defender of nameless heroes who suffered untold wrongs while seeking to uphold their religious beliefs in a society that is in thrall to secular materialism"[10] murders the Director. This conversation explains the standpoint of the traditionalists and the secularists and the concerns felt in Türkiye. The 31st verse of the chapter titled 'Heavenly Light' from the Holy Quran states that women should cover their heads and even their faces is discussed at length in the novel. This discourse raises very pertinent questions, the final answer of which would again be controversial. Pamuk uses the stranger as a mouthpiece when he questions the Director:

> How can you reconcile God's command with the decision to ban covered girls from the classroom?'/ 'We live in a secular state, It's the secular state that has banned covered girls from schools as well as classrooms.'/ . . . Can a law imposed by the state cancel our God's law?'/. . . Does the word "secular" mean "godless"?'/. . . how can you explain why the state is banning so many girls from the classroom in the name of secularism, when all they are doing is obeying the laws of their religion?'/ . . . How does all this fit in with what our constitution says about educational and religious freedom? . . . the real question is how much suffering we've caused our womenfolk by turning headscarves into symbols-and using women as pawns in a political game.'[11]

In *Snow,* we are told that the headscarf girls are humiliated by denying their existence. They were barred from their classrooms, then from the corridors, and finally were thrown out into the street. When they dared to return to school, the police were brought in. And out of depression, one committed suicide. The dress revolution had been a move to identify themselves with the West, but the stranger voices Pamuk as he compels the Director to answer whether "by uncovering themselves, they'll get Europeans to start treating them

like human beings."[12] The stranger deems it his duty to kill the tyrant who inflicts cruelty on believers. This part of the narrative makes clear the mindset of the freedom fighters who stood for Islamic justice. Moreover, they regard the secular moves as a ploy to strip the Muslims of their religion and their honour and thereby turn them into slaves of the West. Turkish women are thus depicted as caught in the political game and as perplexed as to how to lead a normal life.

The stranger, who murders the Director, reveals the reverberations of denying education to covered girls:

> Think of the girls whose lives you destroyed. One had a nervous breakdown; four were kicked out of school in their third year. One committed suicide. The ones who stood trembling outside the doors of your school all came down with fevers and ended up in bed.[13]

The mental trauma of the covered girls is thus intermingled with the suicide narrative to convey that Turkish women were mere pawns in the hands of the dominant social norms of Türkiye.

The suicides depicted can be deciphered as a form of resistance embraced by the victims, mocking their lack of agency in the secular society. This push and pull between the secularists and the conservative fundamentalists is treated with contempt as Pamuk employs the 'play within a play' technique in his novel. Ka, the protagonist, is forced to recite a poem at the National Theatre, where the old play *'My Fatherland or My Headscarf'* is being staged once again. During the initial years of modernization this short play was staged many times in lycées and town halls. The play portrays a troubled woman draped in a black scarf who removes her scarf and proclaims her newfound freedom. But she is forced to put her scarf back, and in a rage, she burns the scarf. Outraged by this show of independence, the religious fanatics try to kill her, and then the brave soldiers of the republic save her. When restaged in Kars, an actual woman appears on stage wearing a headscarf, which incites the viewers. Here, people are shocked to see a woman on stage as Islam excludes women from the public sphere reserved for men and assigns women to the private sphere. Moreover, Kars had decided to remain traditional out of their fear of political Islamists, and hence, such a daring act instigates the fundamental Islamic students present there. This is because a woman in a public sphere is a threat to social order as she carries with her "the danger of *fitna*-her ability to create chaos through her sexual attraction."[14] Women are viewed as objects that arouse men, so veiling becomes a sexual concept. This is very evident when Pamuk writes, "Ka, knew only too well that he could never feel sexually attracted to a woman

in a headscarf."[15] The play enacted within the narrative is symbolic of the Kemalist ideology, which promoted Western attire against the Islamic belief that "headscarves protect women from harassment, rape and degradation."[16] Restaged in a time when the headscarf had become a symbol of political Islam, the play sends mixed messages that disturb both the religious students as well as the officials. The Republicans seated in the front rows became agitated when they saw the lewd belly dancer Fund Eser enacting the role of a liberated woman as she had spent her career using her sexuality to excite male audiences. She could never be a heroine of enlightenment. She enacts the very same scenes of the original play, but the scenario changes when the soldiers who come on stage to rescue Funda Eser from the reactionaries (part of the play) target the audience and start firing. Initially, the audience mistook it as a new dramatic technique, and only by the third volley did they understand that those were real shots. Sunay Zain, a famous actor in the leftist theater now comes onstage and announces, "This is not a play- it is the beginning of a revolution."[17] The narrative proceeds to discuss the preparations for the second performance of the theater revolution, where Kadiffe is forced to enact the role of a covered girl who repudiates nonsensical customs and unveils before the audience. The television announces that this performance will rescue Kars from the religious prejudices that prevented people from embracing modernity. The second play is titled *The Tragedy of Kars* and focuses on the tense issue of suicide and unveiling. Kadife completes her act by uncovering her hair and finally shooting at Sunay Zaim with the unloaded revolver. But the blood on stage alarms Kadife as she exclaims, "I guess I killed him."[18]

The fundamentals of male domination remain intact in Kars, which is a microcosm of contemporary Türkiye. The paradoxical existence of women makes it obvious that the so-called process of emancipation of women was nothing more than a move to gain acceptance as a European state. With the resurgence of Islamic practices since 1987, Islam has become a major force within Turkish society and politics, which has led to the application of Islamic law to women and family matters. The paradox is that women do get involved in the public sphere, but they live in the Islamic way, an example being the increase in the number of women seeking education and employment but with the veil. Muftuler-Bac contends that the veiled woman becomes a "symbol of activism for political Islam, while at the same time, they constituted the boundary line between Islamists and secular Westernists."[19] But it has to be noted that the veil cannot be depicted merely as a symbol of political Islam since it does function as a protective measure against male harassment and also against being

stereotyped as 'sexual beings' in a Muslim community. From this perspective, the veil becomes a defense mechanism to merge into the public space and also a weapon to protect their sexual purity. So, the fundamental reason women's veiling is important to the question of women's rights is that the veil symbolizes freedom of choice. Amina Wadud, an Islamic feminist, emphasizes that the Quran teaches the importance of modesty, but the question as to the type of dress depends on culture and context.[20] The veil is thus evidently a complex symbol of cultural identity, resistance, and personal choice. For some, veiling is a deliberate choice of religious expression, cultural identity, or personal empowerment. It is not inherently oppressive but can be a form of self-determination.

Pamuk tactfully contextualizes *Snow* in post-independent Türkiye, which had "openly adopted a policy of westernization as the only way of wiping out the 'backward' aspects of Muslim-Ottoman Civilization." [21] He hints at how the Kemalist elite failed to project itself in a completely Türkiye-oriented framework and was keen on giving a universal sense to Turkish revolution. He points out the creation of a codified credo comprehensive to Western standards, which was at once national and international. And as Prem Poddar claims, "the emergence of a Westernized elite class meant the colonization of minds."[22] The various Kemalist reforms induced a process of alienation which produced the domination of a Westernized bureaucracy over the people through the destruction of their cultural and social values. The coercive attempts to reorganize their civilization led to the internalization of the values and norms of the imperialist West. Thus, when employed against their own population, this reform resulted in a cultural rupture.

Orhan Pamuk has always taken the liberty to criticize the nationalists' notion that the whole world is engaged in a conspiracy against Türkiye. He holds a different perspective and believes that the Turks should be optimistic at the thought of joining the EU as the "alternative was military or religious dictatorship."[23] Türkiye's attempts at joining the European Union are of great importance as it has brought drastic changes in areas of speech and democratization. At one point, entry into the EU had become the mission of the government. The membership eligibility, based on the Copenhagen criteria recognized in 1993, was defined in terms of politics – democracy, rule of law, human rights, protection of minorities; economics – a market economy capable of standing with the economic forces within the EU; and the country's capacity to accept all the membership requirements. The candidate country had to conform to the EU policies, the *acquis communautaire*.

Pamuk believes that "entering the European Union will not destroy Turkish identity but will make it flourish and give more freedom and self-confidence to invent a new Turkish Culture."[24] Pamuk's reference to the killing of a million Armenians in his interview with a Swiss newspaper had enraged the Turks, and consequently, a case was filed against him for insulting the Turkish identity. Referring to the killings of thousands of Armenians between 1915-1917 and Kurdish Separatists since 1984, he had stated that "Thirty thousand Kurds and a million Armenians were killed in these lands, and nobody but me dares to talk about it." [25] This set off a campaign against Pamuk in the Turkish nationalist press. All his books were banned, anti-Pamuk demonstrations were held, his photographs were torn and discarded, it was demanded that Pamuk be put on trial. He received hundreds of hate mail and several death threats which made him flee Türkiye for London and New York. Though Türkiye's constant efforts to enter the European Union subdued the charges against him, he was deeply misunderstood and was pronounced "the most hated Turk." [26] Yet he calls himself a bridge connecting the East and the West, yet the works of Orhan Pamuk place him on a high pedestal for his expertise in the portrayal of Türkiye.[27]

Conclusion

Orhan Pamuk has already carved a niche for himself in the literary world, focusing on the dilemmas and divisions of a land that is simultaneously Eastern and Western, Islamist and Secular, modern and traditional. The idea of the novel as "a sort of proxy for the nation"[28] foregrounds Pamuk's *Snow* as a metaphor for Türkiye and its intricacies. For him, it becomes a testimonial of shame, pride, anger, and the sense of defeat arising out of the tensions between tradition and modernity. Pamuk believes that it is by sharing their secret shame that they can bring about their liberation, and that is what the art of the novel has taught him. The blatant discourse on the predicament of women in *Snow* is just one dimension where the exercise of Human Rights was imperative. Through his narrative, Pamuk delineates the fact that though the Kemalist reforms have been successful in integrating a section of women into the public sphere, the truth is that a majority are subject to patriarchal norms and values. Only a few educated, professional women are visible, the rest constitute the invisible 'second sex'.

As David N. Coury opines, "*Snow* presents a counter-narrative to the notion of Turkish modernity as equated with secularism and the separation of government and religion, suggesting that modernity through the non-democratic suppression of Islam can only further a

tear at a nation's identity."[29] The headscarf was once a focal point of intense political conflict in Türkiye. The secular establishment viewed the headscarf as a threat to Türkiye's secular order. And, as depicted by Pamuk, the veiled Turkish women struggled under laws that prevented them from wearing the headscarf at schools and in public institutions. But over years, we can now see significant changes in the policies on veiling in Türkiye, as the ban on female students wearing headscarves at universities and professionals in state institutions were lifted in 2008 and 2013, respectively. The consensus on the headscarf issue reflects a significant shift in Turkish political discourse, demonstrating how political parties are adapting to changing social dynamics. However, the emancipation of Muslim women remains an illusion in many parts of the world, as reflected in the headscarf issue dealt with in Pamuk's *Snow*. The crucial question is, as Mai Yamani writes, "the element of choice attached to the garment, and whether it is a woman's right to choose whether to veil or not."[30]The question of agency is not a matter of concern restricted to Türkiye, the plight of Turkish women is just an instance of the denial of basic human rights to women across the world. Both documented and undocumented history of mankind throw light on the liminal existence of women, then and now. The question of agency is still a matter of serious debate in the wake of the new restrictive laws implemented by Afghanistan's Taliban regime requiring women to cover their entire bodies, prohibiting them from public appearance. This is yet another case of denial and suppression of women's rights/agency. The idea of women's rights, whether civil, social, or political, remains unattainable in many parts of the world. In this context, Pamuk's discourse on Turkish women and women's rights can be viewed as a clarion call to rethink and reconfigure the world in which we are living. Pamuk, thus, urges us to commiserate with various traumatic existential crises and embrace a more humanistic spirit that recognizes the inherent dignity of the individual in a shared community.

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Empowering Women Through Panchayat Election: Challenges and Opportunities Post-Reservation

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ABSTRACT

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in India has reserved Panchayat seats for women to promote their political participation and empower them to solve local problems more democratically. However, women political leaders often face physical intimidation, scarce financial resources, and limited political party support. This article examines the situation of women elected in various panchayats due to seat reservations and the obstacles they face post-reservation. The study highlights the need for ongoing advocacy and support to achieve gender justice and inclusive growth in India's political landscape.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Seat Reservation, De-Reservation Gender Equality

Introduction

THE 73RD CONSTITUTIONAL Amendment Act of 1992 in India marked a significant step towards democratic decentralization and women's political empowerment. It mandated the reservation of at least one-third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), and a three-tier system of local self-government in rural areas. This has brought millions of women into politics. [1] However, the journey of women's political empowerment through the Panchayat system has not been without challenges. Despite the constitutional provisions, women leaders in PRIs often face many obstacles, including physical intimidation, scarce financial resources, and limited political party

support.[2] They encounter new challenges after the de-reservation of these seats, as they must now compete with their male counterparts in the open electoral arena.

Existing literature has extensively documented the barriers and constraints faced by women in the Panchayat system, such as the prevalence of proxy representation, lack of capacity-building initiatives, and the persistence of patriarchal norms, etc.[3] Yet, there is a dearth of research exploring the specific challenges encountered by women leaders in the post-reservation era and the institutional mechanisms and policy initiatives required to sustain their political engagement.

This study aims to address this research gap by investigating the challenges faced by women leaders in Indian Panchayati Raj Institutions after the de-reservation of seats and exploring how institutional backing, mentorship, and policy initiatives can help to sustain their political participation and achieve gender justice and inclusive growth. The research question guiding this study is: What challenges do women leaders in Indian Panchayati Raj Institutions face after the de-reservation of seats, and how can institutional mechanisms and policy initiatives sustain their political engagement to achieve gender justice and inclusive growth?

Methodology

The study explores women leaders' challenges and opportunities in Panchayat Raj Institutions, especially after seat de-reservation. It uses secondary data from government reports, scholarly articles, and case studies to understand institutional and societal dynamics affecting women's political participation. The thematic analysis identifies patterns, challenges, and strategies for sustaining women's leadership in local governance.

Historical Context and Gandhi's Influence

The demand for women's participation in political processes in India can be traced back to the struggle for independence since the 1920s. However, these demands were often overlooked, as the broader focus was on securing universal adult franchise regardless of gender, caste, and other factors. As a result, Indian political leaders rarely prioritized this issue. Nevertheless, many women joined the fight for freedom, drawing inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi.[4] Gandhi's inclusive approach in the Indian independence movement attracted participation from all societal sections, including women, who actively broke down traditional inequalities and showcased their socio-political capabilities under his inspiration.

Mahatma Gandhi's groundbreaking efforts for women's equality

and active participation in public life challenged social norms and reflected socio-cultural dynamics. He believed women's involvement in the Indian independence movement was an integral part of his philosophy of nonviolence and Swaraj.[5] Gandhi believed women's involvement in the freedom struggle was crucial for achieving true freedom. He used spinning and salt agitation as non-violent methods, making them accessible and culturally acceptable. These methods allowed women to participate without violating social norms or domestic boundaries. Gandhi's understanding of social dynamics allowed him to leverage prevalent patterns for national emancipation.

Gandhi emphasized the importance of women's rights and empowerment in India's freedom from colonial rule and their participation in decision-making processes, particularly within legislative bodies, as a crucial component of his progressive gender-egalitarian thinking. Gandhiji stated, "I would boycott that legislature which will not have a proper share of women members,"[7] which amply speaks for his concern about women having a leading role in deciding the fate of the nation. Gandhi's association of women with all aspects of the freedom struggle underscored his commitment to their empowerment. He advocated that women must actively participate in boycotts, picketing, and other non-violent struggles. Consequently, the roles played by women during this period expanded beyond the traditional ones. Their leadership in the Salt Satyagraha of 1930, under the inspiring guidance of Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, and other prominent women leaders, demonstrated their potential for leadership and public action.[7] This mobilization of women across India was crucial, as it demonstrated the dormant strength and capability that Gandhi felt was essential for freeing the country from foreign rule.

Gandhi's main focus was the development of rural areas and self-governance, recognizing the importance of strengthening villages as the "backbone of the nation." He established Panchayati Raj institutions after independence, aligning with his ideals of a decentralized system. Women's role in the rural community was central, with educated and empowered women crucial for village progress.

His notion of "ideal women" who would be "India's pride and guarantee of India's future"[8] testifies to his conviction that women were the solution for many problems, whether sanitation, education, or healthcare in the village. Mahatma Gandhi's vision of an independent India was deeply tied to women's equality and participation. He aimed to involve women in freedom, encourage their involvement in decision-making, and empower them at the grassroots level, influencing contemporary discourse on gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Current Status of Women Leaders in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992 mandated a minimum of 33% reservation for women in PRIs, which has been further increased to 50% in some states. This has led to a significant increase in the number of women representatives in local governance.[9] Studies have found that women leaders in PRIs have positively contributed to community development, particularly in areas like education, healthcare, and sanitation. Their participation has led to enhanced investment in public infrastructure that benefits women and children.[10]

However, despite the increased representation, women in PRIs still face various socio-cultural, political, and economic barriers that limit their effective participation and decision-making power. Patriarchal norms, lack of education and confidence, family responsibilities, and proxy leadership by male family members are some of the key challenges.[11] Participation of women, especially from marginalized communities like Dalits and Tribals, has stagnated or even regressed in some cases due to persistent structural inequalities and discrimination.[12] The government has taken various initiatives like the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)[13] and Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP)[14] to enhance the capacity and participation of women in local governance. Efforts are also being made to promote the digital inclusion of rural women through PRIs, which can further empower them and bridge the gender gap. The subsequent study deals with them in detail.

Challenges Faced by Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions Post-De-reservation

Implementing the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution mandated reservations for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). While this initially increased women's representation, the subsequent de-reservation of seats has exposed many challenges hindering their effective participation in local governance. The challenges are discussed in the following paragraphs.

- **Loss of Political Backing**

A significant challenge faced by women post-de-reservation is the loss of political backing and support.[15] The reservation policy was a crucial catalyst, motivating many women to enter politics for the first time.[16] A study revealed that many elected women representatives (EWRs) could not secure re-election after de-reservation, with 39% citing this as the primary reason for not contesting again.[17] This

highlights reservations' crucial role in providing initial political support and visibility. Without the assured seat, women often lack the same level of party support, financial resources, and campaign infrastructure as their male counterparts.[18] This disparity significantly reduces their chances of winning elections independently, effectively silencing their voices in the political process.[19] The rotation system of reserved seats further exacerbates this problem, preventing women from gaining the necessary experience and building a strong political base, thus hindering their re-election prospects.[20] This cyclical process perpetuates a narrative of women as ineffective leaders,[21] undermining their long-term political viability.

- **Gender-Based Societal and Political Barriers**

Even with the initial success of reservations, deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and societal barriers continue to impede women's effective participation in PRIs, both during and after the reservation period.[22] These barriers manifest in multiple forms. Firstly, there's the pervasive issue of tokenism and surrogate representation.[23] Many women representatives are perceived as mere proxies for their husbands or other male relatives, reducing their autonomy and diminishing their ability to represent their constituents' interests independently.[24] This is further compounded by the significant influence of patriarchal party structures, where male party members often dictate their actions, undermining their authority and effectiveness.[25]

Secondly, women face significant societal ridicule and gender-based discrimination,[26] reflecting broader patriarchal norms within the political culture. This discrimination manifests in various ways, including social restrictions that limit their participation in panchayat meetings and decision-making activities,[27] and pressure to prioritize traditional roles, such as household responsibilities, over their public duties.[28] Many women representatives, particularly those from marginalized communities, rely on male counterparts to voice their concerns, further highlighting the issues of tokenism and lack of empowerment.[29] The dual burden of household responsibilities and public duties significantly impacts their effectiveness in governance.[30] Case studies reveal instances of women being co-opted into traditional roles, losing their political agency, and facing obstacles in implementing women-focused initiatives due to party politics.[31] The persistence of male dominance in political discussions further limits their influence, with male counterparts often dismissing or ignoring their contributions.[32]

Furthermore, women often encounter violence and intimidation,

particularly those belonging to scheduled castes or tribes, severely restricting their political engagement.[33] This violence can range from subtle forms of harassment to extreme acts like kidnapping and murder, creating a climate of fear that discourages women's participation in politics. The lack of political backing and support structures exacerbates these risks, leaving women vulnerable to intimidation and coercion. The inadequate devolution of powers and lack of training for women members in PRIs further limit their ability to influence policy and address strategic gender interests effectively.[34] The two-child norm in some states also restricts women's entry into panchayats, reflecting societal norms that prioritize family obligations over public service.[35] Illiteracy and low political awareness also hinder women's effective participation in decision-making processes, underscoring the need for continuous support and empowerment initiatives.

The Impact of De-reservation and Individual Experiences

The de-reservation of panchayat seats for women presents a critical juncture where reservation gains can be easily reversed. In many instances, de-reservation leads to a significant decrease in women's representation, as they often lack the political backing and experience to compete effectively in a traditionally male-dominated landscape.[36] The rotation system, aimed at promoting women's representation, can hinder their empowerment by preventing the development of experienced female leaders organically, posing a continuous challenge to their political progress.

Studies indicate that a majority of women representatives could not get re-elected due to de-reservation.[37] The reservation policy initially increased women's participation but did not guarantee their long-term political involvement. The withdrawal of reserved seats discouraged many women from seeking re-election, highlighting the need for sustained support and alternative strategies to ensure women's continued political participation and empowerment. The de-reservation process often leads to patriarchal control, affecting the progress made through reservation. Experienced women often leave the scene, reducing confidence and experience. The lack of opportunities for women in governance further undermines the progress made through reservation and calls for re-evaluating the reservation system.

Several documents present anecdotal evidence and case studies illustrating the individual experiences of women in PRIs post-de-reservation.[38] These accounts highlight the diverse challenges women face while navigating the complexities of local governance in a

patriarchal society. While some women have successfully transitioned from private to public roles, becoming pioneers and role models, many others struggle against systemic barriers that limit their agency and effectiveness. Smt. Mamta Devi exemplifies the challenges and successes women can experience in these roles.[39] Her proactive engagement with community stakeholders and NGOs contributed to her success, contrasting with the tokenism often experienced by other women representatives. However, even she encountered hurdles such as proxy control by male family members and a lack of support within the PRI framework, highlighting the systemic issues that need addressing to empower women beyond mere representation truly.[40]

Women from lower castes often exhibit more active and effective leadership roles than upper-caste women due to family and societal constraints. However, the loss of political backing from family networks severely undermines the political agency of many women leaders, particularly those from upper-caste backgrounds.Many women view their positions as ornamental, often due to societal expectations and pressures that prioritize family obligations over public service.[42] Women from lower socio-economic backgrounds are frequently more engaged and accountable to their communities than their upper-caste counterparts, who often adhere to traditional gender roles. These varied experiences underscore the complex interplay of caste, class, and gender in shaping women's political participation and effectiveness within PRIs.[43]

The experiences of women in rural Gujarat highlight the continued patriarchal nature of the political environment, where male counterparts often dismiss women's contributions, reinforcing gender imbalances in political representation. Even with a quota for women's representation, political backing and support from political parties often remain limited, resulting in challenges for women in being elected and effectively performing their roles.[44] The institutional design of PRIs also constrains Elected Women Representatives(EWR), treating them more as managers of pre-conceived projects rather than active participants in planning and decision-making, leading to a perception of inefficiency and failure. This perception is further reinforced by the rotation model of reserved seats, which negatively impacts the ability of first-time EWRs to consolidate their work and build a base.[45]

Strategies to Sustain Women's Political Involvement

The reservation policy's success in increasing representation in states with higher quotas underscores the need for continued political engagement. However, fostering a culture of political participation among women is crucial. Women's participation in Panchayat elections

demonstrates their potential for engagement despite challenges like low self-esteem, illiteracy, and opposition from male family members.[46] Furthermore, successful grassroots experience has provided women with a "chance to form a coherent voice, to be heard, and to make a difference in their communities",[47] a powerful motivator for continued involvement.

