



MAHATMA GANDHI AND M.S. GOLWALKAR: A STUDY IN CONTRAST & CONVERGENCE

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Great men in all generations have been anxious above everything else for the improvement of the lot of human beings all over the world. But the problem of the social common weal changes with the times and it is no exaggeration to say that it remains a formidable task for every age. Sometimes what happens is that even if the ultimate goal is the same, the means to achieve that goal can be many and varies. And this difference of approaches, even to achieve the same end, can generate a lot of controversy. This precisely what is assumed between Mahatma Gandhi and M.S. Golwalkar, the two great sons of India.

Prior to Guruji Dr.Hedgewar used to be a most active participant in all national meets and conferences. He presided over a Congress conference at Dehgaon village in April 1923. He had great reverence for Gandhi, in spite of his sharp differences with him in regard to several of his policies. When Gandhiji was arrested and convicted for six years on 18th march 1922, the 18th of every month came to be observed as Gandhi day till his release. On the occasion in October, this is what Hedgewar observed: "This is a most sacred day for us, for it is an occasion for us to listen to and contemplate on the noble virtues of the saintly life of Mahatmaji. And those, especially, who call themselves as his followers, have a special responsibility of emulating those qualities in their day-to-day life. The greatest virtue of Gandhiji lies in his capacity to dedicate himself wholly and solely for the To preach one thing and practice the opposite, would be the verge of what Gandhiji stands for. To shout Mahatma Gandhi and raise support of his programmes in the public meetings and then coolly walk back one's house and get totally lost in social affairs would be nothing less than hypocrisy... Let us not chant they hymn of peace just to cover up our

weakness. Let us first become physically stronger than our adversary and then speak the language of peace. It is the only one who is prepared to throw himself and family into the sacrificial fire of struggle that can rightly claim to be a follower of Gandhiji."

Such was the beautiful harmony he was building up between diametrically opposite viewpoints. He never felt any contradiction in his participating in the non-violent Satyagraha launched by Gandhiji and the following all its rules, even though he himself was a fiery revolutionary who believed that it was armed rebellion alone which would ultimately free the country from the shackles of foreign slavery.

The non-cooperation movement gradually died down, Gandhiji had he jailed. Many who had jumped into it in a momentary flush of enthusiasm were now disillusioned; they now sulked. On 5th February 1922, people in Chauri Chaura in Uttar Pradesh made a violent assault on the Police Station. They murdered 21 Policemen and one Officer, and set fire to the Police Station. then do you harp upon only 'Hindu-Muslim Unity' instead of promoting the unity of all the various sects?" Gandhiji replied, "This will secure the friendly attitude of Muslims toward our country. As you are witnessing, they can be persuaded to side wholeheartedly with us in the nationalist struggle."

Hedgewar said: "Long before this slogan of Hindu Muslim Unity came into vogue, many leading Muslims had identified themselves with our nation and worked shoulder to shoulder with Hindus under the leadership of Lokmanya Tilak - e.g., Barrister Jinnah, Dr. Ansari Hakim Ajmal Khan and others. But I am Afraid that this new slogan, instead of helping unity, might further aggravate the feeling of separateness among the Muslims".

When Mahatma Gandhi launched the 'Salt Satyagraha' in April 1930, both were naturally pleased. Many workers of the sangh sought permission to participate in the movement. Hedgewar wrote



to all the Shakhass: "...The Sangh as such has so far not resolved to participate in their personal capacity are free to do after obtaining permission from their Sanghachalaks."

A memorable event in the year 1934 was the visit of Mahatma Gandhi to the Wardha District Camp of the Sangh and the meeting between Gandhiji and Hedgewar. Gandhiji was then camping at Sevagram Ashram near Wardha. The Sangh camp was right opposite that house. Near about 1,500 Swayamsewaks of Wardha district were camping. Gandhiji had seen the preparations for setting up the camp. He also observed the camp activities from his residence and felt like seeing the camp from close quarters. He spoke to Mahadev Desai who in turn Gandhiji was shocked by the incident. He called off the non-cooperation movement on 12th February.

In all, over twenty thousand people had participated in the movement. What had prompted most of them was the slogan "Independence within one year." People therefore became dispirited when the movement came to a grinding halt. Gloom and disappointment stared them in the face. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, after he came out of the prison in 1923, described situation thus: "We felt exhilarated, but this