- **Institutional Mechanisms: Mentoring, Training, and Awareness**

Several institutional mechanisms can significantly contribute to sustaining women's political participation. Mentoring programs can provide crucial guidance and support to newly elected women representatives, helping them navigate the complexities of local politics and build confidence.[48] These programs can connect experienced women leaders with those newly elected, fostering knowledge transfer and creating a supportive network. Leadership training is equally vital, equipping women with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively participate in decision-making processes.[49] The training should cover governance aspects like financial management, policy formulation, and conflict resolution. Awareness campaigns should educate women about their rights, empowering them to participate in local governance and demand accountability. Success depends on collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The role of women's self-help groups (SHGs) also deserves attention. Studies have shown a strong correlation between SHG membership and increased political participation among women.[50] SHGs facilitate collective action, social mobilization, and skill development for political engagement. However, external support mechanisms like training, information access, and networking assistance are crucial for enhancing women's political involvement.

Policy Reforms: Extended Reservations, Financial Assistance, and Capacity Building

Policy reforms are essential to ensure the long-term empowerment of women in local governance. Extending reservation quotas beyond the initial period could provide a continued platform for women's political participation.[51] This extension, however, must be coupled with other measures to ensure effective participation, not just representation. Financial assistance is equally important, addressing the socio-economic barriers that many women face.[52] This assistance could include providing funds for campaign expenses, training, and other resources needed for effective political participation. Capacity-building measures, such as leadership training and mentoring

programs, are vital to any effective policy reform.[53] These measures should be designed to address the specific challenges women face in political settings, such as navigating patriarchal structures and engaging with male-dominated political systems. Moreover, policy reforms must actively address societal attitudes and systems perpetuating inequality and provide the legal basis for representation.[54] The inclusion of women's component plans in PRI budgets and linkages with self-help groups at all levels of PRIs[55] are crucial steps in this direction. Encouraging political parties to put up women candidates and ensuring women have the opportunity to serve a full term[56] are also vital policy considerations.

The impact of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) should also be considered. While primarily an employment scheme, MGNREGS can indirectly enhance women's political involvement by providing economic empowerment and resource access. Furthermore, the scheme's potential for increased female labour force participation[57] can indirectly empower women and enhance their confidence to participate in political processes.[58] However, studies indicate that the effectiveness of MGNREGS and similar schemes in improving governance and women's welfare is contingent upon various factors, including awareness among intended recipients and the existence of effective implementation mechanisms.[59]

- **Community and Family Support Systems**

Community and family support are crucial for women's political involvement, as they help challenge traditional gender roles and societal norms. Engaging men in gender projects and fostering a more inclusive environment is essential. The success of women's leadership in local governance often depends on the level of community support they receive.[60] Programs aimed at increasing community awareness and understanding of women's roles in governance can play a significant role in fostering this support. This support can manifest in various ways, from helping women with childcare responsibilities to providing them with access to information and resources.

Role of Policies and Institutional Support

Despite the positive impact of reservations, several institutional constraints hinder women's empowerment. The inclusion of ex-officio members, the rotational system of reservations, and bureaucratic dominance can undermine women's authority in decision-making.[61] Addressing these requires clearer rules and provisions regarding women's participation, alongside capacity-building measures and financial support. Furthermore, the study by Lawrence and Hensly,[62]

highlights the limitations of gender quotas in regions with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. This underscores the need for integrated approaches combining quotas with initiatives that change perceptions and cultural attitudes towards women's roles. The detailed insights into this has been given in the subsequent paragraphs.

- **Existing Government Schemes and Their Effectiveness**

Though, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1992 is a landmark legislation aimed to enhance women's political participation and influence in decision-making processes at the grassroots level, the effectiveness of this policy, and subsequent government schemes, has been a subject of ongoing debate. While the quotas significantly increased the number of women in political positions, they did not automatically translate into empowerment or substantive participation in decision-making. As discussed previously, women representatives often faced challenges such as limited autonomy, dependence on male relatives, and sometimes lack of awareness about their roles and responsibilities.[63] The realization tempered the initial enthusiasm surrounding the 73rd Amendment that simply reserving seats was insufficient to overcome deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and power structures.

Government schemes designed to enhance women's participation, such as the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Yojana (RGSY), Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan (PMEYSA), and Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (RGPSA)[64], aimed to address these capacity gaps through training and capacity-building initiatives.[65] However, the effectiveness of these programs has been variable, hampered by factors such as inadequate implementation, lack of awareness among women, and insufficient resources.[66] Furthermore, the success of such schemes often depended on contextual factors and the level of local support. The case study of Smt. Mamta Devi[67] illustrates the positive impact of government schemes when effectively complemented by grassroots initiatives and NGO support.

- **NGO and Civil Society Contributions to Training, Mentoring, and Advocacy**

NGOs and civil society organizations have played a crucial, often complementary, role in empowering women leaders in PRIs. They have provided crucial training and capacity-building programs, equipping women with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the political landscape and assert their agency.[68] This training often focused on leadership skills, financial management, and understanding of government schemes. The training initiatives, often funded by state

actors or donors, extended beyond individual women representatives, facilitating networks at the taluka, district, and even state levels, opening up new political spaces.[69]

NGOs also played a critical role in mentoring and advocacy. They helped women overcome societal challenges and gain confidence in their roles by providing ongoing support and guidance.[70] They acted as intermediaries, bridging the gap between women representatives and higher levels of government, advocating for policy changes and ensuring that women's voices were heard. The experiences of NGOs like CORD[71] and KSSP[72] highlight the vital contribution of civil society organizations in empowering women in local governance.

The case study of women in Orissa's Panchayats illustrated how quotas created opportunities for women's leadership, but the support of social networks and familial support significantly influenced the effectiveness of this.[73] This highlights a crucial need for community-based training and advocacy programs to empower women further. Moreover, the study on women in Panchayats in Kerala further emphasizes the limitations of solely relying on quotas for empowerment. The women representatives, although present in political positions, faced patriarchal domination and party control, demonstrating that presence does not automatically guarantee empowerment.[74]

- **Ways to address the Lacuna in Institutional Support Systems**

Despite the progress made in increasing women's representation and the contributions of NGOs, significant gaps in institutional support remain a persistent challenge. These gaps hinder the effectiveness of women's leadership and limit their ability to perform their roles effectively. Many women representatives lack access to information, resources, and ongoing mentorship,[75] which undermines their authority and effectiveness.

A major concern is the lack of adequate training and continuous support after elections.[76] Many women lack the necessary skills and knowledge to manage their responsibilities effectively, negotiate with local elites, and advocate for their constituents' needs.[77] Furthermore, the rotation of reserved seats[78] has been a barrier to re-election and sustained political empowerment, discouraging many women from contesting again.

To address gender inequalities, a multi-pronged approach involving government and NGOs is needed. The government should provide resources, training programs, and mentorship opportunities for women leaders, while NGOs can offer tailored training and advocacy support. Addressing socio-cultural factors, promoting

women's education, economic independence, and challenging discriminatory practices is also crucial. A comprehensive strategy combining government initiatives with NGOs' localized support is needed. The extension of reserved seats for women could also help overcome seat rotation barriers and build capacity.

The research consistently highlights the need for a holistic approach that goes beyond simply reserving seats. The success of women's leadership in PRIs depends on a combination of factors, including strong institutional support, effective training and mentoring programs, a supportive social environment, and a commitment to challenging deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and practices.[79] The findings from Orissa[80] illustrate the complexities of achieving real empowerment, demonstrating that mere representation does not automatically guarantee political efficacy. The narratives of elected women representatives frequently depict struggles with power dynamics, lack of institutional support, and gender biases.

The studies on the impact of gender quotas further highlight the complexities of achieving sustainable change. While quotas can increase women's initial access to leadership positions, they do not automatically lead to improved retention or genuine empowerment.[81] The success of women's leadership in PRIs requires a long-term commitment to addressing systemic barriers and institutional support. Challenges faced by women in exercising power and influencing local policies necessitate a comprehensive strategy integrating government initiatives, NGO support, and societal norms.[82] The lack of transformation in rural power structures, despite increased women's participation, necessitates a concerted effort to address systemic barriers and ensure women have the agency to exert their leadership truly.

Finally, the study on the impact of caste and patriarchy on women's leadership in Karnataka[83] highlights the need for reforms that go beyond mere reservation to include comprehensive training and empowerment initiatives. The study reveals that women from lower castes are more active and effective leaders, highlighting the intersectionality of caste and gender in shaping women's political participation. It emphasizes the need for a multi-faceted approach to women's empowerment.[84] The significant gaps in training and support for women panchayat leaders, especially those from less privileged backgrounds, must be addressed to enhance their effectiveness in governance and decision-making.

Different Experiences from States: A Comparative Analysis

India's diverse languages, cultures, geography, and socio-economic

conditions present unique challenges across its regions and states. The central government holds significant power as a semi-federal political system, but states also have administrative autonomy to address specific issues. This diversity affects women's participation in local governance, with some states making significant progress but others struggling due to socio-cultural, economic, and political barriers. Comparative analysis is needed to understand why some states excel and adapt best practices to regions with lower participation rates, addressing the unevenness in women's empowerment across India.

- **Progressive States Leading the Ways**

Through PRI elections, several states have witnessed significant progress in women's political empowerment. Kerala, for instance, stands out as a progressive state with a high level of female political participation.[85] The introduction of a 33 percent reservation for women in local governance led to increased participation, although women still faced challenges from the patriarchal structure of political parties, limiting their ability to influence decisions. Even with these challenges, women demonstrated greater sensitivity to constituents' needs and punctuality in their roles.[86]However, they often did not receive the same recognition or support from political parties and bureaucracies as their male counterparts.

Similarly, Karnataka's pioneering introduction of reservation for women in panchayats resulted in greater participation of women and marginalized groups in local governance.[87] Studies show that women from lower castes tended to be more democratic and community-oriented, effectively addressing community issues.[88] However, this success was not uniform. Women from affluent sections often remained passive and family-centered, subject to patriarchal norms, and controlled by male family members.[89] This highlights that socio-economic position does not automatically translate to political empowerment.

Himachal Pradesh and Bihar also exemplify states where increased women's representation has led to positive outcomes. Bihar notably increased its quota for women in Panchayats to at least 50%, becoming a leader in promoting gender equality in local governance.[90] In Himachal Pradesh, despite the 50% reservation across all three tiers of PRIs, empowering women to actively and independently participate remains a challenge due to prevalent gender biases.[91] The case study of Smt. Mamta Devi in Himachal Pradesh illustrates the empowerment of women through Panchayat elections but also underscores the ongoing challenges of proxy politics, gender-based discrimination, and male family members controlling women representatives. Mamta

Devi's leadership, however, exemplifies the positive impact women can have when given the opportunity.[92]

Tamil Nadu and Karnataka also showcase success stories. In these states, women's participation in PRIs has led to improvements in local governance, addressing practical gender needs such as water supply and education.[93] These improvements demonstrate the tangible benefits of increased female representation in decision-making processes. However, even in these progressive states, institutional barriers, such as inadequate devolution of powers and bureaucratic control, limit women's ability to effect change.[94]

Furthermore, in West Bengal, the reservation of one-third of councillor positions for women, alongside proportional representation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), led to a significant increase in women's representation in Panchayat councils.[95] However, the advancement of women to leadership positions, such as Pradhan, which holds effective power, remained limited. This highlights the gap between numerical representation and actual power. Research also shows that women leaders prioritize public goods relevant to women, such as drinking water and roads, reflecting their unique needs and preferences.[96]

- **Difficulties in the Underperforming States**

While some states have experienced relative success, others continue to grapple with significant challenges in women's political empowerment. Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, for example, are cited as states where patriarchal dominance, lack of autonomy, and instances of male relatives acting as proxies undermine women's leadership roles.[97] In these regions, social constraints like illiteracy and caste discrimination significantly hinder women's effective participation.[98] The selection of women candidates for elections is often based on arbitrary reasons, with proxy candidates for husbands or male relatives frequently chosen.[99] This highlights the persistence of traditional power structures and the limitations of reservation alone in achieving genuine empowerment.

In more patriarchal states, women hesitate to participate individually, even though their desire to have their voices heard is strong. The "who will make the chapatis?" and "who will look after the children?" arguments illustrate the domestic pressures that limit women's political engagement.[100] The perception of a woman's independent initiative to contest elections as more threatening than a man's initiative on behalf of a female relative reinforces the existing power dynamics.[101] This surrogate representation, where husbands or male relatives act as proxies, undermines the spirit of the reservation

policy.

The challenges extend beyond mere representation. Women elected to panchayats often encounter institutional barriers, such as inadequate devolution of powers and bureaucratic control, which hinder their ability to effect change. They also face discrimination and exclusion, with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes representatives frequently victimized regardless of gender. In some cases, women are effectively disempowered, reduced to simply putting their thumb impression on documents without any real decision-making power.[102]

Furthermore, the rotation of reserved seats, a common practice in many states, poses a significant challenge to women's long-term empowerment.[103] The withdrawal of reserved seats frequently leads to many women representatives not being re-elected, with many dissuaded from contesting again due to de-reservation.[104] This rotation system hinders the consolidation of leadership skills and experience among women, perpetuating the cycle of limited participation. The loss of political visibility and experience after de-reservation can be a major setback, as women are unlikely to be re-nominated.[105] This continuous cycle of losing and regaining seats hampers the growth of women in politics.

In Orissa, despite the 33% reservation for women in Panchayat Raj Institutions, challenges such as societal pressures, harassment, and violence persist. The cases of Dalimba Sahu, who was kidnapped for refusing to yield to pressure, and Anjana Dehury, who her husband murdered for contesting elections, highlight the dangers faced by women in rural politics.[106] These instances underscore the deeply entrenched patriarchal structures that continue to threaten women's political participation. Even with increased numbers, many women in leadership roles serve as proxies for male relatives,[107] meaning the mere presence of women does not guarantee empowerment or real decision-making power.

Women's reservation in Panchayat elections has significantly increased their presence in local politics. However, progress varies across states and regions, with some facing challenges due to patriarchal norms, institutional barriers, and de-reservation. A multi-faceted approach is needed to achieve true empowerment, including sustained training, support, institutional reforms, and social mobilization. Further research should focus on the long-term impact of reservation models, the effectiveness of empowerment initiatives, and contextual factors influencing women's political participation and success.

Conclusion

The reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has increased women's representation in local governance, but the gains are fragile due to persistent patriarchal norms, societal barriers, and challenges following de-reservation. Women leaders often face a lack of sustained political support, limited resources, and systemic tokenism, hindering their ability to participate in decision-making. Institutional issues like seat rotation further undermine their leadership. To address these challenges, it is crucial to extend the duration of reservations, implement capacity-building initiatives, finance campaigns and development projects, collaborate with NGOs for mentorship and advocacy, and encourage political parties to support female candidates. By implementing these measures, India can move closer to achieving genuine gender equality and fostering inclusive governance at the grassroots level.

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The Rise of Islamophobia in the Western World

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ABSTRACT

Islamophobia in Western societies is largely due to negative media portrayals, extremist actions, and right-wing populism. This leads to prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion of Muslim communities, exacerbated by social divides. To combat this, anti-Islamophobia education, interfaith dialogues, accurate media representations, and comprehensive government policies are needed. Collaborating with Muslim communities and promoting empathy can help build a harmonious future based on respect, unity, and peaceful coexistence among diverse communities.

Keywords: *Islamophobia, media narratives, right-wing populism, interfaith dialogue, historical legacies*

Introduction

ISLAMOPHOBIA, MARKED BY prejudice and hostility toward Islam and its followers, poses a major global challenge. While not a new phenomenon, the recent rise in Islamophobia stems from a complex mix of historical legacies, socio-political dynamics, and media narratives that have reinforced negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims. In the past, Orientalist frameworks portrayed the East—including regions with a majority of Muslims—as exotic, backward, and a threat to the West, depicting Muslims as different. From colonial times into the post-9/11 era, this pattern persisted, closely linking the global emphasis on combating terrorism with Muslim identities. This has led to systemic biases in policies, public discourse, and institutional practices that treat Muslims with suspicion, undermining their

integration and equal treatment in society.

Socio-political factors, such as the rise of right-wing populism and extremist acts carried out by some claiming affiliation with Islam, have amplified Islamophobia in recent years. Politicians and public figures have exploited fears surrounding security and cultural identity to promote divisive narratives, often scapegoating Muslims as threats to national values or safety. Media stories usually worsen these problems by mainly highlighting negative portrayals of Muslims, presenting them as a single entity, and sometimes confusing the actions of a small radical group with the beliefs of the larger community. This biased representation fuels public fear, legitimises discriminatory practices, and perpetuates cycles of exclusion and prejudice. Understanding these intertwined historical, socio-political, and media dynamics is crucial in dismantling Islamophobia and fostering a more inclusive society.

A crucial tool for examining the causes of Islamophobia is the theory of Orientalism, which Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said introduced in his significant work "Orientalism." This theory delves into how Western societies have historically represented the "Orient"—encompassing regions like Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa—as exotic, mysterious, and fundamentally inferior to the West[1]. These portrayals have their roots in colonial-era ideologies that sought to dominate and subjugate non-Western cultures. Said's critique underscores the centuries-long construction and sustenance of entrenched stereotypes of Muslims as "backward" or "dangerous," which have shaped not only cultural perceptions but also political power dynamics.

The colonial stories explained by Said have significant effects today as they still influence how Western societies see Islam and Muslims. Present-day Islamophobia reflects these enduring beliefs by depicting Muslims as outsiders who do not conform to Western values. By examining these stories, Orientalism Theory encourages us to address the lasting effects of colonialism, cultural appropriation, and global inequalities. It underscores the importance of challenging stereotypes through accurate, nuanced depictions of Islamic history and culture. Educational efforts that deconstruct these myths and promote interfaith dialogue can foster empathy, break down simplistic binaries, and enable a more inclusive understanding of Muslims as complex and diverse individuals, fostering tolerance and mutual respect.[2]

The ideas from the Orientalism Theory go beyond analysing history; they also influence how people today view Islam and interact across cultures. They open up vital discussions across disciplines such as postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and anthropology,

encouraging societies to reflect critically on how identity and representation shape intercultural relations. Recognizing the historical roots of Islamophobia helps us understand why current depictions of Muslims evoke fear and bias, emphasizing the importance of historical awareness in combating prejudice. This awareness is crucial for creating policies, media portrayals, and educational efforts that combat Islamophobia and promote accurate recognition of the diversity and contributions of Islamic cultures.

As a result of these persistent biases, Muslims in Western nations face unjust treatment and a lack of friendliness in their daily lives. There has been a significant rise in hate crimes targeting Muslims, such as assaults on mosques and individuals suffering verbal and physical abuse because of Islamophobia. This stigma undermines the principles of tolerance and diversity that many Western societies claim to uphold. Effectively combating Islamophobia requires leveraging historical, cultural, and sociopolitical factors to challenge stereotypes, improve understanding, and create a fairer and more inclusive society. To combat Islamophobia, governments, civil society groups, and individuals need to come together to encourage dialogue, present accurate portrayals, and foster cross-cultural understanding, creating a society that values and honors diverse identities.[3]

Historical Underpinnings

Islamophobia originated in medieval Europe, where misunderstandings and biases against Islam grew in Christian societies due to historical interactions and perceptions. From the Crusades through to colonial encounters with Muslim-majority regions, distorted portrayals of Islam shaped collective attitudes that persist today.[4] These old biases formed the basis for long-standing prejudices, which resurfaced and evolved in contemporary times, leading to new discrimination and stereotypes. Edward Said's concept of Orientalism is crucial for understanding the historical origins of Islamophobia. Said argued that Orientalism represents a systematic way in which the West has historically constructed the East—including Islamic societies—as exotic, mysterious, inferior, and often threatening. This representation went beyond cultural depictions; it functioned as a tool to justify and perpetuate colonialism by portraying Eastern societies as inherently backward, stagnant, and in need of Western intervention or control. Orientalist thinking continues to influence modern Islamophobia, with the media frequently depicting Muslims as a homogenous group linked to violence and oppression. This framing, rooted in colonial narratives, positions Islamic culture as incompatible with Western values and fuels prejudice and exclusion.

Edward Said's critique of Orientalism reveals how these enduring narratives influence political rhetoric, public perceptions, and policies, reinforcing an "us vs. them" dichotomy that marginalises Muslim communities.[5] Recognizing the historical origins of Islamophobia is crucial for challenging biases and advocating for varied representations of Muslim cultures.

Educational initiatives that integrate the history of Orientalism into curricula can foster critical thinking and empower students to challenge stereotypes. Media institutions should also revamp the telling of Muslim stories by engaging cultural experts and delivering nuanced, historically grounded narratives. Community-driven storytelling projects can elevate Muslim voices, showcase their diverse experiences, humanise the community, and counteract misconceptions. Policies rooted in historical understanding can further dismantle systemic biases. Governments can review discriminatory practices in institutions, ensure religious freedoms, and promote equitable representation of Muslims in public life. By addressing structural dimensions of Islamophobia, societies can foster inclusive portrayals of Muslim cultures rooted in mutual respect.

Orientalism's legacy extends beyond cultural representation; it influences power dynamics by justifying Western dominance and marginalising Eastern customs. To combat this, responsible and inclusive reporting must challenge harmful narratives and highlight the diversity of Muslim lives.[6]

Studies show that strategic media content, such as Al Jazeera English documentaries and Turkish TV series, can effectively counter stereotypes and foster cultural understanding.[7] The media plays a crucial role in reshaping perceptions and combating detrimental stereotypes. Al Jazeera English, for example, has produced numerous documentaries highlighting the diversity and complexity of Muslim communities worldwide. Programs such as The People's Story and Al Jazeera World explore Muslim individuals' contributions to various fields, their struggles against discrimination, and their triumphs, thereby humanising their experiences and breaking down monolithic representations. Similarly, popular Turkish TV series like *Diriliþ: Ertuðrul* and *Kurulu°: Osman* challenge stereotypes by showcasing Islamic societies' rich cultural heritage, historical achievements, and moral principles.[8] These productions provide global audiences with a nuanced view of Islamic history and identity, portraying Muslims as multifaceted individuals with aspirations, values, and struggles that resonate universally.

Journalistic initiatives like the BBC's "My Muslim Life" and platforms such as "The Muslim Vibe" offer diverse perspectives and

reshape narratives. Inclusive reporting that contextualises and avoids generalisations ensures fairer portrayals, breaking the monolithic depictions often associated with Muslims. Collaborations with media watchdogs and training programs for journalists can further encourage unbiased reporting, fostering empathy and understanding.[9]

Addressing Islamophobia through the lens of Orientalism helps illuminate the deep-rooted biases that shape current perceptions and practices. Dismantling stereotypes and fostering an inclusive society based on respect and equity require comprehensive strategies that include education, media reform, and interfaith dialogue.

Political Climate

Right-wing populist movements and mainstream politicians' rhetoric have fuelled the political climate in many countries, amplifying Islamophobic sentiments. These actors exploit populist agendas by framing Islam as a significant security threat and depicting Muslims as dangerous to national identity and Western values. Fearmongering narratives, often spread through media channels and political speeches, infiltrate public discourse and policy, fuelling baseless suspicions and worsening the feelings of marginalisation and alienation experienced by Muslims.[10] The erosion of social cohesion not only diminishes the sense of belonging for Muslim individuals but also undermines their self-esteem and weakens their connection to their national identity.

Theories of Governmentality and State Security illuminate the governance of Muslim communities under the guise of national security. Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality sheds light on how states use surveillance and regulations to govern Muslim communities, impacting their rights and freedoms. In the context of Islamophobia, these mechanisms lead to heightened security measures that frequently criminalise, monitor, and stigmatise Muslim identities, perpetuating discrimination and marginalisation.

The complex interplay between Islamophobia and the rise of populism not only deepens societal divisions but also influences policy-making and shapes public narratives, posing significant challenges to social cohesion.[11] Right-wing populism often uses Islamophobia to rally support, presenting complex societal issues through a simplistic "us versus them" framework.

Policies restricting immigration from Muslim-majority countries; rhetoric depicting Islam as inherently incompatible with Western values; and conspiracy theories about Muslims posing significant threats to national identity all contribute to the normalisation of discrimination and hostility.[12]

Research has demonstrated that Islamophobia has a substantial impact on Muslim school-aged children, resulting in psychological distress, social isolation, and academic obstacles. To tackle these challenges, a comprehensive approach is needed, with political leaders implementing measures such as anti-discrimination laws, educational programs on cultural diversity, and active participation in interfaith dialogue to combat Islamophobia.

Causative Factors of Western Islamophobia

Islamophobia, marked by fear, hatred, or prejudice against Islam and its followers, is increasingly troubling in the Western world. It results in discrimination, violence, and marginalisation in Muslim communities. Factors including media bias, socio-political tensions, religious extremism, misinformation, and entrenched stereotypes influence Islamophobia.[13]

Several factors contribute to the rise of Islamophobia in the West. These include media bias perpetuating negative stereotypes, socio-political tensions heightening fear and mistrust, religious fundamentalism leading to violent acts, a lack of education fostering misconceptions, and misunderstandings about Islam perpetuating prejudice.

Media bias is one of the major causative factors of Islamophobia in the West. The media frequently perpetuates negative stereotypes by associating Muslims and Islam with terrorism and violence. This creates a distorted image of Islam and stirs up fear and resentment against Muslims. Negative stereotypes perpetuated by the media contribute to demonising Islam and its followers, leading to increased prejudice and discrimination.[14]

Socio-political tensions also play a significant role in fuelling Islamophobia in the West. Issues like immigration laws that encourage segregation, terrorist attacks that fuel fear, and national security measures that heighten suspicion have all contributed to the escalation of tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Politicians and policymakers have used Islamophobia as a tool to gain support and promote their agendas, further perpetuating negative attitudes toward Muslims. This scapegoating of Muslims contributes to the marginalisation and discrimination of Muslim communities in the West.[15]

Islamophobia in the West is a result of various factors, including religious fundamentalism, misinformation, lack of education, and misconceptions about Islam. Extremist groups that claim to represent Islam have committed acts of terrorism, leading to the perception that Islam is violent and intolerant. Misinformation and a lack of

education about Islam contribute to fear and prejudice against Muslims. Conflicts between cultural practices and religious teachings often result in a distorted perception of Islam. Discrimination in employment, housing, and public spaces due to religious beliefs reinforces negative attitudes. Political rhetoric and discriminatory policies further marginalise Muslims. Social media and online platforms also spread Islamophobia, promoting hate speech and anti-Muslim sentiments. The ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the rise of terrorist groups further fuel Islamophobia. To combat Islamophobia, concrete steps such as education, interfaith dialogue, and awareness-raising campaigns are crucial.

Media bias: shaping perceptions

Media bias plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of Muslims, often perpetuating Islamophobia through skewed narratives and selective reporting. Western media often portrays Muslims negatively, linking them primarily to terrorism, violence, or cultural incompatibility.[16] This repetitive framing creates a distorted, monolithic image of Islam, feeding fear and resentment within societies. Sensationalist reporting, particularly following extremist attacks, dominates headlines, while stories highlighting the diverse contributions of Muslim communities are marginalized or ignored, further cementing harmful stereotypes.

These biased portrayals not only misrepresent Islam but also have tangible consequences for Muslim individuals and communities. Muslims are frequently subjected to heightened scrutiny, social alienation, and even acts of violence, as media narratives fuel societal suspicion and prejudice. Such representations strip away the nuance and diversity within Muslim identities, reducing them to a single, negative archetype. This reinforces the misconception that Islam and Muslims cannot align with Western values, hindering integration and mutual understanding.

To counteract this harmful bias, media outlets must adopt more responsible reporting practices that prioritize accuracy, fairness, and diversity in representation. Highlighting stories of Muslim contributions to culture, science, and society can combat stereotypes and nurture empathy. Emphasizing stories of coexistence, resilience, and shared values can change perceptions and foster understanding. Promoting a fair depiction of Islam is vital for combating Islamophobia and enhancing societal harmony.

Sociopolitical tensions and populist agendas

Sociopolitical tensions around immigration, terrorism, and national

security have amplified Islamophobia in the West, with populist leaders exploiting these issues for political gain. By framing Muslims as threats to cultural integrity or economic stability, they cultivate fear and division among the public. Politicians often employ inflammatory rhetoric, painting Muslim communities as incompatible with national values or as a security risk, to rally support from anxious electorates. This narrative not only fuels prejudice but also legitimizes discriminatory practices, embedding Islamophobia into societal norms.

These strategies lead to policies such as travel bans on Muslim-majority nations and anti-immigration laws, reinforcing institutional Islamophobia and worsening the marginalization of Muslim communities.[17]

Such measures institutionalize Islamophobia, reinforcing the idea that Muslims are outsiders or enemies within. Beyond creating immediate barriers to inclusion, these policies deepen the marginalization of Muslim communities, fostering feelings of alienation and distrust. This cycle of exclusion exacerbates social divisions, making it harder to build cohesive, multicultural societies.

Ending this cycle necessitates strong leadership and inclusive policymaking that confronts, rather than perpetuates, populist narratives. Governments must prioritize policies that promote equality and social integration, ensuring that national security measures do not unfairly target any group. Moreover, promoting public discussions that highlight shared values and common objectives can counteract the divisive rhetoric of populism. By tackling issues like economic inequality or fear of change, societies can shift from hostility to understanding, fostering solidarity and mutual respect.

Extremism and the Misrepresentation of Islam

Extremism has significantly contributed to distorting the image of Islam, with radical groups' actions often incorrectly generalised to reflect the beliefs of all Muslims. For example, groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda have perpetrated heinous acts in the name of Islam, which has resulted in widespread misconceptions linking the religion to violence and terrorism.[18] Media coverage worsens this misrepresentation by giving excessive attention to these fringe groups and overshadowing the majority of Muslims who denounce such behaviour. This distorted portrayal instills fear and prejudice, masking the true essence of Islam, which is rooted in peace, compassion, and community. It is crucial to counter these narratives through education, media reform, and interfaith dialogue to foster a more precise and balanced comprehension of Islam, ultimately diminishing Islamophobia and advocating for inclusion and understanding. Showcasing the

diverse voices in the Muslim community and their positive impacts can promote empathy and understanding. Islamophobia in the West arises from factors like religious fundamentalism, misinformation, lack of education, and misconceptions about Islam. Fear and prejudice against Muslims are fueled by misinformation and a lack of education about Islam. Cultural practices often conflict with religious teachings, causing a distorted view of Islam. Political rhetoric and discriminatory policies, such as right-wing leaders' voting propaganda, exacerbate the marginalisation of Muslims. Social media and online platforms contribute to the spread of Islamophobia by promoting hate speech and anti-Muslim sentiments. Islamophobia is exacerbated by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the presence of terrorist groups. In combating Islamophobia, taking concrete steps such as promoting education, engaging in interfaith dialogue, and conducting awareness-raising campaigns is essential for fostering unity among diverse faiths and cultures. This collaborative effort is vital in promoting a more harmonious and tolerant world.

Extremist groups falsely representing Islam have spread misconceptions by portraying the religion as inherently violent or intolerant.[19] This link between Islam and extremism overlooks the diversity within the Muslim world and contributes to the cultivation of fear and mistrust. Extremists frequently view these acts as representative of Islam, promoting an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility. It is vital to challenge these misconceptions by discerning between terrorist actions and the peaceful tenets of Islam embraced by the majority of Muslims globally.

Ignorance and Misinformation

Lack of education and widespread misinformation about Islam further perpetuate Islamophobia. Many people in the West have limited knowledge of Islam and rely on media-driven stereotypes and misconceptions.[20] This ignorance fuels fear and prejudice, making Muslims vulnerable to discrimination. Encouraging education, interfaith dialogue, and exposure to diverse Muslim perspectives can challenge misconceptions and promote mutual understanding and respect.

Individuals can challenge stereotypes and misconceptions by promoting education about Islam and engaging in interfaith dialogues. It is important to seek out diverse Muslim perspectives and learn about the rich cultural and religious traditions within Islam. By fostering mutual understanding and respect, we can work towards building a more inclusive and tolerant society for all individuals, regardless of their religious beliefs. Initiatives that promote education

and dialogue can help combat Islamophobia and create a more harmonious community where people of all faiths can coexist peacefully.

Cultural misconceptions and stereotypes

Cultural misconceptions and stereotypes deeply permeate society, driving misunderstanding, prejudice, and discrimination. These false narratives often stem from limited knowledge about Islam and are perpetuated by media, education, and societal influences. Challenging these misconceptions is essential to fostering cultural appreciation, empathy, and unity. Distinguishing between cultural traditions and Islam's core teachings is necessary to combat Islamophobia and promote a more nuanced understanding of the religion. This can help dispel misconceptions and foster greater respect and tolerance among diverse communities.[21]

One prevalent misconception is the assumption that all members of a culture or ethnicity exhibit identical behaviors, traits, or values. This oversimplification ignores the rich diversity within cultural groups and undermines the individuality of each person. In the context of Islam, cultural practices are often mistaken for religious teachings, leading to distorted perceptions. Misinterpretations of Islamic texts and traditions fuel false narratives, painting Islam and Muslims in a negative light. Recognizing the distinction between cultural customs and the core teachings of Islam is vital to promoting a nuanced and respectful understanding of the faith.

Stereotypes amplify cultural misconceptions by projecting exaggerated and inaccurate portrayals. For instance, labeling all Muslims as terrorists or characterizing all Arabs as regressive perpetuates discriminatory attitudes that can manifest in employment, housing, and social settings. These biases create barriers to equality and contribute to cycles of marginalization and exclusion.

The media plays a significant role in shaping and perpetuating such misconceptions. Television shows, films, and news outlets often portray certain cultures and religions negatively or overly simplistic. These portrayals influence public perception, fostering biases and deepening cultural divides. Media outlets must commit to accurate, nuanced, and diverse representations to challenge stereotypes and promote empathy across cultural boundaries. By showcasing a wide range of perspectives and experiences, media can help bridge the gap between different communities and foster understanding. Media outlets must take responsibility for their portrayals' impact on society and strive for more inclusive storytelling.[22]

Discrimination in Daily Life

Muslims in the West frequently encounter discrimination rooted in their religious beliefs, cultural practices, and appearance. This manifests in various forms, including unequal opportunities in employment, biased treatment in housing, and hostility in public spaces. Such systemic discrimination not only marginalizes individuals but also perpetuates Islamophobia by reinforcing negative stereotypes and fostering division. Addressing these issues requires proactive efforts to implement and enforce policies that safeguard the rights of all individuals, ensuring fair treatment regardless of religion or ethnicity.

Promoting inclusivity and combating Islamophobia begins with fostering a culture of understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. populations.[23]

Educational initiatives play a crucial role in challenging stereotypes and dispelling misconceptions, providing platforms for people to learn about the diversity and shared values within Muslim communities. Similarly, open dialogues within workplaces, schools, and communities can bridge gaps, creating opportunities for meaningful connections and fostering solidarity. By emphasizing shared humanity and valuing diversity, societies can dismantle prejudice and create environments where all individuals feel respected and empowered.

Political rhetoric and populism

Political rhetoric targeting Muslims significantly contributes to the rise of Islamophobia by legitimising fear and hostility. When political leaders engage in anti-Muslim rhetoric, they reinforce discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, often framing Muslims as threats to societal values or security. Policies such as the Muslim travel ban in the United States or bans on religious symbols in parts of Europe exemplify this marginalisation, institutionalising exclusionary practices under the guise of national interests.[24] To address these issues, leaders should use inclusive language, implement policies supporting religious freedom and social unity, and create a sense of belonging for marginalized groups.

Populist movements exploit societal divides to further their goals, creating a strong link between Islamophobia and populism. Right-wing populism, in particular, simplifies complex social and economic issues into an "us versus them" framework, often scapegoating Muslim communities for broader grievances such as financial instability, migration, or cultural changes.[25] This divisive language worsens social divisions and creates a conducive environment for discriminatory policies that erode democratic values and worsen social conflicts.[26]

Populist leaders frequently capitalise on Islamophobia to solidify their support base by amplifying fears and perpetuating stereotypes. Policies targeting immigration from Muslim-majority countries, conspiracy theories about threats to national identity, and rhetoric portraying Islam as incompatible with Western values exemplify this strategy.[27] These narratives normalise exclusionary practices, justify discriminatory actions, and contribute to a broader environment that tolerates Islamophobic attitudes and violence.[28] Consequently, the cycle of fear and resentment perpetuates, with populism thriving on the crises it fabricates.

To sever the connection between Islamophobia and populism, it is essential to tackle the underlying causes of exclusion and misinterpretation. Educational initiatives that dismantle stereotypes, inclusive policymaking fosters equity, and cross-cultural dialogue that builds mutual understanding are essential countermeasures.[29] Furthermore, by holding politicians responsible for divisive speech and advocating stories of unity and common identity, you can combat the emotional and ideological foundations of populist movements By confronting the structural and cultural dynamics that feed Islamophobia, societies can move toward greater inclusivity and cohesion.

Social Media and Online Hate

The emergence of social media has intensified the dissemination of hate speech, conspiracy theories, and false information aimed at Islam. These platforms facilitate the unchecked dissemination of Islamophobic content, normalising discriminatory attitudes and radicalising individuals.[30] The anonymity and global reach of social media create environments where hateful ideas can spread unchecked, reinforcing biases against Muslim communities.[31] Research emphasises the importance of controlling this content to reduce its negative impact on society and promote inclusivity.

Legal frameworks, community initiatives, and ethical media practices are critical tools that collectively address the challenges posed by online hate speech. Strengthening anti-hate speech legislation, as seen in several European countries, can hold individuals and media outlets accountable for incitement based on religion.[32] Similarly, regulatory frameworks for social media platforms can mandate algorithms to detect and remove hate speech while encouraging the promotion of diverse, positive narratives about Muslim communities.[33]

Effective collaboration with social media companies is essential to achieving these goals. Platforms can employ advanced artificial intelligence to identify and eliminate Islamophobic content while also

promoting stories that highlight the contributions of Muslim communities. Research demonstrates that content promoting inclusivity can challenge stereotypes and strengthen social unity.[34] Public .campaigns, documentaries, and cultural exchanges play a crucial role in dismantling damaging stereotypes and showcasing the diverse identities and achievements of Muslims worldwide.

Equally important is the role of ethical journalism in reshaping public narratives. Journalists can adopt reporting standards that emphasise accuracy, avoid sensationalism, and include authentic Muslim voices. For instance, presenting nuanced perspectives on Muslim communities can mitigate the effects of biased or inflammatory media coverage, fostering understanding and respect Through ethical storytelling, media professionals can have a profound impact by shaping public perceptions and diminishing the marginalisation of Muslims in society.

Addressing online hate speech requires a comprehensive strategy encompassing legal, technological, and cultural measures. Governments, media organisations, and civil society must work together to create an environment that upholds the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusivity. Only unified actions can reduce the harmful effects of online Islamophobia, fostering a more tolerant and fair digital environment.

Geopolitical Conflicts and Global Events

Geopolitical conflicts and world events, especially those in the Middle East, have had a significant impact on the rise of Islamophobia. The continuous conflicts and the rise of terrorist groups have strengthened negative stereotypes associating Islam with violence and extremism, leading to widespread suspicion of Muslims. However, it is important to highlight that Muslims are frequently the primary targets of terrorism, as data shows they bear a disproportionate burden of such violence. This discrepancy underscores that the actions of a small minority do not reflect the beliefs or behaviours of the entire Muslim community.[35] Both media bias and sociopolitical tensions fuel these misunderstandings, perpetuating false information about Islam and its followers.

The media, especially after 9/11, significantly influences public perception by often linking Muslims to violence and extremism. The portrayal of Islam and Muslims as monolithic and inherently violent by Western media worsens the narrative that fuels widespread Islamophobia. Religious extremism and misinformation worsen the situation, making it challenging for the general public to differentiate between the peaceful majority of Muslims and a small, radicalised

group. Therefore, tackling Islamophobia requires concerted efforts across various sectors. Educational initiatives, media campaigns combating stereotypes, and promoting interfaith dialogue are key in mitigating these deeply ingrained biases. Community-based initiatives like cultural exchange programs and intercultural workshops play a vital role in fostering mutual respect and understanding, and enhancing social inclusivity.[36] Addressing Islamophobia helps build stronger, more united communities that embrace and value diversity.

Additionally, political participation and governance play a critical role in fighting Islamophobia. Governments should collaborate with communities and organizations to develop policies that combat discrimination, uphold equality, and safeguard religious freedoms. These initiatives are foundational in creating a society that not only tolerates but actively embraces diversity. Eliminating the systemic factors that fuel Islamophobia promotes mutual respect and social cohesion, creating a future where individuals of all faiths feel welcomed and valued.[37]

In essence, combating Islamophobia demands a holistic approach encompassing education, media literacy, and government involvement. Communities can transcend biases that impede integration and mutual understanding by confronting negative narratives and embracing inclusive approaches. Through unified endeavors, we can cultivate an environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds can coexist peacefully and harmoniously.

Socio-Cultural Dynamic

Deeply rooted in socio-cultural dynamics, Islamophobia often stems from a perception of Muslims as "racialised others" and a threat to dominant cultural norms.[38] Human tendencies to divide social groups into groups they identify with ("us") and those they see as different ("them") often lead to the exclusion of Muslims, framing them as incompatible with Western values. Media portrayals, political rhetoric, and historical narratives that homogenise Muslims and associate them with violence or extremism exacerbate this process. Oversimplified and negative portrayals of Muslims, such as equating Islam with violence or portraying all Muslims as extremists, have historically caused widespread fear and reinforced harmful stereotypes. For instance, following high-profile terrorist attacks, media narratives frequently spotlight the religious identities of Muslim perpetrators, reinforcing the inaccurate link between Islam and violence. This has led to widespread fear and suspicion, resulting in discriminatory policies like travel bans targeting Muslim-majority countries and increased monitoring and scrutiny of Muslim communities. Television

shows and films, such as '24' and 'Homeland,' that consistently portray Muslims as terrorists or oppressors further reinforce these stereotypes, intensifying public bias.[39] Such portrayals strip individuals of their humanity, justify exclusionary practices, and contribute to cycles of fear and hostility. The impact is profound; it stigmatises entire communities and fosters social isolation, making meaningful integration and mutual respect more challenging.

People often view perceived cultural and religious differences, like Islamic practices and customs, as foreign or in opposition to mainstream values. This narrative overlooks the diverse nature of Muslim communities, reinforcing the misconception that Islam is a singular and inherently incompatible entity. Portraying Muslims as threats to social cohesion impedes authentic intercultural understanding and dialogue.

Political and economic factors often exacerbate the marginalization of Muslims, particularly during times of social or economic crises. In such periods, political leaders may resort to scapegoating vulnerable communities, including Muslims, as a strategy to consolidate in-group identity and deflect attention from systemic issues. This tactic diverts public scrutiny from structural challenges by targeting already marginalized groups, effectively creating a convenient "other" to blame for broader societal problems. Historically, such strategies have been employed to manipulate public opinion, exploit societal anxieties, and maintain political dominance, allowing leaders to avoid addressing the root causes of crises.

The scapegoating of Muslims frequently manifests through inflammatory political rhetoric, biased media portrayals, and discriminatory policies that disproportionately target these communities. These actions stoke fear and reinforce the misconception that Muslims are responsible for societal instability. Such strategies exploit social and psychological dynamics, creating a common enemy to unite people through shared fear or resentment [40] This manipulation not only fuels Islamophobia but also weakens social cohesion, fostering distrust and division. The long-term consequences include entrenched stereotypes, further marginalization of Muslim communities, and missed opportunities to address systemic issues. To counter these harmful effects, societies must prioritize inclusive policies, promote unity, and focus on tackling the actual causes of economic and social challenges.

Challenges for Muslim Integration

Muslim communities in Western societies encounter obstacles to integration because of entrenched discrimination, stereotypes, and

pervasive Islamophobia. These challenges manifest in limited access to employment, education, and housing opportunities, contributing to their social, economic, and political exclusion.[41] Portraying Muslims as a single group linked to extremism or cultural incompatibility worsens these challenges. Studies such as the *European Islamophobia Report* and research from the University of Alabama reveal that Western media disproportionately highlight acts of violence by Muslims while underreporting similar acts by non-Muslims, thereby fuelling mistrust and alienation.[42]

Media outlets have a substantial impact on perpetuating these stereotypes. Research from Media Tenor International indicates that over 80% of media coverage of Muslims in Western outlets is negative, often framing them within the contexts of terrorism, conflict, or cultural discord. This narrative entrenches societal biases, portraying Muslims as threats to national security and identity, which marginalises their voices and contributions.[43] These portrayals contribute to discriminatory practices such as biased hiring processes, limited representation of Islamic contributions in curricula, and exclusion from public discourse. These systemic barriers undermine efforts to foster social cohesion, allowing stereotypes to persist and deepen societal divisions.

Visible markers of Muslim identity, like the hijab, make individuals more susceptible to increased scrutiny, verbal harassment, and physical attacks. For instance, a 2017 Pew Research Centre study found that 69% of Muslim Americans reported experiencing some form of discrimination, from profiling at airports to unwarranted suspicion in public spaces.[44] Experiences of prominent figures such as Ilhan Omar, who have encountered Islamophobic rhetoric questioning their loyalty, emphasize the systemic nature of these challenges.[45] Personal accounts from Muslim youth reveal the psychological toll of suppressing their religious practices or cultural identities to avoid discrimination, resulting in anxiety, alienation, and a diminished sense of belonging.[46]

Comprehensive changes across various societal dimensions are necessary to overcome these integration barriers. Governments must implement and enforce inclusive policies that protect religious freedoms, eliminate discriminatory practices, and promote equal opportunities for Muslims. Media organizations must combat harmful stereotypes by highlighting diverse and positive depictions of Muslim communities. Educational systems should incorporate cultural sensitivity into curricula to foster understanding and respect for diversity. Additionally, interfaith and intercultural initiatives can bridge understanding gaps, dismantle misconceptions, and encourage inclusivity.

By tackling the structural and social origins of Islamophobia, societies can empower Muslims to engage fully and fairly, thereby fostering a cohesive, inclusive, and harmonious community. Such efforts are crucial for building a future where diversity is celebrated and mutual respect is a cornerstone of multicultural coexistence.

Confronting Discrimination and Prejudice Against Muslims

Negative portrayals of Muslims often reduce them to a monolithic group linked to violence, extremism, or cultural incompatibility, ignoring their diversity and complexity. Media narratives that focus disproportionately on conflict and terrorism have been instrumental in perpetuating these harmful stereotypes.[47] Such portrayals reinforce fear and suspicion, shaping public perceptions that fuel prejudice and justify discriminatory practices. This bias is particularly damaging for Muslims who visibly express their faith through attire or rituals, as they frequently become targets of heightened surveillance, harassment, and even hate crimes.

The resulting social stigma fosters an environment of mistrust and exclusion, deeply affecting the daily lives of Muslim individuals. Marginalization limits opportunities for meaningful participation in society and reinforces cycles of alienation. Instead of addressing the diversity and contributions of Muslim communities, these negative portrayals sustain harmful narratives that erode social cohesion. To counteract these stereotypes, it is crucial to promote accurate and nuanced representations of Muslims, emphasizing their diverse identities and positive contributions to society. The goal is to create a more inclusive society where all people, regardless of their faith, can live without fear of discrimination or hostility. Efforts may include education, community engagement, policy changes, and legal actions to protect individuals from hate crimes and bias.

Islamophobia goes beyond personal biases, leading to systemic discrimination in education, employment, and political involvement. For instance, discrimination in hiring practices against Muslims, particularly those of Arab descent, is a widely acknowledged problem. Bartkoski et al. found significant biases in the hiring process, unfairly scrutinising or excluding Muslim applicants, particularly those of Arab descent.[48] Similarly, in educational settings, peers and educators often subject Muslim students to prejudice, undermining their academic success and sense of belonging. Political portrayals of Muslims as outsiders or challenges to national identity often limit their opportunities for civic engagement and exacerbate their marginalization. A report by the American Broadcasting Organisation revealed that a significant percentage of Muslims face barriers to

leadership positions due to systemic exclusion.[49]

These discriminatory practices significantly hinder Muslims' full participation in society.

Structural exclusion and negative depictions worsen inequality, impeding Muslims from advancing socially and limiting their societal contributions. The marginalization of Muslims is influenced not only by individual bias but also by the policies, practices, and cultural narratives that shape their everyday lives.[50] Overcoming these challenges necessitates actively challenging stereotypes, fostering inclusivity, and establishing avenues for the flourishing of Muslim individuals. Policy reforms, education, and ongoing advocacy can achieve this by dismantling the systemic barriers that hinder Muslim participation in all aspects of society.

Stereotypes and prejudices create social barriers by dehumanizing Muslims, which undermines social unity. Islamophobia, a deep-rooted issue, affects Muslims, causing anxiety, depression, and isolation. Addressing Islamophobia is crucial for promoting global harmony and combating extremism effectively. Community-based initiatives in Canada and the UK have built social trust, contributing to reducing radicalization risks. Society should challenge harmful narratives through media education. It should also encourage interfaith conversations and enforce inclusive policies.

Embracing diversity in Muslim education.

Reducing Islamophobia requires a comprehensive effort to change how people view Muslims and break down long-held stereotypes that label them as different. To tackle the underlying reasons for fear and prejudice, it is essential to focus on education, community engagement, and promoting intercultural dialogue. One significant cause of Islamophobia is the continuation of misunderstandings and limited representations of Muslim identities, influenced by historical colonial narratives and biased media portrayals. These portrayals fuel negative perceptions of Muslims as violent or backward, perpetuating harmful stereotypes that portray them as threats. Changing these perceptions requires telling stories highlighting Muslim communities' diverse contributions to society, thereby offering a more accurate and positive representation.

Including accurate information about Islamic history, culture, and the achievements of Muslim scholars in school curricula can challenge the historical stories that have often shown Muslims as exotic and violent. For example, showing the accomplishments of Muslim thinkers in fields such as mathematics, medicine, philosophy, and art demonstrates their significant impact on global progress and cultural

development.[51] These historical perspectives help debunk myths about a single and hostile Muslim identity, demonstrating that Muslims have played a vital role in our shared human history. Providing students with a comprehensive understanding of Islamic cultures that include various ethnicities, languages, and interpretations of faith helps them develop empathy and break down biases. This understanding can create a more inclusive environment where students see differences as opportunities to learn from one another rather than as sources of division.

Educational institutions are crucial in fostering understanding through dialogue and providing environments where students from various backgrounds can exchange experiences and form connections founded on mutual respect. Schools should promote critical thinking and challenge ethnocentric perspectives, fostering an environment where individuals feel safe to ask questions, engage openly, and learn from one another. Broader societal initiatives should complement these educational efforts by challenging stereotypes in the media and offering more balanced and unbiased representations of Muslims. Non-profit organisations play a significant role in organizing events, workshops, and campaigns to promote intercultural exchange, with government policies necessary to support these initiatives. Through promoting inclusivity and fighting discrimination through legislation and action, governments can establish a society where Muslims are appreciated, respected, and empowered to engage actively in civic affairs. In doing so, societies can cultivate communities built on empathy, understanding, and shared humanity.

Interfaith and Intercommunity Dialogue

Interfaith and intercommunity dialogues play a crucial role in combating Islamophobia. They help people understand each other, dispel stereotypes, and connect individuals from different backgrounds. These conversations enable individuals from various faiths and communities to engage openly and respectfully, dismantling the barriers of fear and suspicion that fuel prejudice. When individuals see each other as fellow human beings rather than part of a different group, mutual respect and understanding grow. These dialogues nurture empathy by recognising common values, like moral principles and shared aspirations, fostering an atmosphere of inclusivity and collaboration.[52]

One key strength of interfaith dialogue is its power to correct misunderstandings about Islam and Muslim communities. In these conversations, Muslims can share their personal stories and beliefs, providing a genuine view that challenges simplified media portrayals

depicting them only as extremists.[53] Engaging directly challenges harmful stereotypes and enhances understanding of the Muslim community, showcasing its complexity and diversity. Listening to Muslims directly enables participants to see beyond limited views focused on violence or cultural differences, fostering informed and empathetic perspectives that diminish bias and fear. Amplifying Muslim voices is crucial in dispelling persistent stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive society. Accurate representation in media, education, and public discourse plays a key role in challenging misconceptions and humanizing Muslim communities. By showcasing their diverse contributions to fields like science, art, and social justice, society can counter the reductive notion that Muslims are defined solely by their religion. Including these voices in broader societal narratives not only combats harmful stereotypes but also fosters a nuanced and accurate understanding of Islamic cultures. This shift in perception is essential for breaking down barriers of distrust and fear, paving the way for solidarity and mutual respect.[54] Promoting interfaith dialogue and ensuring the authentic representation of Muslim perspectives are foundational strategies for combating Islamophobia, reducing prejudice, and building a more harmonious and understanding society.

Strategies to Counter Islamophobia

Government policies and legislation against Islamophobia are crucial in addressing the pervasive issue of discrimination and prejudice against Islam and Muslims. These policies play a crucial role in protecting the rights and well-being of Muslim individuals and communities, guaranteeing their fair and prejudice-free treatment. Educational programmes that promote cultural understanding and knowledge of religions and debunk stereotypes in the media are essential for dispelling misconceptions and promoting acceptance. Collaboration between governments and Muslim communities has proven to be an effective strategy in addressing Islamophobia, leading to the fostering of social cohesion. For example, in the United Kingdom, the government collaborated with Muslim organisations on initiatives such as the "Prevent" strategy, which aims to guide and protect vulnerable individuals from radicalization. Despite criticism, the program highlights the importance of collaborating with Muslim community leaders to address extremism-related issues and prevent unwarranted stigmatization of the broader Muslim population. In Canada, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women worked with government agencies on educational campaigns to address discrimination and enhance understanding of Islamic culture and practices. These collaborations have bridged gaps between Muslims

and the wider society, showing how proactive and inclusive engagement can promote greater harmony and reduce prejudice.

Programs that promote social justice and equity showcase successful collaborations between governments and Muslim communities. For example, in Norway, the government collaborates with Muslim organisations to implement initiatives aimed at addressing issues such as Islamophobia, discrimination, and integration. These partnerships have created cultural exchange programs, interfaith dialogues, and workshops on tolerance and acceptance, encouraging greater social integration and mutual respect. Involving Muslim communities in the development and implementation of policies allows governments to ensure that initiatives are both practical and culturally sensitive, addressing the genuine concerns of those affected by Islamophobia. Enhancing partnerships between communities is crucial to creating a future where all individuals can live harmoniously, free from discrimination based on their faith or background.

Recommendation and Policy Implication

Islamophobia is a significant global challenge, with an alarming rise in discriminatory acts targeting Muslims. Governments must enact laws against discrimination to address this issue by promoting understanding, tolerance, and inclusivity. The education sphere can achieve this by implementing effective legislation that specifically addresses and condemns acts of Islamophobia, thereby providing legal protection to Muslim individuals and communities. Governments should also establish dedicated task forces or agencies responsible for monitoring and addressing incidents of Islamophobia by allotting support to victims and conducting thorough investigations. Research should explore the social factors that contribute to the spread of Islamophobia, including stereotypes and misinformation. Additionally, studying the economic aspects can shed light on how Islamophobia affects employment opportunities and economic disparities within Muslim communities. Lastly, exploring the political factors will help identify policies and legislation that perpetuate Islamophobia and find ways to address them.

Supporting local community groups working to combat Islamophobia at the local level by providing funding and resources to help them implement educational programs and community outreach initiatives would also reduce hatred. To understand the underlying reasons for Islamophobia, local community groups are essential for promoting understanding, tolerance, and challenging stereotypes in their communities. Supporting these initiatives helps build a more inclusive society that celebrates diversity and opposes Islamophobia.

The government must encourage media responsibility by working closely with media outlets to encourage responsible reporting and representation of Islam and Muslims. Promote economic diversity by implementing policies that ensure equal employment opportunities, support entrepreneurship, and invest in education and skills training. Strengthen legislation by enacting and enforcing robust legislation that makes illegal Islamophobic hate crimes and discrimination. Promote interfaith dialogue and partnerships. Advocate for Muslim representation in diverse sectors. Combat hate speech and online radicalisation. Utilise media outreach. Strengthen support networks. Foster global collaborations. Consistently evaluate the impact of initiatives in combating Islamophobia.

Building a Future Free from Islamophobia

Islamophobia is a significant and widespread problem affecting societies worldwide. It is a form of prejudice and discrimination that targets individuals who practice Islam, often leading to hate crimes, harassment, and marginalisation. To eliminate Islamophobia in the future, it is essential to act through education, awareness, and advocacy. Promoting understanding and tolerance is essential. This helps dispel misconceptions and stereotypes that fuel Islamophobia, leading to a more inclusive society for people of all faiths.

Education plays a fundamental role in breaking down Islamophobia and nurturing acceptance and respect for diversity. Including lessons about Islam and Muslim beliefs in school curricula can help maintain a well-informed and empathetic generation. Additionally, providing training and resources to teachers, community leaders, and law enforcement agencies is crucial for addressing bias and discrimination. Increasing knowledge and awareness about Islam and Muslims allows us to combat misinformation and stereotypes that perpetuate Islamophobia.

Advocacy plays a crucial role in addressing Islamophobia by empowering individuals to speak out against discrimination and hate speech. Speaking out against discrimination and hate speech empowers individuals to help create a safer and more inclusive environment for Muslims. Engaging in conversations, attending rallies, and supporting organisations dedicated to combating Islamophobia are effective ways to promote inclusivity and understanding. Uniting our community and advocating for change actively enables us to build a future that values and respects everyone, irrespective of their religious beliefs.

Conclusion

To effectively combat Islamophobia, a multifaceted and sustained

approach must address its structural, institutional, and societal roots. These roots encompass biases, prejudices, and systemic discrimination. For instance, education systems can incorporate curricula that explore the diversity of Islamic cultures and histories. This approach challenges stereotypes by providing accurate and nuanced perspectives. For instance, Canada's implementation of programs like Islamophobia awareness weeks in schools has been successful in fostering empathy and understanding among students, leading to a reduction in discriminatory behaviors. Likewise, interfaith initiatives led by organizations such as the Interfaith Youth Core in the United States have facilitated dialogues between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, resulting in increased understanding, cooperation, and mutual respect.

Through platforms like social media, news outlets, and entertainment, media significantly influences public perceptions by framing narratives, shaping opinions, and influencing attitudes, underscoring the importance of accountability and diverse representation. For instance, Al Jazeera English's documentaries and Turkish dramas like *Ertuðrul* have successfully highlighted Muslim histories, values, and contributions, countering the one-dimensional portrayals often seen in Western media. Specific government policies, such as anti-discrimination laws, funding for community programs, and monitoring of hate crimes, play a vital role in addressing systemic issues by promoting inclusivity, protecting marginalized groups, and fostering social cohesion. In the UK, programs promoting community cohesion, such as the *Tell MAMA* initiative, work to monitor and combat hate crimes, providing support to victims and raising awareness about Islamophobia's harmful effects on society.

Effective collaboration among governments, media organizations, educational institutions, and civil society is essential for dismantling exclusionary practices. This collaboration involves sharing resources and expertise and creating cohesive and inclusive communities dedicated to halting Islamophobia. By adopting these concrete strategies, societies can challenge harmful narratives, empower marginalized communities, and pave the way for a future rooted in mutual respect and unity. A commitment to celebrating diversity not only counters the divisions caused by Islamophobia but also creates a foundation for more harmonious and equitable societies.

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A Living Tree of Religions: M.K. Gandhi's Interpretation

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ABSTRACT

M. K. Gandhi's views on religious unity are presented in the paper. He uses the tree metaphor to explain that all religions have one root. They all show different paths to one God, leading to salvation. At the same time, each religion is imperfect. Gandhi represents the ideal conceptual religion as the tree trunk and real religious systems as its branches. He compares individual religious ideas with tree leaves because each person has a unique vision of God. Such an approach to religious diversity may help us respect other cultures and offer another way of thinking and understanding the world.

Keywords: M. K. Gandhi, tolerance, religious universalism, spiritual kinship, dialogue of religions.

THE TREE IS a popular image in mythology, literature, and religious thought. Almost all cultures have their own archetype of the world tree (lat. *Arbor mundi*) or tree of life. This magic tree connects the universe in two perspectives: *spatial* and *temporal*. Firstly, the world tree depicts the unity of several aspects of being. In many cultures, its roots symbolize the underworld, the trunk means the earthly world, and its branches reach heaven. In some cultures, the world tree is represented in an inverted mood – its roots are in heaven, and the crown symbolizes the human world. This way, Indians represent the eternal sacred *Asvattha* tree.[1] Secondly, the tree combines three forms of time: *past* (roots), *present* (trunk) and *future* (branches). Moreover, a tree, as we usually see it in nature (without roots), illustrates motion from the integrity of the trunk to the plurality of branches and leaves. In other words, it is a metaphor for evolution from simplicity and

unity to complexity and diversity. All these make a tree an ideal symbol of unity in diversity, harmony, and agreement.

Unity in diversity is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's ideal of relationships between various religions, cultures, and countries. Also, unity is the central idea of his understanding of the universe. All beings are connected by one spiritual power, which is usually called God. The Indian thinker writes: "I believe in absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul."[2] His attention to spiritual unity brings him closer together with such thinkers as the Russian philosopher Vladimir S. Solovyov and American writers-transcendentalists, who believed that every individual soul is "identical with the world" and considered it as "a microcosm of the world itself."[3] In the East, the philosophers of Advaita Vedanta were the most famous apologists of spiritual unity. Gandhi often declared his sympathy for them or defined himself as Advaitist.[4] He confesses:

> I want to realize brotherhood or identity not merely with the beings called human, but I want to realize identity with all life, even with such things as crawl upon earth. I want, if I don't give a shock, to realize identity with even the crawling things upon earth, because we claim descent from the same God, and that being so, all life in whatever form it appears must be essentially one.[5]

Gandhi also uses the metaphor of the world tree to explain his understanding of the unity of the world. He says in his commentary on Bhagavad Gita XI: 10–13:

> The whole universe, despite its manifold divisions, is gathered there in Him (Like a tree and its leaves. The tree is like the cosmic form of the Lord, the root and the leaves being one. The root contains the whole world of the tree, and the leaves represent that world divided into many forms). Arjuna saw thus the [cosmic] form of the God of gods.[6]

In these shlokas of the original text, Arjuna sees Krishna's real image – he sees the whole universe in the body of the God of gods. This passage about the tree in brackets in the quotation above is absent in the Gita. The *ashvatth* tree is described in the Gita – in chapter XV: 1–4. Gandhi explains these shlokas in his "Discourses on the Gita": "The world is a holy gift made by God out of His grace; the tree of the world grows from the navel of Brahma. But there is another world with its root below, whose leaves are the various objects of sense-pleasure; that world is the world of desire."[7] Also, he comments on these shlokas in "Anasaktiyoga" (The Message of the "Gita"):

> *Shvah* means tomorrow, and *ashvattha* (*na shvopi sthata*) means that which will not last even until tomorrow, i.e., the world of sense which is every moment in a state of flux. But even though it is perpetually changing, as its root is Brahman or the Supreme, it is imperishable.[8]

Gandhi firmly believed that God is the one. Therefore, he considers all religions as different paths to the same goal. All main religions of the world are "based on common fundamentals. They have all produced great saints."[9] Also, Gandhi says:

> For, I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and 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 different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another.[10]

Does it mean that humanity does not need religious diversity? One day a 'great Muslim' asked Gandhi: "Let me be plain. I do not believe in Akbar's dream. He aimed at fusing all religions into one and producing a new faith. Do you have some such aim?" Gandhi answered: "I do not know what Akbar dreamt. I do not aim at any fusion. Each religion has its own contribution to make to human evolution. I regard the great faiths of the world as so many branches of a tree, each distinct from the other though having the same source."[11] In another abstract Gandhi explains: "In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion. But in practice, no two persons I have known have had the same and identical conception of God."[12] Different people generate different theories of God. Potentially, the number of concepts of God may be equal to the number of the human race. In Gandhi's words, "We may all have different definitions for 'God'. If we could all give our own definitions of God there would be as many definitions as there are men and women."[13] This diversity of ideas takes the form of different religions in different civilizations.

Usually, Gandhi uses two metaphors for religious unity: flowers in the same garden and branches of one tree. He says: "For me the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree."[14] The last variant is clearer and more exact than the former one. Moreover, in his texts, the image of a tree occurs more often than the comparison of religions with flowers.

It is important the way Gandhi understands real (not metaphoric) trees and nature as a whole. One evening, his disciple Mirabehn brought him the branch of a tree with folded leaves. He looked

pitifully and said: "Trees are living beings just like ourselves. They live and breathe, they feed and drink as we do, and like us they need sleep. It is a wretched thing to go and tear the leaves off a tree at night when it is resting!"[15] Nature is a grandiose example of God's creative power for him. Gandhi saw in nature harmony that had not been destroyed by human activity. He values nature more than the most famous pieces of art. Similarly, he estimates civilizations by whether they are far from this ideal natural life ('modern civilization') or close to it ('true civilization').

As it was mentioned above, God is the root of the world's tree for Gandhi. All of God's creations are inseparable from their Creator. God does not merely create the world. He embodies Himself in each of His creations. But there is a great difference between God's manifestation in nature and social life. From a religious-philosophical point of view, we can conditionally define nature as the first stage of the immersion of the Spirit into matter. At this stage, one spiritual power (God) turns into plurality. The second stage is the immersion of God in the 'body of culture.'

In both cases, the same mechanism works: oneness becomes plurality. However, on the first level, i.e., when the Spirit is embodied in nature, the connection with the Creator persists better than on the level of cultural life. At the first level, the harmony of God's plan is not yet distorted by the imperfect human mind.

However, when the culture arose, people began to move further from spiritual sources. Gandhi, in a traditional Indian manner, recognizes the historical process as a regression from the ancient Golden age (*Satya Yuga*) to the modern Dark age (*Kali Yuga*). These views determine his understanding of the *tree of religions*.

Using this metaphor, Gandhi usually speaks about trunks, branches, and leaves, not roots. However, we can conditionally say that in the Indian thinker's imagination, the root of the religious tree could be God, because He is the world tree's root. Also, in some texts, Gandhi gives ethical characteristics of the religious root. He says: "Compassion is at the very root of religion and one who forsakes it, forsakes God; one who forsakes the poor forsakes everything. If we do not look after the poor and the untouchables, we are sure to perish."[16] He repeats these words about compassion over and over again with reference to Tulsidas.[17]

All religions grew out of one root and one trunk. According to Gandhi, there is only one ideal religion in reality. He does not clarify where it exists or when it was in the past. We can suppose that this one true religion belongs to the divine world (or, according to Plato, to the *world of ideas*). And many centuries ago, when different religions

arose, great teachers and prophets saw the light of true spiritual knowledge and tried to transmit it to people. But it is impossible to render this light without loss and deformation. Gandhi says:

> Why should there be so many different faiths? The Soul is one, but the bodies which She animates are many. We cannot reduce the number of bodies, yet we recognise the unity of the Soul. Even as a tree has a single trunk, but many branches and leaves, so is there 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 can command, and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect.[18]

From a psychological point of view, a single "true religion" can be explained by the similarity of the spiritual needs of different people. Thus, people of all religions aspire to realize their own true spiritual Self and feel relation with their Creator. Gandhi writes:

> Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the Truth within and whichever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the should utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.[19]

We cannot find this one ideal religion in our cultural reality, but we can imagine it. This is the source of all religions. This is the trunk of the religion's tree, and all the great religious systems are its branches. Gandhi explains: "Just as a tree has many branches but one root, similarly the various religions are the leaves and branches of the same tree. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism are the main branches but as for varieties of religion, they are as numerous as mankind."[20]

The leaves of the tree symbolize the diversity of human ideas about God. Gandhi does not limit the number of religions to such great religious teachings as Hinduism, Islam, etc. As mentioned above, he distinguishes as many religious directions as human beings. Overthinking this theme, he emphasizes that a tree symbolizes harmony. He said, "Various religions were like the leaves on a tree. No two leaves were alike, yet there was no antagonism between them or between the branches on which they grew. Even so, there is an underlying unity in the variety which we see in God's creation."[21]

People should strive to achieve such harmony in their social life. Gandhi says:

> No two leaves of this very tree, under whose shadow we are sitting, are alike, though they spring from the same root, but even as the leaves live together in perfect harmony and present to us a beautiful whole, so must we, divided humanity present to the outsider looking upon us a beautiful whole. That can be done when we begin to love each other and tolerate each other in spite of differences.[22]

This ideal harmonic life of many leaves is possible due to their connection with the branches. Through the branches, leaves are linked to the spiritual trunk and root. Once, Gandhi was asked: "If there is only one God, should there not be only one religion?" He answered:

> This was a strange question. Just as a tree had a million leaves similarly though God was one, there were as many religions as there were men and women though they were rooted in one God. They did not see this plain truth because they were followers of different prophets and claimed as many religions as there were prophets.[23]

Figuratively speaking, we can say that leaves are not "aware" of their connection with the trunk and root, and therefore, with the whole tree, they can only feel a relationship with their own branch. This means that it is easy for each of us to see our connection with the particular religious system and tradition, but only a few people feel their relation with one spiritual root: God Himself. This also means that only a few can feel their spiritual connection with other religious branches.

Is this feeling important for a person? For Gandhi, this sense of spiritual kinship with other creations (including people of other faiths) and with God is the key to preventing and solving religious conflicts. Such an understanding of life makes the very idea of enmity senseless. How can a person hate somebody if he recognizes himself and others as parts of spiritual oneness? To kill a human or even animal in this context is the same as to hurt your hand or another part of the body.

The Indian thinker felt his relation with all religious systems and called others to respect all faiths. Sometimes, though rarely, Gandhi spoke about his religious universalism. American journalist Louis Fischer depicts such an episode:

> In 1942, when I was Gandhi's guest for a week, there was only one decoration on the mud walls of his hut: a black and white print of Jesus Christ with the inscription, 'He Is Our Peace.' I asked Gandhi about it. 'I

am a Christian,' he replied. 'I am a Christian, and a Hindu, and a Moslem, and a Jew.'[24]

On the other hand, he often defined himself as a *sanatani Hindu* (traditional Hindu).[25] It seems that these two statements contradict each other. How can a person call himself a follower of all faiths and at the same time claim that he is a Hindu? However, there is no contradiction due to Gandhi's understanding of each particular religion as a synthesis of all religious systems. Once, an American pacifist and Christian asked him: "Would you say then that your religion is a synthesis of all religions?" Gandhi replied: "Yes, if you will. But I would call that synthesis Hinduism, and for you the synthesis will be Christianity."[26] Another time, he clarified that his view of Hinduism is subjective and said: "My Hinduism is my own – I personally think it embraces all faiths."[27]

The ability to see one's religion as a synthesis of all faiths, that is, to see connection of one's own religious branch with other branches, is a characteristic of a spiritually developed person. When somebody respects other religions, this expands his view of his own religion. Gandhi wrote about his friend Anglican priest Charles F. Andrews: "…he has given the same love to others as he has for his own, and thereby broadened his Christianity…" And further, Gandhi adds about himself: "as I broadened my Hinduism by loving other religions as my own."[28]

Someone can also expand his own religion by studying other religions and taking their best elements. Gandhi writes: "I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. If we are to respect others' religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of world's religions is a sacred duty."[29] He exhorts that we should study other scriptures, like their followers. In his words, "If you read the Koran, you must read it with the eye of the Muslim, if you read the Bible, you must read it with the eye of the Christian, if you read the Gita, you must read it with the eye of the Hindu."[30] And after that, "Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only not hesitate but would think it our duty to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths."[31]

If all religions proceed from one root and each may be considered as a synthesis of others, does it mean that a person can choose and change his faith? Gandhi was against the change of religion. He compares the link between a devotee and his faith with marriage. He writes: "The closest though very incomplete analogy for religion I can find is marriage. It is or used to be an indissoluble tie. Much more

so is the tie of religion."[32] In his words, "we can only pray, if we are Hindus, not that a Christian should become a Hindu, or if we are Mussalmans, not that a Hindu or a Christian should become a Mussalman, nor should we even secretly pray that anyone should be converted, but our inmost prayer should be that a Hindu should be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim and a Christian a better Christian."[33]

All religions have a common base and unique features. It seems paradoxical, but according to Gandhi, different religions are equal and unequal at the same time. On the one hand, all religions are equally true and equally imperfect. On the other hand, they are unequal due to they are permanently changing. These two statements lead to the same conclusion: it is senseless to consider somebody's faith as the best one. Gandhi says:

> The finer the line you draw, the nearer it approaches Euclid's true straight line, but it never is the true straight line. The tree of Religion is the same, there is not that physical equality between the branches. They are all growing, and the person who belongs to the growing branch must not gloat over it and say, 'Mine is the superior one'. None is superior, none is inferior, to the other.[34]

Let's return to the marriage image mentioned above. Gandhi teaches us that love for one's mate should not mean disrespect to other people, and the same is true with religion. He writes: "And just as a faithful husband does not need in order to sustain his faithfulness to consider other women as inferior to his wife, so does not a person belonging to one religion need to consider others to be inferior to his own."[35] Further he continuous his reasoning, saying that "even as faithfulness to one's wife does not presuppose blindness to her shortcomings, so does not faithfulness to one's religion presuppose blindness to the shortcomings of the religion."[36]

We should regard the tree of religions impartially. In Gandhi's words, "All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect and liable to error."[37] In another text, comparing religions with flowers from the same garden and with branches of the same tree, he adds: "Therefore they are equally true, though being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect."[38] Thus all scriptures are equally inspired by God and, at the same time, are deformed by interpolations. And we should attentively read them, dividing human and Divine elements. Also we should be brave to see virtues of other faiths and confess weak sides of our religion. Gandhi says:

> I do not like the world tolerance but could not think of a better one. Tolerance may imply gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own, whereas *ahimsa* (i. e. non-violence. – *E. B.*) teaches us to entertain the same respect for religious faiths of others as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter.[39]

Therefore, Gandhi teaches that every religion has its positive and negative features. We can suggest that positive features arose because prophets and saints understood one divine Truth differently. The weak sides of all religions come from the imperfection of human reason, language and traditions. Recognizing the faults of another religion should not lead to hatred of its adepts. This is the fundamental principle of Satyagraha: resistance to the bad system without hatred of people who support it. Regarding respect for followers of other faiths, Gandhi says: "My doctrine of toleration does not include toleration of evil, though it does the toleration of the evil-minded."[40]

Moreover, when evaluating another religion, we should carefully consider its cultural context and respect the feelings of the people of other faiths. Gandhi clarifies:

> So long as there are different human heads, so long will there be different religions, but a secret of a true religious life is to tolerate one another's religion. What may appear evil to us in certain religious practices is not necessarily evil to those who follow those practices. I cannot, I dare not, blind myself to existing differences. I cannot rub them off the slate, if I would, but knowing those differences, I must love even those who differ from me.[41]

Misunderstanding of this point was one of the reasons for bloody fights between Hindus and Muslims shortly before and soon after getting Indian independence in 1947. Both sides blamed each other for traditions and habits, which are normal in the opposite culture. For example, Muslims kill cows, which are the sacred animal for Hindus. Hindus from low castes eat pork meat and use pigskin, while Muslims recognize a pig as an impure animal. Gandhi warns Hindus that cow protection should not turn into a reason to hate Muslims. He says: "I think it is sin for Hindu to look upon Mussalman as an untouchable, and the Hindu ought not to do so, irrespective of a Mussalman killing or sparing the cow. … If Hinduism teaches hatred of Islam or of non-Hindus, it is doomed to destruction."[42] He suggests the ideal model of Hindu-Muslim unity where cow-protection can help both sides to achieve mutual understanding and respect. Maulana Hasrat Mohani (1875–1951) once told Gandhi, "that the Mussalmans

ought to protect the cow for the sake of the Hindus, and Hindus should cease to regard the Mussalmans as untouchables, as he said they are regarded in North India." Gandhi replied: "I will not bargain with you in this matter. If the Mussalmans think it their duty to protect the cow for the sake of Hindus, they may do so, irrespective of how the Hindus behave towards them."[43] They both opposed the division of the country on a religious principle. But as we know, their dream did not come true.

However, let us return to the image of the religious tree. When communicating with other people, we constantly deal with different points of view, including religious questions. Gandhi's metaphor of a religious tree can help us see unity in this diversity of views and ideas. In our imagination, we can investigate this tree from its roots to its branches and leaves and in the reverse direction. Thus, we can realize the connection between different religious branches and even find our spiritual origin in God, who is the world tree's root. This gives us the opportunity to feel our spiritual kinship with all creations. For Gandhi, understanding someone's spiritual relationship with all creation is the criterion of personal development. Realizing spiritual kinship with all beings, a person comprehends his connection with God. This way, he achieves spiritual freedom – *moksha*.

This is not a mere spiritual matter but also the ideal of intercultural, interreligious, and international relations. Gandhi's ideal is the perception of the whole humanity as a great family. He writes in his Autobiography: "We are all one family."[44] He began understanding this in youth when he was acquainted with the Bible. He recalls his disagreement with the Christian dogma that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God: "If God could have sons, all of us were His sons. If Jesus was like God, or God Himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself."[45]

Gandhi's ideal of an all-human family is related to his idea of common welfare (*Sarvodaya*). People and other creations are connected so closely that the achievements and failures of someone affect everyone else. Gandhi says:

> There is not a single virtue which aims at, or is content with, the welfare of the individual alone. Conversely, there is not a single moral offence which does not, directly or indirectly, affect many others besides the actual offender. Hence, whether an individual is good or bad is not merely his own concern, but really the concern of the whole community, nay, of the whole world.[46]

The ideal of the all-human family on the level of international relationships gives us the opportunity for a broad understanding of

patriotism. Gandhi confesses that his mission is a brotherhood of humanity and his patriotism is all-embracing. He concludes: "The conception of my patriotism is nothing if it is not always, in every case without exception, consistent with the broadest good of humanity at large."[47]

This applies not only to social life, but also to spiritual one. No religion has the right to claim that only its path leads to God. Moreover, even no one can achieve spiritual salvation alone. Gandhi suggests us the ideal of collective spirituality and collective *moksha*. He argues:

> I do not believe that an individual may gain spiritually and those that surround him suffer. I believe in *advaita*. I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Therefore I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent.[48]

Using the metaphor of a religious tree, we can conditionally compare a person who strives for individual spiritual salvation with a leaf torn from a branch. As mentioned above, we achieve spiritual power when we realize our inner connection with other beings. On the contrary, breaking spiritual links makes us weaker. *Religion*, *love*, and *social service* for Gandhi were the forces that help us understand the unity of the world. He says: "In nature there is fundamental unity running through all the diversity we see about us. Religions are given to mankind so as to accelerate the process of realization of fundamental unity."[49] An ideal religion is incompatible with hatred of other faiths. Otherwise, it presupposes love to all beings and social service as one of the expressions of this love. Gandhi concludes:

> Though there is repulsion enough in Nature, she *lives* by attraction. Mutual love enables Nature to persist. Man does not live by destruction. Self-love compels regard for others. Nations cohere because there is mutual regard among individuals composing them. Some day we must extend the national law to the universe, even as we have extended the family law to form nations – a larger family.[50]

Investigation of Gandhi's religious tree image can help us to understand more deeply the philosophical foundation of his peacekeeping activity, especially interreligious peacekeeping. We can see his ideal of unity in diversity through this metaphor. As the world tree has one root in God, all religious branches are equally true because they proceed from one divine source. In addition, at the same time, they are all equally spoiled by the imperfection of human nature and reason. Understanding these two statements leads to the realization

that all claims to the superiority of one religion over another are meaningless. Moreover, Gandhi's ideal of all-embracing inner unity shows us the meaninglessness of all conflicts and wars. The connection between all beings on the spiritual level means the impossibility of individual salvation. The Indian thinker teaches us that only united people can achieve collective *moksha*, and in the same way we can resolve the problems of our earthly life. According to Gandhi, religion should not be the cause of disagreements, but it should be one of the forces that helps us understand the necessity of unity.

Notes and References

1. Similarly the Russian visionary and poet Daniil L. Andreyev depicts the *Rose of the world* (*Roza Mira*, literally) in his book of the same name. He uses metaphor of the flower as a symbol of religious unity in diversity. The roots of the rose are in heaven and petals touch the earth. Every petal is the sign of one religion which helps us to feel the connection with divine world.
2. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: The Publications Division. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, 1958–1994, 100 volumes), vol. 25, p. 199 (further – CWMG).
3. Kathryn VanSpanckeren, *Outline of American Literature*. Revised Edition (Washington: United States Department of State, 2007), pp. 26–27.
4. *CWMG*, vol. 29, p. 411.
5. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *All Men are Brothers: Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi as Told in His Own Words* (Paris: UNESCO, 1969), p. 119.
6. *CWMG*, vol. 32, p. 293.
7. Ibid., vol. 32, p. 323.
8. Ibid., vol. 41, p. 130.
9. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Teachings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Lahore: The Indian Printing Works, 1945), p. 479.
   Gandhi also explains:
   All religions are essentially identical because:
   a) It is one truth god that inspires all religions.
   b) All seek truth; they are different paths to the same goal.
   c) All believe in moral order / a universal governed by moral law; this law is God/truth.
   d) All affirm the same fundamental morality; and religion is essentially morality (non-violence, truth, love).
   e) All respect a higher power.
   f) All religions have served in embellishing mankind, all have

produced great saints i. e., self-sacrificing person (Quoted from: Mohammad Ali Modarresin, *Gandhiji on the Harmony of Religions – a Critical Study. A Thesis Submitted to the University of Mysore for the Award of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy* (Mysore, University of Mysore, 2013), p. 170).

10. Harijan, vol. II, no. 1, 16.02.1934, pp. 5–6.
11. Ibid., vol. VI, no. 51, 28.01.1939, p. 448.
12. Ibid., vol. I, no. 52, 2.02.1934, p. 8.
13. *CWMG*, vol. 26, p. 224.
14. Harijan, vol. IV, no. 51, 30.01.1937, p. 407. See also: Mohammad Ali Modarresin, op.cit. p. 141.
15. *CWMG*, vol. 42, p. 238.
16. Ibid., vol. 25, p. 603.
17. Ibid., vol. 88, p. 42; vol. 90, pp. 79, 333. Gandhi repeats about significance of compassion and its connection with religion in the last months of his life, when Hindu-Muslim conflicts reached their culmination.
18. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Teachings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Lahore: The Indian Printing Works, 1945), p. 478.
19. *CWMG*, vol. 17, p. 406.
20. Ibid., vol. 85, p. 31.
21. Harijan, vol. X, no. 16, 26.05.1946, p. 154.
22. *CWMG*, vol. 26, p. 296.
23. Harijan, vol. XI, no. 7, 16.03.1947, p. 63.
24. Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1957), p. 360.
25. Vide: *CWMG*, vol. 19, p. 327–328; vol. 26, p. 265.
    For example, he writes:
    I call myself a *sanatani* Hindu, because,
    1. I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures, and therefore in avatars and rebirth,
    2. I believe in the *varnashrama* dharma in a sense in my opinion strictly Vedic but not in its present popular and crude sense,
    3. I believe in the protection of the cow in its much larger sense than the popular,
    4. I do not disbelieve in idol-worship (*CWMG*, vol. 21, p. 246).
26. Harijan, vol. V, no. 4, 6.03.1937, p. 27.
27. *CWMG*, vol. 77, p. 352.
28. Ibid., vol. 35, p. 462.
29. Ibid., vol. 31, p. 350.
30. Harijan, vol. V, no. 5, 13.03.1937, p. 38.
31. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Teachings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Lahore: The Indian Printing Works, 1945), p. 478.
32. Ibid., p. 482.
33. *CWMG*, vol. 35, p. 461.
34. Harijan, vol. V, no. 5, 13.03.1937, p. 38.

35. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Teachings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Lahore: The Indian Printing Works, 1945), p. 482.
36. Ibid., p. 482.
37. Ibid., p. 478.
38. Harijan, vol. IV, no. 51, 16.02.1934, p. 407.
39. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Teachings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Lahore: The Indian Printing Works, 1945), p. 477.
40. *CWMG*, vol. 35, p. 462.
41. Ibid., vol. 26, p. 296.
42. Ibid., vol. 25, p. 137.
43. Ibid., vol. 25, p. 136.
44. Ibid., vol. 39, p. 247.
45. Ibid., vol. 39, p. 112–113.
46. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *All Men are Brothers: Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi as Told in His Own Words* (Paris: UNESCO, 1969), p. 118.
47. Ibid., p. 119.
48. Ibid., p. 118.
49. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Teachings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Lahore: The Indian Printing Works, 1945), p. 480. See also: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *All Men are Brothers: Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi as Told in His Own Words* (Paris: UNESCO, 1969), p. 338.
50. Ibid., 118.

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Study of the One Who Lent His Voice to the Chipko Movement: The Gandhian Folk Poet Ghanshyam Sailani

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Gandhian Folk Poet Ghandshyam Raturi Sailani, who inspired the Chipko Movement in Uttarakhand. Sailani, a prominent figure in the movement, encouraged the communities of hills to lead effectively and understand their rights and responsibilities. He actively participated in forest conservation and anti-liquor movements, promoting literacy and activism. Sailani's movements were characterized by their adherence to Gandhian principles, including Sarvodaya and nonviolence, which significantly boosted their impact.

Keywords: *Chipko Movement, Ghanshyam Sailani, Forest Conservation, Anti-liquor movements, Untouchability.*

Introduction

THROUGH VARIOUS MOVEMENTS, numerous social workers, cultural activists, and Gandhian leaders contributed to restoring the rights and entitlements of the residents of Uttarakhand. Among these, one such renowned cultural activist and Gandhian leader was Ghanshyam Raturi, famously known for his pen name, "Sailani." Sailani was one of the progressive thinkers who stood apart from the superstitions and societal rigidities of the time. He actively participated

in movements such as eradicating untouchability, Sarvodaya, Chipko, Bhoodan, and prohibition, providing society with a new direction and perspective. He also played a significant role in environmental conservation.

From a cultural perspective, human beings have always relied on various means of expression for simplicity, entertainment, and emotional connection, enriching their lives. Music, drama, and dance are powerful mediums for expressing human emotions but also play a significant role in addressing complex societal issues and resolving conflicts. Music, in particular, has been an integral and influential part of human life. It serves as a source of entertainment and a medium for articulating social issues, struggles, and movements. Through music, emotions, aspirations, and concerns are conveyed and transformed into a potent tool for raising social awareness and inspiring collective action.[1]

During India's freedom struggle, music, poetry, and folk songs played an extraordinary role in awakening public consciousness and energizing the spirit of resistance. Iconic works by poets like Rabindranath Tagore and Subhadra Kumari Chauhan became hallmarks of this movement. Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana* and *Ekla Chalo Re* emerged as symbols of nationalism[2] self-reliance, and indomitable courage. Similarly, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's renowned poem *Jhansi ki Rani* celebrated the valour and sacrifice of Rani Lakshmi Bai, igniting the flame of freedom in the hearts of millions .[3] These poets transcended the boundaries of mere literary expression, transforming their creations into non-violent but powerful social and political activism instruments. Their works inspired the contemporary populace and preserved the spirit of struggle and sacrifice for future generations, ensuring their enduring relevance in the narrative of India's freedom movement.

Besides being a leading social worker, Sailani was a folk poet and singer. His poems and songs reveal his deep desire to contribute to society. These poems express sorrow, pain, and a spirit that energizes ordinary people. Sailani participated in numerous movements throughout his life. He inspired the people with his Gandhian ideals, igniting a revolution and motivating them to move forward. In addition to his environmental protection and awareness work, his role in eradicating social evils such as untouchability, casteism, and animal sacrifices was unforgettable.

It is also evident that through various socio-political movements, modern Indian society has been inherently progressive, periodically awakening the populace to the oppressive stranglehold of orthodoxy. This enlightenment has instigated an extraordinary metamorphosis

in the people's collective consciousness, operating in a multifaceted manner by employing diverse methodologies and optimally harnessing the instruments of societal awakening. Such endeavours have paved the way for the fundamental eradication of societal inertia. This entrenched stagnation fostered a renaissance of consciousness, and movements occasionally became imperative for the people. Yet, a pivotal question loomed: who would spearhead this vital cause? Who would bear the immense responsibility of fulfilling this collective need? This existential dilemma presented a significant challenge to contemporary society at the time. Amidst this backdrop, numerous luminaries emerged as active participants in the Indian national movement, discharging their duties with unwavering dedication and absolute integrity. Among these towering figures was Mahatma Gandhi, whose contributions to the Indian freedom struggle remain indelible. Gandhi's influence was paramount as he endeavoured to elevate society's moral and social fabric through his cardinal principles of truth, nonviolence, satyagraha, and the Sarvodaya philosophy. The people embraced these principles and served as the foundation for individuals to mobilize, participate in movements, and secure their inherent rights.

As we know, Mahatma Gandhi's return from South Africa in 1915 marked the beginning of his unwavering commitment to the Indian populace, dedicating his entire existence to their service.[4] Upon his immersion into Indian politics, Gandhi undertook an extensive odyssey across the nation, intending to awaken the people's dormant political and social consciousness. Through these travels, he sought to integrate those regions and communities into the Indian independence movement that had, until then, remained detached from the cause. On a more profound level, Gandhi envisioned the unification of India through its rural heartlands, steadfast in his belief that the realization of a united India, could be achieved if its foundations were deeply entrenched in prosperous villages. He held that the cornerstone of a resilient and flourishing India lay in the welfare and vitality of its villages. By fostering self-reliance, development, and prosperity within these rural communities, Gandhi aspired to forge an India that was not only self-sufficient but also advanced and thriving in every respect.[5]

Literary data also indicated that Mahatma Gandhi's multiple visits to Uttarakhand left an indelible mark on the region, as each time he arrived, his electrifying speeches stirred the latent consciousness of the populace.[6] His profound principles captivated many, and those deeply moved by his ideology and committed to lifelong adherence to his values, working tirelessly to uproot societal vices, were

henceforth recognized as Gandhians.[7] Following India's independence, Vinoba Bhave spearheaded the Bhoodan movement, grounded in Gandhi's Sarvodaya philosophy, which achieved significant progress in Uttarakhand. Within Sarvodaya's ideological framework, the demand for forest rights gained momentum in Uttarakhand. Sarvodaya activists played a pivotal role in transforming this modest forest rights campaign into the iconic Chipko movement. However, the person who coined "Chipko" has largely faded into oblivion.

That individual was the Gandhian cultural activist Ghanshyam Raturi, affectionately known by his pen name "Sailani." Sailani gave voice to the forest rights movement, widely disseminating it under the "Chipko." Sailani also penned numerous folk songs addressing issues like prohibition, the Seed Conservation movement, the plight of forests, and the cruelty of animals. Sailani galvanized the masses with these folk songs, urging them to assert their rights while employing his poetry and songs to dismantle social iniquities.

Deeply influenced by Gandhi's Sarvodaya ideology and playing an instrumental role in amplifying the voice of the Chipko movement, Ghanshyam Raturi Sailani resolved to engage in grassroots activism in Uttarakhand. At the same time, as Vinoba Bhave kindled the flames of the Bhoodan movement across the nation, Sailani had the privilege of collaborating closely with Mirabehn. This association further anchored the contemplative Gandhian thinker in the philosophy of Gandhian ideals. When Mirabehn arrived in Gawali village (situated in the Bhilangana valley of Tehri district), she established the Gopal Ashram. During this period, Ghanshyam Sailani resided at the Gopal Ashram with Mirabehn, where he translated the Garhwali Ramayana into Hindi for her. Mirabehn, who was deeply committed to rural development within the Gandhian and Sarvodaya principles, left a profound impression on Sailani. Consequently, Sailani actively joined the Sarvodaya movement. He started implementing Gandhian social programs from 1956–57, and by 1960, the Sarvodaya movement fully integrated him.[8] He received training in rural development at Sevapuri in Varanasi after joining Sarvodaya. This journey was vital for Sailani's participation in various movements and was crucial in his transformation into a Gandhian cultural activist.

Contributions to Various Movements

Ghanshyam Sailani was born on May 18, 1934, in Charigaad village in the Bal Ganga Valley of Tehri Garhwal.[9] His father was Maghvanand Raturi, and his mother was Annapurna Devi. Sailani hailed from a priestly lineage, where his family sustained itself through religious rituals and ceremonies. Following family tradition, Sailani also pursued

Sanskrit studies in Haridwar from 14 to 15, intending to become a priest.[10] However, a particular incident deeply impacted him during his time in Haridwar.

In Charigaad, two villagers, Gaurdas and Kalidas, wished to host a Satyanarayan Katha in their home. However, being Dalits, no priest was willing to perform the ceremony, as they were considered untouchables. Conducting such a religious ceremony without a priest was inconceivable. Yet, Sailani, free of such discriminatory beliefs, readily agreed to lead the Katha, reciting the sacred mantras and conducting the ceremony. For this act, a Rajput youth struck him multiple times, declaring, "How dare you perform a religious ceremony in their home? You have tarnished the reputation of the Brahmins!"[11] This episode sowed within Sailani a profound disdain for such regressive practices, prompting him to take a vow to rid society of these evils.

In his bid to dismantle such hollow traditions, Sailani composed his first poem as a scathing indictment of the exploitative and hypocritical Jajmani system, filled with pretence and ritualistic deceit

"Kharch badhege, cheez mahinga
So khushaamad, jajamaan kee
Path ko sawa rupayaa"[12]

As time progressed, expenditures escalated, and commodities grew costlier. Despite the necessity of lavishly ingratiating oneself with patrons, the fee for conducting the reading has remained static at merely one and a quarter rupees.

Ghanshyam Sailani's involvement in various movements was shaped profoundly by Gandhian Sarvodaya leaders such as Sarla Behn, Mira Behn, and Sundar Lal Bahuguna. Motivated by their examples, Sailani immersed himself in these causes. In 1961, he established his initial operational centre in the village of Saij, located in the Bhattwari development block of Uttarkashi. He undertook initiatives addressing critical issues such as prohibition, village donation, and women's empowerment. His efforts were bolstered by the support of Mr. Ghanshyam Bhandari, renowned as the "Marginal Gandhi" of Uttarkashi district. In 1963-64, during the Navratri festival, Sailani was journeying towards Lakhamandal and took refuge in the village of Bhadli. It was customary during Navratri for villagers in Uttarkashi district to sacrifice buffaloes. Sailani observed the villagers performing the sacrifice of three buffaloes. The brutal spectacle and entrenched superstitions profoundly affected Sailani. Subsequently, he sought solace beneath a deodar tree. He composed a poignant poem titled "Bela Ki Pukar" (The Cry of an Unfortunate Buffalo), encapsulating his profound dismay over the

barbaric treatment of animals and the pervasive social malpractices he had witnessed.[13]

Similarly, Sailani undertook journeys through various villages and, during one such sojourn, arrived in Kamad village, where he was confronted with another disturbing and archaic practice. In Kamad, a nine-day and nine-night festival was celebrated, climaxing on the ninth day with a ritualistic slaughter of buffaloes. Following the local dances on this day, the buffaloes designated for sacrifice were mercilessly chased and bludgeoned to death with clubs and sharp implements. To curtail these barbaric practices, Sailani conceived an ingenious plan. He seized a harmonium and enchanted the villagers amid the cultural festivities with his soulful rendition of "Bela Ki Pukar" (The Cry of an Unfortunate Buffalo). Through his evocative song, he sought to captivate and profoundly affect the audience, thereby challenging and potentially curbing the inhumane customs.

"Main Bela Baagee Tumhaara Bhaee
Bachapan Mein Ma Dudh Dagadi Khaee
Dagadi Dholya Ham Gveendi Gudhyaarayon,
Kya Khoee Main Ju Main Yanu Maarayon"[14]

In this poem, Ghanshyam Sailani, conveying the plaintive lament from the buffalo's perspective, articulates: "I, the buffalo, am but your kin, your brother. In our infancy, we both partook of our mother's nourishment and frolicked in unison. Yet, what transgression have I committed that warrants such ruthless treatment and leads you to slaughter me in this merciless manner?"

Adorning himself with a harmonium draped around his neck and intermittently striking the drum, Sailani remained perpetually poised to address public grievances. By the 1960s, he had already attained prominence as a folk poet. During this era, the contemporary mass communication channels played a pivotal role in disseminating Sailani's compositions to every household. Concurrently, the "Uttarayan" program, broadcast from the All India Radio Lucknow station, afforded Sailani the platform to present his lyrical works. These compositions gained considerable traction, with notable examples including "Ye Ooncha Garhwal Kashmir Banawa," "Swarg Uttarakhand Bhumi," and "Phal-Phoolon Ki Dali Gau-Gau Ma Lagaya," among others.[15]

The inhabitants of Uttarakhand were grappling with a multifaceted issue—intoxication and alcohol—which had particularly severe repercussions for women in the community. Adherents of Gandhi's principles, working in alignment with Mahatma Gandhi's doctrine, discerned this problem and embarked on efforts to address it. It is plausible that resistance to alcohol in Uttarakhand began as early as

the 1960s or even prior. The prohibition of alcohol was a crucial element within Gandhi's Sarvodaya philosophy. Upon witnessing the deteriorating plight of the hill people due to alcohol and addiction, Gandhians perceived the situation as profoundly distressing. Consequently, they commenced their efforts to remedy this issue from 1971 onward, instigating a vigorous campaign against alcohol. Sailani contributed to the movement by performing the song "We Will Exorcise the Demon of Alcohol." He never underestimated the potential of women, recognizing that mobilizing maternal strength could be instrumental in achieving success in the prohibition movement. Hence, Sailani strategically placed women at the vanguard of the anti-alcohol campaign. During this movement, both Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Ghanshyam Sailani were apprehended by the authorities in Tehri and handcuffed for their participation in demonstrations.[16]

The campaign spearheaded by Gandhians achieved notable success; however, analogous movements persisted in other regions of Uttarakhand. Within this prohibition crusade, Sailani assumed a pivotal role by engaging the populace through his lyrical compositions and fostering awareness regarding the resolution of the issues at hand.

"*Sharaab na pya*
Hita dedee hita bhulyo
Chala gau bachaila
Daaroo kak daint lagyoo tai daint hataula
Tincharee koo bhoot lagyoon tai bhoot bhagaula
Ghar hamaara ujaadee gai
Chhaaree-chhooree bigadee gen"[17]

In essence, "Refrain from consuming alcohol. Come, sisters and brothers, let us preserve our village. Let us expel the demon of alcohol. Let us dispel the spectre of alcohol. Our homes have been devastated due to alcohol, and our children have deteriorated as a result."

Following the prohibition movement, Sarvodaya activists organized against the entrenched practice of contracting out timber harvesting and the consequent ecological devastation. In the mountainous regions, especially in Uttarakhand, a longstanding tradition of resistance against illicit deforestation exists. The forest conservation efforts observed in 1972 can traced back to the Tilari Movement[18] (To reclaim their rights over the forests, the villagers of Tehri organized a protest or satyagraha against the Tehri princely state at Tilari grounds. In response, the unarmed villagers were brutally fired upon.)[19], which progressively matured and culminated in the Chipko Movement.[20] This anti-deforestation crusade was inaugurated on December 11, 1972, in Purola, Uttarkashi district, where

citizens manifested their indignation by orchestrating substantial processions against the rampant and indiscriminate logging of forests. Ghanshyam Sailani, alongside other Sarvodaya activists, actively participated in this significant movement.[21]

Continuing the protests, Sailani departed for Gopeshwar on December 13-14. There, he crafted a song for the movement that gained substantial popularity and became a prominent fixture in the public discourse of the time.[22] This composition effectively outlined the framework for the Chipko Movement, and this very work gave the forest conservation initiative its distinctive name—the Chipko Movement.

"Khada utha bhai bando sab katha hola,
Sarkari neeti se jangalu bachela.
Thekedari pratha se jangalu katige,
Bura aegi sama kaal varsha hatige.
Pahado maan jangalo ki tabahi havege,
Jangalo ko sab laabh thekedar khaige.
Barson biti hamun van palya,
Peedee dar peedee jangalu lagvalya.
Poonjipati jangalo se paisa kamaunda,
Paadi chhora bhair bhanda majaaunda.
Leesa ku karkhana aaj Bareilly,
Leesa ka udyog sab tain khaili.
Leesa ka dhau laigi pedo maan gaira,
Hawa se jangalu ukhadi ge saara.
Sarkar maldar jangalu katai rai,
Naya ped, naya van kveeni lagere.
Janglaat vibhaag arnyapaal,
Paree havaig ulta jangalu ka kaal.
Ab yoo se jangalu ki bachi aasha nichh,
Jangal bachein ki yau ki bhaasha nichh.
Chipka pedon par ab na katen dya,
Jangalo ki sampatti ab na luten dya.
Pakda silepar uda na bagan gha,
Pahado ki sampatti ab na luten gha."[23]

In other words, "The government's adversarial policies towards forests have wrought havoc. We have meticulously nurtured and preserved these woodlands through countless generations. Now, government contractors are systematically ravaging our forests. Wealthy capitalists are reaping profits, while our children are relegated to menial tasks in urban areas. There is a conspicuous absence of initiatives for reforestation or the establishment of new woodlands. The forest custodians have become agents of ruin. They are oblivious

to the principles of forest conservation. Rise, comrades, embrace the trees. We shall no longer permit the pillaging of our heritage."

The Gandhian intellectual lent his voice to the forest movement through his compositions, rendering it renowned as the Chipko Movement in every household. Sailani, through his lyrical works, galvanized an awareness among the populace regarding their entitlements. In this process of enlightenment, Sailani introduced a distinctive approach to non-violent satyagraha to assert social and forest rights.[24] Whether in the Purola region on December 11, the Uttarkashi region on December 12, or Gopeshwar on December 15, 1972, Sailani relentlessly composed and engaged in public education. Gandhi's doctrines of nonviolence and satyagraha were comprehensively applied in the Chipko Movement, and Gandhians mobilized public support against the government, fortifying the movement even further.[25]

Vijay Jadhari reflects on Ghanshyam Sailani's role in the Chipko Movement, asserting, "Undoubtedly, Bhatt ji may have advocated for tree-hugging, but the profound depth of the Chipko Movement has never thoroughly examined. Should we not explore its intricacies now, as Sailani has forgotten, his literary contributions and the associated historical narrative will fade from memory."[26] Jadhari further elaborates, "Although March 26, 1973, is widely acknowledged as the official commencement of the Chipko Movement, the Gandhian thinker Ghanshyam Sailani had already composed his song about Chipko on December 12, 1972, in Rudraprayag."[27] The Chipko Movement was inherently multifaceted, encompassing various dimensions and participants. These contributors collectively elevated what started as a mere forest conservation effort into a globally recognized movement called Chipko. The Chipko Movement did not arise from the leadership of a singular individual or a few; rather, it emerged through diverse efforts and collaborative contributions, ultimately crystallizing into the movement we recognize today.

When we closely examine the philosophy of the Chipko movement, we find that in its initial phase, it was primarily a struggle to reclaim long-lost rights over forests. However, as the movement expanded, its philosophy and objectives also evolved.[28] In the village of Reni, when trees were on the verge of being felled, the local women saved the trees by clinging to them and fought to protect the forest resources crucial for their survival. This incident highlighted the deep economic dependence of women on forests, which form the backbone of life in these mountainous regions. These women were not merely saving trees but fighting for their livelihoods.[29]

As the movement progressed, its perspective broadened to include

demands for employment opportunities. Activists argued that the right to cut dry trees should not be allowed by external companies but by the local people. It could help creating employment opportunities for the region's youth.[30] The Economic dimension vividly reflected in Sailani Ji's poem, where he writes, *"While capitalists are making money from our forests, our children were forced to leave and wash dishes elsewhere."*[31] With the expansion of the Chipko movement into the Heval Valley, its philosophical outlook underwent a significant transformation. Initially, the movement's slogan was, *"What do forests yield? Resin, timber, and trade,"* which later evolved into, *"What do forests yield? Soil, water, and pure air."*[32] This shift in perspective led society to recognize that forests are not limited to trees alone; the forest's air, water, and soil are equally vital for human life as the trees themselves.

The Chipko movement not only focused on forest rights and conservation but also addressed the fundamental issues of the region. These included the status of women, mining activities, dam construction, and alcoholism, among other socio-economic challenges.[33] The movement extended beyond forest preservation to embrace a broader vision of regional development, which subsequently inspired initiatives such as the *Beej Bachao Andolan* (Save the Seeds Movement) in the 1980s.[34]

The movement gradually disseminated across Garhwal with an incendiary rapidity. Numerous demonstrations were orchestrated in opposition to forest auctions at various sites.[35] Sailani subsequently manifested his activism in additional locales, including Adwani in Tehri, Sleet, Mandal, Fata, Reni, Badiyargad, Lasi, Kangad, and Khuret. He composed novel hymns for these movements and remained resolutely at the vanguard, actively engaging as a principal participant in the popular struggles.[36]

Parallel to the movements, his poetry underwent a gradual evolution. Sailani's verses, through their inherent artistic finesse, offer readers a profound and nuanced empathy towards the predicaments of Uttarakhand. For example, in "The Tree's Cry," he articulates:

""Rudakaana holo padalon khaado,
Main dhaal par chhaun ar bed gaun chh."[37]

Essentially, "If there is a landslide, the slope will collapse. I was positioned on the slope, and your village is right below."

Sailani does not cease here; his reflections evolve into a more profound and expansive discourse wherein he articulates:

Hanyuchali Dadyon ma ab hyun kakhan jamalon
Barakha vaala ban katega, yun sannee koo thamalon[38]

In essence, "How will snow accumulate on the elevated, glacial summits in the future? Who will intervene to halt this egregious

devastation as the rainforests are deforested intentionally?"

Sailani's environmentally conscious perspectives can potentially elevate the discourse on climate change to a novel paradigm in contemporary times. His insights resonate not merely within Uttarakhand and India but possess global relevance. In parallel, Sailani remained a fervent advocate in the anti-mining and Tehri Dam movements, harnessing his musical prowess to foster public consciousness. Furthermore, Sailani was instrumental in establishing the Seed Saving Movement. His composition, 'Harchi Kakh Garhwal Ku Kondu Ar Kandali,' embodies the essence of the Seed Saving Movement's philosophy.[39]

Sailani's compositions invigorated the populace's consciousness and galvanized their sentiments within the movements. Sailani's notable achievement in these endeavours was his method of immersing himself among the people, imparting his songs directly to them, thereby amplifying their resolve to spread awareness broadly through these musical works. Much like Gandhiji, Sailani embarked on extensive foot journeys throughout the villages of Uttarakhand, establishing profound, direct, and intimate bonds with the public through his musical outreach. Sailani, a cultural activist, would ardently perform songs of social awakening, harmonium slung around his neck, whether amidst crowds, under the shade of trees, or atop buses, demonstrating his unwavering dedication.[40]

Sailani's pivotal contribution to the Chipko movement, ignited through his songs, achieved its intended success, culminating in the movement being honoured with the 'Right to Livelihood' Award by the Swedish Parliament on December 1, 1987. This accolade is regarded as an alternative to the Nobel Prize. The award certificate also commemorated the contributions of Ghanshyam Sailani and the Gandhian Dhoom Singh Negi.[41]

Sailani's folk compositions enchanted audiences not only across India but also on an international stage, leaving an enduring legacy through his music. In this context, Sailani represented India at the Environmental Song Festival in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1988, where his Garhwali songs captivated and enthralled all attendees.[42]

In 1995, Ghanshyam Sailani passed away from cancer. Despite traversing various medical institutions in Delhi in search of treatment, he could not obtain any efficacious intervention. In this grave predicament, even his distinguished accolades proved ineffectual. Consequently, owing to the absence of adequate medical care over two years, this Gandhian cultural luminary departed from this world on December 2, 1997.[43]

Conclusion

Ghanshyam Ratuadi Sailani's compositions and poetry were a formidable instrument for social awakening. Through his literary and activist endeavours, Sailani invigorated the oppressed and marginalized communities of the hills, endowing them with effective leadership and fostering an acute awareness of their rights and responsibilities. He was an active participant in both forest conservation and anti-liquor movements. A defining characteristic of the movements he orchestrated was their adherence to Gandhian principles, integrating concepts such as Sarvodaya and nonviolence. This adherence significantly amplified the impact of these movements. In recognition of his unwavering dedication to his homeland and indelible contributions, Ghanshyam Ratuadi Sailani will forever enshrined in the hearts of the local populace.

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Through the lens of Political Cartoons: Understanding Gandhi's Battle against Colonialism

Omprakash Kushwaha

ABSTRACT

Gandhi, an iconic leader in India's independence movement, waged a historic battle against colonial powers, a struggle intricately portrayed in various art forms, including cartoons. This article delves into the lens of political cartoons to illuminate three pivotal aspects of Gandhi's anti-colonial fight. Firstly, it explores the visual representation of Gandhi's identity, encapsulating the essence of his character in these artistic renderings. Secondly, it scrutinizes his relentless struggle against the British colonial state, intricately depicted in the cartoons that became a powerful medium for resistance. Lastly, it unravels the portrayal of colonial oppression in India, shedding light on the profound impact of these cartoons in galvanizing the masses against the colonial regime. Through this exploration, the article unveils the multifaceted dimensions of Gandhi's battle against colonialism as envisioned by impassioned cartoonists supporting India's independence movement.

Keywords: *Cartoon, Anti- colonial struggle, Colonial Oppression, Gandhi's battle*

Introduction

THE GLOBAL ICONOGRAPHY of Mahatma Gandhi, a figure synonymous with nonviolence, justice, and anti-colonial resistance, has been intricately woven into the tapestry of political and cultural narratives worldwide. Artists and cartoonists, in particular, have leveraged this imagery to depict Gandhi's profound impact on the fight against colonial domination. As Ramaswamy astutely observes, "Gandhi's persona transcended mere national borders, crystallizing

into a global symbol of nonviolent resistance"[1]. His ideas of nonviolence, therefore, align with the arena of social and political life that designed and sounded India's freedom movement[2]. In this case, historical examinations, such as Hardiman[3] and Chatterjee highlight "the multifaceted portrayal of Gandhi's socio-political endeavours"[4]. Central to this portrayal is the medium of political cartoons, which, through a blend of satire, critique, and artistry, captured Gandhi's nuanced strategies and principles in challenging British hegemony. These cartoons celebrated Gandhi's commitment to nonviolence and galvanized public sentiment against colonial rule, both within India and on international platforms.

An intriguing dimension of these artistic renditions is the amalgamation of critical analysis with humor[5]. Cartoonists like Shipra[6] masterfully employed this blend to champion Gandhi's principles, fostering a sense of unity and purpose among the masses. Such representations were not confined to India; European and American publications, such as *Punch* magazine, the *New York Times* played a pivotal role in disseminating these caricatures, thereby shaping global perceptions of the anti-colonial struggle. Following the historical context, the inception of *Punch* magazine in 1841 by Henry Mayhew and Ebenezer Landells marked a significant chapter in the evolution of cartooning, especially within colonial territories like India[7]. While initially serving as a conduit for British colonial cultural narratives, Punch's influence in India underwent a transformative phase with the emergence of Gandhi and the Gandhian movements. As Bhattacharya elucidates, "Gandhi's leadership style and nonviolent ethos catalyzed a shift in India's cartooning landscape, infusing it with critical and satirical undertones"[8]. This paper, in this case, embarks on a scholarly expedition to unravel the intricate interplay between Gandhi's anti-colonial endeavours and their representation through political cartoons. By examining these caricatures' evolution, impact, and nuances, this study aims to elucidate the pivotal role of cartoons as both journalistic tools and satirical commentaries. In doing so, we endeavour to offer a comprehensive understanding of Gandhi's battle against British colonialism, as depicted and interpreted through the captivating realm of political cartoons.

Methodology

This research employs a methodology to scrutinize the portrayal of Gandhi's resistance against colonialism through the lens of political cartoons during India's independence movement. Concentrating on three pivotal facets—Gandhi's identity, his struggle against British rule, and colonial oppression in India—the paper adopts a qualitative

research method coupled with a visual analysis technique. It serves as the primary tool for dissecting the intricate layers embedded in political cartoons. This method is chosen due to its efficacy in deciphering visual narratives, uncovering latent meanings, and discerning the nuanced expressions embedded within the cartoons. Given the unique nature of political cartoons as a visual medium, traditional textual analyses may fall short of capturing the richness and depth of the conveyed messages. Moreover, qualitative research is the cornerstone of this study, providing a robust framework for exploring political cartoons' subjective and context-dependent nature. This method is well-suited for delving into the complexities of visual narratives, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the symbolic language used in political cartoons. Through in-depth analysis and interpretation, qualitative research facilitates the extraction of deeper meanings and insights encapsulated within visual representations.

Selection of Cartoons

Selecting political cartoons involves meticulously creating visuals from prominent publications and satirical platforms during the Indian independence movement. Cartoons are chosen based on their relevance to Gandhi's persona, his anti-colonial struggle, and the broader socio-political landscape of the time. This purposive sampling ensures that the selected hundreds of cartoons align with the research objectives, providing a focused lens to analyse the multifaceted dimensions of Gandhi's battle against colonialism. Once the cartoons are assembled, a systematic coding and categorization process ensues. This involves identifying recurring themes, symbolic elements, and visual metaphors present in the cartoons. Through a careful coding process, patterns and trends are discerned, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of how Gandhi's anti-colonial narrative is depicted and disseminated through political cartoons.

Interpretation and Analysis

The qualitative research method is complemented by an interpretative analysis beyond surface-level observations. By delving into the socio-political context, historical nuances, and the cultural backdrop of the cartoons, this interpretation and analysis seeks to unravel the layers of meaning embedded in visual representations. The goal is to provide a holistic and nuanced interpretation of how political cartoons contribute to the broader discourse surrounding Gandhi's battle against colonialism. Therefore, the combined use of qualitative research methods and the visual analysis technique forms a robust methodological framework, allowing for a comprehensive exploration

of the intricate dynamics encapsulated in political cartoons illustrating Gandhi's resistance during India's fight for independence.

Review of Literature

Several distinguished scholars i.e. Mitter[9], Mclain[10], Khanduri[11], Yadav[12] Saha[13] in the literature, have delved into the portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi in colonial cartoons, shedding light on his immense recognition and popularity among cartoonists and artists across various domains. The analysis of these pieces underscores Gandhi's central position as a subject of considerable artistic attention. Many are very critical of Gandhi's idea, examining the narrative inclined with the socio-economic context of Gandhi's resistance against the colonial power. Gandhi's anti-colonial stand, particularly his advocacy of nonviolence as a paramount method of resistance, garnered widespread attention across diverse communication channels[14]. The principle of nonviolence, rooted in the pursuit of truth, justice, and freedom, presented a formidable challenge to British rule in India[15]. This unique approach to anti-colonial resistance catapulted Mahatma Gandhi into the limelight, establishing him as a widely recognized and celebrated leader in the fight against colonial power.

The manifestation of Gandhi's nonviolence, coupled with the tactical application of "Satyagraha,"[16] ushered in a new era for social movements. Key episodes, such as "the Salt March (*Dandi* March) in 1930 and the *Dandi Satyagraha*, exemplified acts of nonviolent civil disobedience aimed at challenging colonial authority"[17]. Gandhi's innovative methods of resistance not only demonstrated a commitment to nonviolence but also served as defining moments in India's struggle for independence. In 1942, Gandhi's Quit India movement emerged as a colossal mass movement, gaining unprecedented popularity across the nation. The movement, characterized by Gandhi's unwavering commitment to nonviolence, solidified his image as a chief proponent of peace and nonviolence[18]. The Quit India movement marked a pivotal juncture in the anti-colonial struggle, reflecting Gandhi's ability to mobilize the masses and challenge the established colonial order through nonviolent means. This effort of Gandhi deeply influenced a group of artists and cartoonists in two ways – firstly, it opened a space for physical participation in the freedom movement, and secondly, it gave subject matter for artistic creation by ensuring anti-colonial essence in art and cartoons.

The literature reviewed collectively emphasizes the pivotal role of Mahatma Gandhi in colonial cartoons, portraying him not only as a political leader but as an icon of nonviolent resistance. In this context, nonviolence appeared as a strategic tool that governed social

gatherings and movements, exemplified by events like the Salt March and the Quit India movement. It demonstrated Gandhi's enduring influence on India's struggle for independence and recognised the idea of nonviolence as a tool of resistance. Following the same perspective, many reviewed works[19] contribute to a nuanced understanding of how colonial cartoons shaped and reflected the public perception of Gandhi's anti-colonial endeavors and offer significant insight to illuminate the intricate interplay between visual representation, political activism, and the quest for freedom[20]. In this case, Gandhi's principle of nonviolence has left an indelible mark on the genre of political cartoons, shaping their narrative and visual representation. The genre of political cartoons in this case is the relationship of verbal text and visual images, it appears to frame the sense of meaning that influences the audience."[21] This influence can be observed through two distinct dimensions[22]. Firstly, the principle aligns with the essence of human harmony, advocating against violence. Secondly, it acknowledges that conflict is inherent but emphasizes a deeply motivated state of mind that effectively challenges prevailing power dynamics[23].

The impact of Gandhi's idea of peace and nonviolence resonates prominently in Indian cartooning as well as in the Indian mindset, particularly during the colonial time. The depiction of Gandhi's image, therefore, composes two complex tendencies- Gandhi's idea of resistance and the idea of non- violence shaping the movement against British rule in India. Notably, the renowned Indian cartoonist R.K. Laxman drew substantial inspiration from Gandhi's idea of nonviolence, evident in his iconic creation—the "common man"[24]. This character, achieving global recognition, became a symbol of peace and nonviolence, offering a critical and satirical perspective on Indian society[25]. Laxman's "common man" embodies the principles of peace and truth and uses satire as key to challenge prevailing power structures. This approach of Laxman's 'common man' underlines a true essence of non- violence and its way to strengthen the fight against colonial power in India. In this case, Gandhi's idea of peace and nonviolence cannot be separated from India's independence movement; it instilled a profound psychology of harmony and confidence among the populace, fostering resistance against British rule[26]. This psychological shift played a pivotal role in manufacturing anti-colonial sentiments and a collective resolve among the general public. As articulated by R.K. Laxman, Gandhi's emergence as a political leader marked a transformative event, providing moral impetus to the freedom struggle[27]. Gandhi's approach galvanized the domestic front and garnered international sympathy. In response,

cartoonists, in a sympathetic stance, directed their creative endeavors towards critiquing British rule and its suppressive policies.

The growing popularity of Gandhi's image and its essence among cartoonists catalyzed a paradigm shift in the style of depiction and visualization in Indian political cartoons. Gandhi became an iconic figure in the anti-colonial movement, a source of inspiration for cartoonists who sought to articulate their dissent through visual satire. This period witnessed a surge in cartoons appearing in newspapers and magazines, each contributing to the broader narrative of resistance against colonial oppression. In most of these cartoons, visual narrative and satire play vital role in serving and circulating Gandhi's idea of peace and nonviolence in common masses. In this context, Gandhi's idea of nonviolence permeates the visual language involved in political cartoons to share the deep sense of peace and nonviolence, providing a nuanced lens through which artists critique societal norms and power structures. The enduring legacy of Gandhi's principles in the realm of political cartoons attests to the profound impact of his ideology on shaping not only India's struggle for independence but also the artistic expressions that emerged during this transformative period.

Historical context

The exploration of political cartoons as a medium for social and political commentary is situated within a rich historical tapestry that spans centuries[28]. The roots of political cartoons can be traced back to the 18th century when the art form emerged as a powerful instrument for satire and criticism. This period witnessed the birth of editorial cartoons, often featured in newspapers and pamphlets, to provide a visual commentary on the prevailing political landscape.

Political cartoons became increasingly influential during the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly in Europe and the United States[29]. Renowned artists such as James Gillray and George Cruikshank in England and Thomas Nast in the United States utilized their artistic prowess to shape public opinion and lampoon political figures[30]. These cartoons played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse around significant events like the French Revolution and the American Civil War.

The 20th century marked a zenith for political cartoons as mass media, including magazines and newspapers, embraced the visual medium[31]. Cartoonists like David Low and Herblock became iconic figures, offering incisive critiques of political leaders and ideologies[32]. The two World Wars and the Cold War provided fertile ground for cartoonists to convey complex geopolitical issues in a digestible and often humorous manner.

The advent of the internet in the late 20th century and the subsequent rise of digital media transformed the landscape of political cartoons. Cartoonists now had a global platform to disseminate their work instantly[33]. The 21st century saw a resurgence of political cartoons as a form of protest and activism, with artists addressing issues ranging from climate change to human rights.

This research paper contextualizes this historical trajectory and examines the evolving role of political cartoons in reflecting and influencing public opinion. It delves into the shifting dynamics between cartoonists and political power, considering how Gandhi's peace and non- violence way to fight for India's independence has impacted the art form especially cartoons and cartoonists' vision. By navigating through the historical underpinnings of political cartoons, the paper aims to unravel the enduring significance of this visual medium in the realm of political discourse and societal critique.

Finding and Discussion

Source: gandhimedia.org

The analysis of political cartoons following three pivotal aspects of Gandhi's anti- colonial fight provides valuable insights into the perceptions and responses to Mahatma Gandhi's struggle against colonialism. One noteworthy example is a cartoon published in the 1948 edition of the *'Evening Standard,'* a prominent British Journal, crafted by the renowned British cartoonist David Low[34]. The cartoon artfully portrays the reactions of a businessman and a politician to

the standards set by Gandhi for personal conduct. Employing a unique style and a satirical tone, the cartoon conveys the prevailing sentiment within the ruling circle, suggesting that Gandhi was perceived as an impractical idealist who failed to comprehend the complexities of the real situation. Gandhi's commitment to peace and nonviolence, central to his political activism against British rule in India, is illuminated through the cartoon. In creating this visual narrative, David Low shapes a specific mindset by showcasing Gandhi's unwavering confidence in challenging British dominance. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the inherent political motivation and satirical perspective embedded in David Low's cartoon. A similar trend is evident in another cartoon titled 'Gandhi Goes to War,' published in the *Prager Presse* in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in 1930. This cartoon visualizes the historic Dandi March, employing visual, symbolic, metaphorical, and linguistic elements. Numerous cartoons circulated worldwide during this period, published by various newspapers with a primary objective: to disseminate Gandhi's vision of peace as an alternative to the post-World War II crisis[35]. Amid a global struggle to overcome the aftermath of the war, Gandhi's vision garnered significant attention on an international scale. In India, this message permeated through cartoons presented in diverse regional languages, advocating for freedom and *Swaraj*. The depiction of the *Dandi* March in cartoons, exemplified by "*Gandhi Goes to War*," not only fosters a sentimental image and emotional appeal among Indian audiences but also garners sympathy from foreign viewers.

Source: gandhimedia.org

The influence of *British Punch*'s politically motivated style is palpable in developing a mission undertaken by a group of cartoonists. This mission aims to visualize the *Dandi* March and other significant issues, ultimately catalyzing a transformative shift in the thought processes of India's common audience[36]. This shift can also be marked in Indian cartooning and it exposes several Indian cartoonists adopted a nonviolent approach in depicting Gandhi's *Dandi* March, the political motivation embedded in their style remains evident. One of the key characteristics that appeared in Indian cartoons is the idea of peace within the satirical situation. This particular mode of visual representation played a pivotal role in uniting the common Indian populace by aggregating the sense of colonial oppression. The cartoons effectively showcase Gandhi's key intention to build peace and nonviolence, using his image as a symbolic representation to counteract colonial narratives in Indian cartoons[37]. In essence, visual storytelling through political cartoons emerged as a powerful tool that helps in amplifying Gandhi's vision. This project in Indian cartoons played a vital role in shaping public opinion and fostering a sense of unity among the Indian masses during the struggle for independence.

Gandhi's Role in India's Independence Movement

The emergence of Mahatma Gandhi on the political stage added a pivotal dimension to the narrative of India's struggle for independence, placing the principles of peace and nonviolence at the forefront of the discourse[38]. Gandhi's arrival altered the political landscape and introduced a novel strategy for challenging British rule in India. His commitment to peace and nonviolence became a cornerstone of the freedom movement, resonating globally and evoking widespread sympathy[39]. Gandhi's fearlessness and his peace mission were deeply rooted social and cultural notions that shaped public perception. Significantly, public opinion that the mission led a perspective against colonial policies aimed at suppressing the voices of the common populace. This mission of Gandhi extended beyond the realm of politics, permeating the works of writers, artists, and cartoonists who found themselves compelled to depict India's burgeoning independence movement and challenge to the British rule. Numerous cartoonists actively participated in in this movement led by Gandhi such as the *Champaran Satyagrah*, Non-Cooperation Movement, *Dandi* March, and the Quit India movement[40]. Using their cartoons, they chronicled these historical events on the one hand and emphasized Gandhi's mission and non- violence as a potent weapon against colonial power[41]. Even then, it is a fact that most of the early political cartoons of Gandhi published by Indian newspapers and

Magazines depicted him with an elephant, representing India as a mentally colonised country[42]. This approach of Indian cartoonists was very complex social and cultural symbols that emotionally connected to the wider population and heuristic cues for cognitive elaboration or sharing an argument using association, connotation, and juxtaposition[43].

Whether in Indian or Western cartoons, the theme of nonviolence played a pivotal role in shaping the perspectives conveyed by the artwork. Western cartoons covering India's independence movements consistently underscored Mahatma Gandhi's stature as a central figure in the struggle for India's freedom. The depiction of Gandhi's image became a recurring motif in hundreds of cartoons published both within and outside India, symbolizing the essence and perspective of the country's independence movement[44]. Consequently, the portrayal of India's evolving struggle for independence in cartoons was profoundly influenced by the iconic image of Gandhi and his unwavering commitment to combating colonial oppression through the principles of peace and nonviolence. In this case, political cartoons appeared to be the most convincing factor in India's independence movement[45].

In a compelling cartoon featured in *Kladderadatsch*, a popular humorous weekly in Berlin, a profound depiction of the global context during two world wars unfolds. Against this backdrop, India, led by Mahatma Gandhi, steadfastly moved towards independence, facing staunch opposition from the British. The cartoon strikingly portrays Gandhi in a relaxed position atop an elephant, surrounded by disciplined British military personnel.

Gandhi – Kladderadatsch, Berlin, Germany, c. 1930[46],

This visual narrative serves as a potent signal of Gandhi's image in Germany and other Western countries. His comfortable posture underscores Gandhi's commitment to nonviolence, portraying him as a leader who effectively combated colonial power by uniting the common masses. The cartoon subtly exposes the fearless demeanor and critically defined Gandhi's image and poised stance against the British military, posing populist sentiment at the forefront of India's independence movement. Moreover, fearlessness emanates from a particular context rooted in the principles of peace and nonviolence. Gandhi emerged as a pivotal advocate for nonviolence in the aftermath of the two World Wars, where countless lives were lost, posing a significant challenge to human civilization[47]. The popularity of Mahatma Gandhi and his nonviolent mission was a response to the crisis that emerged from the World Wars, prompting a re-evaluation of existing ways of life and a call for peace and democracy. In this case, Herold J. Laski, in his article "*The Crisis in Our Civilization*," echoed these sentiments, justifying the demand for peace and democracy in the face of evolving weaponry. The quote, 'Our weapons are different, Mr. Gandhi, but one of us must finally win,' from Simplicissimus, Munich, as cited in Durga Das's *'Gandhi in Cartoons'*[48], encapsulates the evolving dynamics.

"Our weapons are different, Mr. Gandhi, but one of us must finally win," Simplicissimus, Munich from Durga Das, Gandhi in Cartoons[49].

Numerous cartoons, both within and outside India, delved into the gravity of World War II, gravitating towards Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence. Addressing the broader question of human civilization, these cartoons leveraged Gandhi's iconic image to symbolize the

essence of nonviolence. Examples such as *"Wait for the Rope Trick"* by Shanker in 1942 and *"Reluctant Dragon"* by Vikram Verma, published in Down in 1944, stood out for their impactful narratives. These cartoons, inherently motivated, challenged power dynamics and the suppressive policies of the colonial state in India. These cartoons make a significant contribution to the discourse on nonviolence during a tumultuous period in global history.

The Role of Political Cartoons in Shaping Public Opinion

The widespread popularity of Mahatma Gandhi throughout India served as a powerful indicator of the burgeoning anti-colonial sentiment. It sparked a new wave of resistance across Indian society breaking social and cultural boundaries. Gandhi's outspoken criticism of the Modern Industrial civilization imposed by the colonial state in India positioned him as a relentless critic. He viewed this civilization as satanic, capable of eroding cultural values and ethics that traditionally bound society together[50]. Gandhi's critique underscored his concerns about colonial repression and expansionist policies in India, providing a crucial backdrop for the portrayal of his various political activities that reshaped the trajectory of India's independence movement. In this context, depicting Gandhi and his political endeavours of nonviolence became a central theme, symbolizing the voice of the common public silently protesting against colonial oppression. These depictions had a profound impact on the collective consciousness of the population. It is crucial to note that Gandhi's role was not merely symbolic but was grounded in realism and aligned with the principles of nonviolence. His advocacy for applying "moral force" in politics aimed to foster unity against British oppressive policies in India.

Gandhi's pragmatic efforts to transform the nation into a bastion of nonviolent resistance against colonial power left an indelible mark. In a letter dated April 12, 1919, Rabindranath Tagore publicly hailed Gandhi as a *"great leader of man"* who emerged to revive the "Idea" of India. This ideal stood against both the vengeful hidden revenge and the submissive terror-stricken demeanour imposed by colonial forces[51]. Gandhi's contribution to the anti-colonial movement and his resistance against repressive colonial policies were inherently political, aimed at awakening the common masses to the harsh realities of colonial oppression. The visual representation of Gandhi's principled activism in political cartoons thus played a pivotal role in shaping public sentiment, fostering unity, and contributing to the larger anti-colonial narrative in India. Following the same perspective, numerous satirical and critical cartoons were pivotal in shaping India's independence

movement, serving as powerful tools to challenge colonial policies. The cartoons, characterized by a high level of motivation, can be broadly categorized into two groups. The first category encompasses nationalist cartoons published by Indian newspapers and magazines. Utilizing Gandhi's image, these cartoons safeguarded social and cultural values and formed alliances with local powers to confront colonial policies. The imagery of Gandhi became a symbol of resistance, both preserving the essence of Indian identity and posing a challenge to the colonial authority. In the second category, cartoons published outside India took a highly critical stance towards both local and colonial powers. Here, Gandhi's method of nonviolence emerged as a central theme, depicting it as a key determinant in Gandhi's battle against British rule. A poignant example is the *Salt Satyagraha* initiated by Gandhi from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad during his historic march to *Dandi*. This movement gained widespread popularity across India, and cartoonists from India and other countries played a significant role in globalizing its impact. The visualization of this historic march through cartoons constituted the image of Gandhi as a key figure of anti- colonial struggle on the one hand and helped the movement to get widespread support on the other hand. Despite this, cartoonists skilfully depicted Gandhi's image in their cartoons and amplified the influence of the *Salt Satyagraha*. The visualization of this movement was seen particularly in a cartoon titled *"Move Over"* published by the American newspaper Springfield Leader in 1930, which portrayed Gandhi with increased confidence and fearlessness. This cartoon and others contributed to the serious depiction and visualization of the issue by artists worldwide.

The depiction of Gandhi's image in cartoons unfolds in dual dimensions, offering a nuanced portrayal beyond mere representation. Primarily, it serves as a conduit for localized sentiments, fostering a collective sense of unity among the Indian populace. Secondly, these cartoons crystallize Gandhi's unyielding commitment to society and individuals, capturing the essence of his ideals. In the visual realm, cartoons emerge as dynamic catalysts for change, propelling the momentum of India's arduous struggle for independence onto the global stage. An illustrative example of this transformative power is evident in the cartoon titled *'Move Over,'* crafted by a US-based artist and published in the USA. This artwork not only resonates with Indian sentiments but also through a familiar visualization style, bridging cultural gaps. Similarly, Indian cartoonist Shanker has made substantial contributions, skilfully infusing his creations with local cultural values and ethical nuances[52]. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that Shankar's lens was not always aligned with Gandhi's political

Source: gandhimedia.org

perspective. In 1939, Gandhi himself expressed his discontent through a postcard critiquing Shanker's cartoons, revealing instances of constructive disagreement[53]. Enver Ahmad, a pioneering political cartoonist in undivided India (1909-1992), achieved fame for his caricatures of Mahatma Gandhi published in the daily *'The Down'*[54]. Ahmad's works encapsulated various facets of Gandhi's social and political activities. Recently, the Indian Institute of Cartoonists (IIC) in Bengaluru exhibited Ahmad's creations, providing tangible evidence of Gandhi's enduring impact on political cartoons. This dynamic interplay between Gandhi's image and political cartoons illustrates the multifaceted nature of their influence. Beyond a surface-level portrayal, these cartoons mirror the evolving socio-political landscape, encapsulating unity and dissent in the narrative of India's journey toward independence.

Depiction of Gandhi's Struggle

Mahatma Gandhi's multifaceted struggle against colonial power employed diverse modes and strategies; it centrally focused on the principles of civil disobedience and non-cooperation[55]. Two pivotal aspects of Gandhi's struggle stand out within this dynamic context. The first aspect appeals to the spirit of nationalism, while the second grounds Gandhi's historical resistance in Indian culture, society, and ethics. These dimensions have etched an enduring imprint on history, serving as a wellspring of inspiration for movements worldwide and

influencing various facets of human life. Encapsulated in these aspects, Gandhi's approach accentuates both the perspective of colonial oppression and the transformative impact of the principles of peace and nonviolence. Cartoons played a crucial role in popularizing Gandhi's image as an anti-colonial with a staunch advocate of India's independence movement[56]. It provides a visual narrative that resonates with a broad audience. The role of cartoonists and their works, in this context, becomes subordinated to Gandhi's overarching vision of peace and nonviolence. Following a similar perspective, an exemplary illustration is found in the cartoon titled '*The Ghost Walks in India*,' published in the American newspaper *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in 1930. This artwork visualizes the context of Gandhi's civil disobedience movement, offering a glimpse into the genuine concerns driving Mahatma Gandhi's actions[57]. The pattern of visualization, narrative, and storytelling structure employed in this cartoon starkly exposes how the movement altered public opinion in America. Capturing the march on the salt depot at *Dharsana* on May 21, 1930, where approximately 2000 volunteers participated, an American journalist reflected, 'In eighteen years of my reporting in 20 countries, during which I have witnessed innumerable civil disturbances, riots, street fights, and rebellions, I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at *Dharsana*.

In a parallel vein, the cartoon titled *'The British Lion Shows His Teeth,'* published by the Dutch newspaper *Haagsche Post* in 1930, provides a captivating perspective that politically diverges from the prevailing narrative on Gandhi's civil disobedience movement and his principle of nonviolence. The cartoon presents an intriguing lens through which to examine the multifaceted nature of Gandhi's struggle and its portrayal in cartoons. Understanding this context requires acknowledging two crucial aspects. Firstly, it becomes apparent that a majority of the cartoons, to varying degrees, adopt a critical perspective. This critical lens shapes a subjective opinion concerning Gandhi's commitment to peace and nonviolence and shows a deep commitment to strengthen India's independence movement. The nuances within these visual narratives contribute to a complex and diverse spectrum of viewpoints surrounding Gandhi's principles and his mission to fight against injustice. Secondly, as depicted in these cartoons, Gandhi's anti-colonial struggle is often portrayed with a nationalistic fervor, placing a primary focus on colonial oppressions. The visual representation not only encapsulates the essence of Gandhi's mission but also reinforces the idea that his movement was deeply rooted in the collective struggle against colonial injustices. This dual dimension of critical perspective and nationalistic fervor within the

The Ghost Walks in India - *Post-Dispatch*, St. Louis, USA, 1930, retrieved from *www.gandhimedia.org*

realm of political cartoons adds layers of interpretation to Gandhi's role in India's fight for independence.

Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi emerged as a pivotal figure in India's struggle for independence, spearheading a relentless battle against British rule that significantly contributed to the anti-colonial movement. This paper has centered its exploration on comprehending Gandhi's anti-colonial endeavours through the lens of political cartoons. The portrayal of Gandhi in these visual narratives played a crucial role in influencing global artistic expressions and amplifying the collective voice against colonial power.

Frequently depicted as the leader of the anti-colonial movement, Gandhi employed the method of nonviolence, showcasing a multifaceted approach encompassing self-discipline and astute political strategies. These facets of Gandhi's nonviolent methodology challenged existing power relations and solidified his position as a vanguard in India's anti-colonial struggle.

This paper has delved into the intriguing aspect of Gandhi's resistance against British rule, specifically focusing on the role of nonviolence and its depiction in cartoons. The portrayal of Gandhi's nonviolent methods effectively disseminated the principles of justice, truth, and peace, presenting an innovative vision for societal transformation. The principle of nonviolence, championed by Gandhi and widely popularized through cartoons, has left an enduring imprint on the realm of visual storytelling. It propagates the concept of human harmony, countering violence with peace, truth, and justice. Additionally, "it acknowledges conflict as a natural occurrence but positions nonviolence as a potent state of mind that challenges existing authority and power relations"[58]. This significant aspect of Indian cartooning, prevalent during the colonial period, vividly portrays historical and political events, emphasizing Gandhi's unwavering struggle against British dominion.

The profound influence of Gandhi's principles extended to the active participation of numerous cartoonists in pivotal movements against British rule, such as the *Champaran* Movement, Non-Cooperation Movement, *Dandi* March, and Quit India Movement. Through their cartoons, these artists visualized historical events and popularized Gandhi's commitment to peaceful means and nonviolent resistance against British rule in India[59]. This impact resonates not only in Indian cartoons but also in Western counterparts, where the doctrine of nonviolence conspicuously intersects with a humanistic perspective, constituting a poignant expression of the anti-colonial struggle.

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Maneuvring Solidarity in Classrooms: Gandhian Educational Experiments and the Making of Citizens

Ushasi Banerjee

ABSTRACT

The Nation of India was imagined by English-educated intellectuals in the late 19th century but was isolated from the illiterate masses due to exclusivist communitarian values and socio-cultural norms. Education was necessary to overcome cleavages over caste, religion, linguistic, and regional lines. Gandhi's unique design of school curriculum and non-academic practices in ashrams aimed to create solidarity among learners, preparing them for dedicated national service. This paper demonstrates how education can promote cohesion among diverse social sectors.

Keywords: *solidarity, hierarchy, Nation, education, children*

Introduction and Context

'JUNAGADH, A MOSLEM STATE in Kathiawad, … possesses a well-regulated college … The new Nawab, a few days ago, issued a *ukase* expelling all non-Kathiawadi students within twenty-four hours … In my opinion, [the Kathiawadi students] should leave the college in a body after lodging a respectful protest. They will buy their free education at too dear a price if they have not the manliness to show their *sympathy to their fellow-students* by leaving the college.'[1]

At the height of the Khilafat Movement, the Nawab of Junagadh expelled the non-Kathiawadi (mostly Sindhis) Muslim learners from the college without any apparent wrongdoings on their part. Gandhi

vociferously condemned this sheer act of injustice foisted on the innocent students. He urged the remaining Kathiawadi students to leave the college and stand in solidarity with their classmates. But, was the socio-cultural context of the time conducive to making space for the development of empathy and compassion for individuals of different religions and regions? By and large, no.

The anecdote alludes to an inherent stumbling block that continues to complicate the conception of Indian nationalism – how can a cementing force be engendered among the individuals belonging to culturally diverse communities and integrate them into a single political entity? Emile Durkheim has theorised that modern societies replaced the mechanical solidarity based on the 'sameness' of individuals with an organic one formed through interdependence and division of labour in Nation-States. Sinisa Malesevic has observed that all 'genuine solidarity' is essentially mechanical. It involves persistent emotional commitment, such as directing parental or other forms of devotion into the nationalist discourse.[2] Thus, though the economic bases of modern nation-states tend to rest on the division of labour and harmony among the citizens, its sustenance or permanence is inevitably ensured through stronger feelings of oneness transcending micro-level community consciousness. This paper explores how Gandhi envisaged his educational scheme and structured the curriculum in his ashrams to facilitate the rise of solidarity among 'future citizens' from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Before delving into it, it is necessary to overview the *bildungsroman* of the idea of Indian nationalism preceding the arrival of the Mahatma at the centre stage of British Indian politics in the 1920s.

The Nation of India was started to be imagined by English-educated intellectuals at the end of the 19th century, marking the beginning of the formulation of nationalist mentalities. The protagonists, however, were 'leaders without a following'[3], isolated by the diction of rationality and sophistication from the illiterate, subaltern masses. The exclusivist communitarian values and socio-cultural norms prevailing in the subcontinent easily fuelled regional, linguistic, or communal solidarity and subsequently hindered the growth of cross-cultural nationalist sentiments. To situate the problem in the intellectual space, it can be said that the pockets of social solidarity based on an individual or community's pre-modern identities were not yet engineered to facilitate the overarching idea of the Indian Nation.[4] At this juncture, Gandhi provided a sound ideological basis for navigating micro-level communitarian bonds and integrating them within a single political entity.[5] He employed numerous tactics to achieve the end through non-violent resistance

movements but the allegories of Hindu-Muslim unity, class cooperation, etc., proved to be rather ephemeral. The Nation-building project necessitated more rigid social ties among its citizens to supersede deep-rooted cleavages perpetrated over caste, religion, linguistic, or regional lines. In other words, the 'project' was not only restricted to political or economic reformulation but entailed emotional transformation. Education provided a meaningful tool to infiltrate the attributes of empathy, fellow feeling, or compassion into the mindscape of the children to conceive genuine solidarity among them. It will be demonstrated in this paper that Gandhi's unique design of school curriculum and non-academic practices in the *ashrams* were geared towards creating a new kind of solidarity among the learners and particularly aimed to prepare the students for dedicated national service.

The educational initiative was experimented with during the peak hour of the nationalist movement, and it endorsed the purpose of a modern education system that sought to manoeuvre young minds into obedience to authority. Krishna Kumar observed that the agenda of colonial education was to train the natives to be a citizen by adhering to the definitions of civilization and modernity outlined by the Britons.[6] The 'literati' who had earned the distinction of 'colonial citizens', internalised the modern purpose of education. They inherited the moral responsibility of the 'civilised' to train the non-literates to be free from passionate impulses and be rationally guided to further their commercial and political (nationalist) interests. In other words, they showed the similar paternalistic attitude of the British and intended to incorporate 'nationalist ethos', instead of imperialist ones into the new educational ideal. Though a staunch opponent of modern civilization, Gandhi accepted the rationale underlining colonial educational drive. His educational enterprises, including a well-crafted curriculum, sought to produce thoroughly responsible moral beings practising the vows of self-restraint and discipline, dedicated to the cause of the society, community, or Nation.[7]

The foremost prerequisite for taking forward the 'project' of infiltrating the nationalist gospel was to expand the demographic base in the schools, a fact that was culturally and economically restricted. The first section of this paper will elaborate on the stages in which mass education could be materialised in Indian society, with special attention to Gandhi's commitment to do so. It will provide the context in which the demographic base was expanded in educational institutions. The second section will demonstrate how Gandhi designed the rules of his *ashram* to facilitate the development of companionship and fellow feeling among the inmates. The third section

will delve deeper into the practical problems of the instrumentalist agenda of imparting education to preach the 'civic religion'.[8] The emancipatory prospects of education seriously threatened the existing status quo in Indian society. During the colonial times, acquiring English education became sufficient for upward economic mobility along the social ladder. However, the nation-making project would grossly suffer if all children aspired for white-collar jobs after educating themselves. Hence, debates ensued to formulate policies that would educate children on the gospel of nationalism and encourage them to serve dedicatedly in the sphere assigned to them while acknowledging the necessity and respectability of others serving in other spheres. Therefore, older communitarian or caste-based ties had to be replaced with broad-based national ties among the people working in different sectors. It will elucidate how Gandhi's educational experiments thrived in inculcating solidarity among children from diverse social backgrounds while not endorsing the radical prospects of mass education.

Demographic Composition in Classrooms

The site of the classroom, through common experiences, aspirations, and anxieties, has the potential to promote a new kind of companionship among its inmates that cut across the barriers perpetuated by caste, class, religious, regional, and gender differences. However, that required not only the presence of children of different descends to occupy the space but also the primacy of the student's identity, shadowing his/her familial or socio-religious ones. This mental disposition had to be curated, maintained, and internalised through a wide range of physical or visual collective activities like wearing uniform attire, sharing seats, playground, daily routine, and food, and being the recipient of the same treatment from teachers and authorities, spiritual learning, etc. The project of creating student identity divorced from micro-level community consciousness was ultimately tied to the end of conceiving an ideal citizen for the incipient Nation. Keeping the broader objectives in mind, the following section will explore how the pressing need for mass education opened the access of classrooms to those debarred from it historically.

During pre-colonial times, the tols, pathshalas, maktabs and madrasas served as the institutions imparting education to different religions' children until the early nineteenth century. Generally, the boys belonging to the upper three castes attended the elementary schools. Amit Kumar Suman has observed that the Brahmin boys often did not attend the common schools as accounting was the chief subject of instruction. They studied the initial years at home before embarking

on higher studies.[9] William Adam's Report shows that very few lower-caste children attended missionary or native schools.[10] Therefore, access to learning houses was conventionally restricted to the high-born in Hindu society on the eve of the introduction of English education. Many Hindu boys from the Kayastha caste went to Patna to learn Persian to secure employment under the Nawabi administration. Both Kayastha and Muslim boys enrolled here in the eighteenth century, providing an incidence where students of inter-religious faith shared a common classroom experience in pre-colonial times.[11] Raja Rammohan Roy's case can offer the most elusive example of this. Though such spaces facilitated inter-cultural transactions and healthy exchanges in the 'public' domain, this can be taken as another instance of 'assimilation from a distance'.[12] The pre-colonial education system primarily sought to equip the learners with an array of skill sets or knowledge necessary to take up familial professions. Higher education or Sanskrit learning in *Gurukula*, monopolised mostly by the Brahmins, barring a few exceptions, aimed at personal spiritual development and attaining salvation.[13] Thus, segregated classrooms and socio-cultural rigidity in pre-colonial times stemmed from the rationale that determined the contours of a steeply hierarchical social system by insulating one group from the other physically and ritualistically.

After initial experimentations with indigenous forms of education during the first quarter of 19th century, the education system got progressively anglicised after the sanction of the infamous Macaulay's Minute (1835) and the Wood's Despatch (1854). The prospect of securing a clerical job in government offices and corresponding economic and cultural mobility induced the natives to send their boys to English schools. However, this was restricted to the upper/middle classes as most of these schools received small Government grants or were private enterprises. For instance, in the secondary English schools of Madras during 1912-1917, most of the boys came from landowning families, and some were sons of officials and traders.[14] English education flourished most in Bengal – the craze for it percolated among the richer cultivating classes like Chasi Kaivarttas and Muslims, pushing the upper-castes like Baidyas, Kayasthas, Brahmans or Brahmos towards further education due to the increasing competition for 'respectable' jobs.[15] Though the discrepancy in literacy rate or enrolment ratio between upper-caste and depressed classes was huge,[16] the English schools offered, for the first time, a common classroom experience with similar aims of acquiring clerical jobs and respectability to the high-born and low-born alike. The ritualistic barriers that had monopolised the educational sphere for the upper

castes and apprentices in the pre-colonial period blurred with the introduction of secular policies guiding entry into these institutions. The institutional changes, however, were not enough as the social prejudices hindered the rise of companionship among learners from different familial backgrounds. Often, differential treatment was meted out to the boys of lower caste. For instance, B.R. Ambedkar recorded in his reminiscence that he was not allowed to sit on benches alongside caste Hindu students and ended up attending classes by squatting in a corner. Numerous dehumanising practices like denial to provide water were quite normalised within the school premises.[17] The socio-cultural predicaments posed by the myths of untouchability, purity, and pollution restricted intermingling among students belonging to different castes and religions, even though they were sharing the same physical space. Within the apparent secular framework, therefore, the colonial education system harboured discriminatory social practices through the processes of systemic segregation, otherisation and dehumanisation. This was a threat to the development of any cross-cultural solidarity among the students, a fundamental prerequisite for nationalist sentiment incorporating ALL.

Schooling, at least at the elementary level, was necessary for regional, communitarian, or national development. Since the 1920s, many intellectuals felt the need to bring children of different social backgrounds to the schools as an extended part of the nationalist project. Free schools were established to draw in poor children, as in the Howrah district between 1925 and 1926.[18] They aimed at holistic development of the child, implying expansion of his mental, physical, and social worldview. Chittaranjan Das emphasized the need for students to connect with their socio-cultural surroundings and be aware of political happenings of the time instead of remaining cocooned within their small world of intellectual brilliance and prospective career.[19] It was, however, not enough to drag them within classrooms but to arrange the paraphernalia to facilitate the development of companionship among the inmates. The Scouts' Movement in India instilled compassionate and empathetic feelings for fellows of other social backgrounds and went a long way in cementing ties among the adolescents and youths.[20]

Mahatma Gandhi dealt with this problem sensibly and devised his phenomenal solutions through the infamous educational experiments. The groundwork for this campaign was drawn back during his stay at South Africa, in June or July 1911 at Tolstoy Farm, in the Transvaal region.[21] Students from various ethno-religious backgrounds, including Parsees, Muslim, Madrasis, Bengalis, and Gujratis, lived and learnt together as blood-brothers.[22] Gandhi

contemplated about this unique classroom experience and maintained that such superfluous differences of culture can be covered up through character-building or commonality of the heart.[23] Moreover, manual work and shared discipline facilitated the development of a bond among them, transcending ethno-religious commonality or differences. He founded the Gujarat Vidyapith in Ahmedabad as a response to his call to boycott Government schools and colleges in the manifesto of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920. In his unprecedented attempt to not cooperate with the British Raj, the boycott of the 'clerk-producing factories' aimed to encumber the Empire's magnanimous administrative machinery.[24] As Gandhi and others had set up, the national schools served more than this explicit political purpose and emerged as 'citizen-producing entities'. Apart from making them literate or skilled, it became equally important to prepare them morally for the role of citizenship.[25]

Firstly, he made it a point that the classroom represents the demographic diversity of the subcontinent. In a speech delivered at National Education Conference held at Ahmedabad on August 1, 1924, Gandhi emphasized on the presence of *antyaja* children in national schools as equals. He gave the clarion call – "Let us stand fearlessly on truth and maintain that the school which the Antyaja children cannot attend is not a national school, not a school for swaraj, not a non-co-operation school".[26] The Vidyapith made provisions for admitting the *antyaja* children at the face of sheer opposition from some teachers and most parents. The Resolutions of the above-mentioned Conference also noted that the learning spaces shall strive to promote brotherhood among Hindus, Muslims and children of other faiths.[27] At National Education Conference held at Hardwar in 1927, Gandhi urged the teachers to ensure that any sort of fanatical practices of any religion be strictly condemned and sought to design the national schools as hub of Hindu-Muslim fraternity.[28] This was a fundamental hurdle that Gandhi had to pass before he could delve into the task of planning academic curriculum and structuring the ashram life so that companionship and empathy among classmates could be instilled into the children.

Practising Comradeship

Gandhi sought to modulate, particularly, three most important aspects of the students' lives in his *ashrams* – a) The students were provided with a very simple yet strictly disciplined way of life, b) As a corollary to the previous point, they had to be self-reliant and self-supporting for catering to their daily needs and c) It was compulsory for them to participate actively in the community or social services. Firstly, the

rules and regulations were applicable to all, diluting the tradition of differential treatment that had been meted out to the children of marginalised communities in society. Secondly, performing acts of services or menial works was restricted to the sudras and untouchables, and this ostracised them as polluted beings from the high-caste quarters who only engaged in intellectual or skillful works. The lines of purity and pollution got dissolved by cleaning, cooking and attending to one's own bodily needs. Thirdly, catering to the social needs of the underprivileged and unfortunate groups would allow the students to connect with their surroundings, inducing empathy. All these collectively created a different context that would facilitate the development of cohesion among the children detached from their hitherto familial ties.

A concomitant feature of modern schooling has been its disciplinary measures and methods of punishment.[29] Rabindranath Tagore condemned the authority's indifferent and somewhat cruel attitude towards children's natural response to impulses most vociferously.[30] Gandhi, a staunch opponent of anything associated with modern civilization, endorsed the practice of self-discipline, made the children of his *ashram* internalise it but materialised it through loving gestures. A very beautiful example of this can be found in Narayan Desai's recollection of his experiences at Sabarmati *ashram* that shows that "Gandhi was a disciplinarian, not a dictator; and was a friend to children".[31] The mundane, daily activities were tuned to the sound of the bell, which Desai had counted, rang fifty-six times a day.[32] Moreover, Gandhi instructed the students to practice self-restraint in the form of observing austerity, diligence and *brahmacharya* to fight the miseries of indolence, indulgence, superstition and surrender to carnal impulses.[33] Like other ashramites, the learners wore khadi clothes and collectively ate simple, nutritious food.

All these arrangements had huge transformative potential – Gandhi would call it 'character-building' exercise or kindling 'commonality of the heart'. Inter-dining and stringent code of behaviour institutionalised for all pupils, irrespective of familial backgrounds, served to be quite effective in mitigating caste-based, discriminatory norms. Adhering to simple means of living and clothing blurred out class or caste privileges depicted through it. Additionally, sharing every minute of day, especially during adolescence, naturally led to developing a very strong companionship among the inmates, alleviating the influence of earlier solidarities based on caste, class or religious identities. Loosely, this can be taken as a replacement of pre-modern mechanical solidarity with another form of mechanical solidarity based on classroom experiences.

An extension of simple and disciplined mode of living was instituted through supporting own daily needs. Participation in manual labour is configured as an important pillar of Gandhian social thought.[34] The indignation of working by hand institutionalised segregation in Hindu society, labelling the workers as untouchables. Gandhi, in his attempt to abolish the abominable practice, sought to invalidate the associated disrespect by urging all his disciples to perform it voluntarily and on a regular basis.[35] He blamed the colonial education system for emphasizing too much intellectual development, ignoring moral or physical development. As a result, society has become dysfunctional as individuals lose the harmonious balance between their mind and body.[36] He himself undertook the task of cleaning a village named Maganwadi near Sevagram ashram.[37] He even urged his students to keep their surroundings tidy and not be fearful of losing dignity for cleaning latrines.[38] The *ashram* inmates were fed in the community kitchen run by the youngsters on rotation, and they even grew vegetables on a patch of land around the residence.[39] The exceptional and, in a way, revolutionary aspect of this self-supporting programme was the act of spinning. This simple act not only allowed the students to stitch their own *khadi* cloth but also provided them with a source of income so much so as to finance their education.[40] Gandhi's formulation of this technique of self-financing schooling system solved the tedious problem of convincing the Government to grant aid. Learning the art of making handicrafts was at the core of his pedagogical philosophy and the resultant scheme of *nai taleem*.[41] It was adopted by other Gandhians like Satish Dasgupta and Anilmohan Gupta in Bengal.[42] Consequently, not only spinning, the children were encouraged to embark upon lessons on carpentry, tailoring, dyeing, printing, book-binding, weaving, carpet-making, shoe-making and leather-work.[43] Participation in manual labour by high-caste students blurred the familial tradition of abstaining from *karmayoga* and made them stand alongside the *antyajas* as comrades. The pre-modern social hierarchies lost their legitimacy through all these activities, which paved the way for developing new bonds strengthened and sustained by living/practising them through everyday activities.

From a very early stage, the students had to be actively involved in community services. In this case, Gandhi endorsed the Western concept of drilling alongside indigenous games for cultivating physical expertise necessary for carrying out the heavy and difficult tasks of society like extinguishing fire, rescuing people from drowning, carrying the sick and disabled, etc.[44] The colonial education system detached its benefactors from their roots or surroundings to the extent that they almost found their neighbours alien. Gandhi accused English

education for perpetuating this seemingly unbridgeable distance between the members of civil society and the masses and designed the life of children in his *ashram* so that they remain grounded and connected to the happenings around them. He was of the opinion that the students could not restrict their worldview to a particular province, community, or caste but need to learn to think about all sections of society, including drunkards, hooligans, prostitutes, and other underprivileged sections.[45] Regular community services provided the best solution to achieve this goal. Even after the death of Gandhi, this remained ingrained into the curriculum of the Sevagram school, as the students, including Dr. Abhay Bang dedicated themselves to the Bhoodan Movement of Vinoba Bhave in the districts of Bihar in the 1960s.[46] This noble practice gave the students great exposure to the reality of Indian village life. They learned to be empathetic and cooperative towards the physically incapable or culturally marginalised. They thus groomed themselves well to be responsible citizens dedicated to the cause of the betterment of their compatriots.

So far, it has been explained how Gandhi sought to eradicate the pre-modern ties from the minds of the students and promoted a new basis for broader social cohesion by organising their activities and trying to regulate their thoughts in his *ashrams.* The lines of cleavage along caste, religion, or regional identities were attenuated by the uniformity of everyday lives and commitment towards the same cause of serving society or the incipient Nation as responsible citizens. In other words, the identity of a citizen gained primacy over the previous ones. They began to identify more with their peers, irrespective of their family background, than the older status-based groups. This created the emotional basis of nationalist sentiment, a forerunner to the kind of solidarity necessary to conceive a Nation and sustain the State. However, it would be wrong to assume that this emotional department of the nationalist project advocated egalitarianism by breaking existing social hierarchies to foster solidarity. It created new, supposedly secular, hierarchies while aspiring to maintain cohesion in a respectful and harmonious manner. The following section will show how Gandhi crafted a design within his educational discourse to institute the themes of interdependence and division of labour to preserve stability and social order.

Hierarchy, Mutual respect, and Social Order

Mass education had its own emancipatory prospects in colonial society. As the educational field was democratised, this posed a serious threat to the existing status quo as the marginalised sections could improve their socio-economic situation using their newfound certificates as

capital.[47] A nation-state, however, is a steeply hierarchical entity, and the myth of nationalism is presented specifically to perpetuate the stratified politico-social structure. Therefore, the radical prospect of mass education had to be neutralised to suit the ends of modelling ideal citizens.

Since the 1920s, the intelligentsia sought to frame policies so that checks and balances could be introduced and everyone would not get the ticket to the *bhadralok* class. Legislators like Priyanath Mallik of Howrah observed at a conference on primary education in 1926 that the curriculum ought to differ according to region or caste (or familial profession); otherwise, universal curriculum would induce more competition in clerical offices and speed up unemployment.[48] Unending debates continued in search of a unique solution that would maintain social stability, on the one hand, create a consciousness, through 'value education', to form close connections among people across the social spectrum, on the other. Gandhi accomplished This task best as he urged students of diverse social backgrounds to stay together and acknowledge each other's specialisation of labour in a harmonious and respectful manner. In other words, he succeeded in grafting the contours of stratification within the apparently egalitarian framework. This can be explained with the help of Gandhi's idea about compulsory elementary education and women's role in society.

Gandhi propounded an 'organismic' conception of society where the solidarity among individuals or groups stems from interdependence layered with mutual respect to ensure social harmony.[49] The *varna-shrama-dharma*, in his opinion, provided the basis of it. Individuals ought to submit willingly to the restraints institutionalised through the tradition of acquiring hereditary professions in the economic sphere and limiting access to decision-making in political sphere, for the well-being and stability of All. This civic virtue of sacrificing oneself for the greater good of society or the nation was instilled through the *ashram's* way of character-building and academic curriculum.[50] Moreover, he emphasized that following hereditary profession would allow more time for spiritual pursuits.[51] The Wardha Scheme of Education proposed free and compulsory education for children between seven and fourteen years old. During this time, the curriculum would be the same, and the objective was to take the child from the family and return him after seven years, as an 'earning unit' to the family, as a compassionate neighbour to the community, and as a diligent citizen to the Nation. The focus was on character-building and training of the child in a particular craftsmanship.[52] Civic training and economic contribution were the basic things that the Nation demanded of *every* child. Secondary

education or higher education was not for all, and this was how the avenue of upward mobility was discouraged and restricted. In the long run, this structure could only be sustained cautioned Gandhi if those commanding more power recognise the contribution of others and wielded it to promote not personal gains but overall well-being. Therefore, his scheme of primary education being free and compulsory for all created the space necessary to promote empathy and respectful attitude among children from diverse familial backgrounds in the ways discussed in the previous section. Additionally, restricting the scope for free and compulsory education to the school level laid the groundwork for the division of labour in society.

The educational scheme also perpetuated gendered division of labour. He argued that according to the natural disposition, the curriculum for boys and girls ought to differ after the elementary level. He believed in the strict demarcation of the men and women's domain of work and autonomy, i.e., the man needs to learn skills to manage the external affairs while the woman takes up the caring and nurturing roles inside the home. Though they were equals in terms of commanding respect, their responsibilities ought to complement each other. The woman was to be educated accordingly to become 'Mother to the Nation' and primary educators of children or future citizens.[53] He never endorsed formal education or even higher education for women. In a letter to Manilal and Sushila Gandhi, he instructed them to teach their daughters the art of home-keeping, child-care, and spinning and realize the true potential of their inner, intuitive power. On the other hand, he advocated for the abolition of superstitious practices and social evils like child marriage, prostitution, etc., that hindered the blossoming of feminine energy within women. The Wardha scheme also introduced free and compulsory education for women till fourteen years of age, but guardians could withdraw their daughters at the age of twelve if they so wished.[54] Education for women was, therefore, designed not to empower them to choose the destiny of their lives but to make them wise companions of their husbands and nurturers of the Nation's future generation.

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The education system that Gandhi conceived of was emancipatory for the marginalised or underprivileged groups but not always empowering. It institutionalised a strict division of labour according to one's economic position or sex, thereby maintaining the labor supply to all sectors and ensuring social stability. This served as the socio-economic basis of the State. Consequently, this division of labour

created cohesion in society based on the interdependence of individuals or groups. Such a form of organic solidarity, however, may be sufficient to run a sound administrative machinery, but it was not enough to ensure the longevity or legitimacy of civic nationalism in a pluralist state like India. For that, a new kind of emotional connection needed to be cultivated in the minds of the individuals or groups, and that came through the indoctrination of nationalist sentiments.[55] The anecdote at the very beginning of this paper exemplifies this. Gandhi urged the Kathiawadi students to stand in solidarity with their ex-peers. However, the basis of such commitment to peers from other religions and regions had not been ingrained in 1920. Like many others, Gandhi devised various tools to engineer cross-cultural feelings of oneness among the masses, and education was an impactful medium. His educational experiment was a phenomenal initiative within the nationalist project and posed an indispensable alternative to the rising forces of ethnic nationalism in the subcontinent.

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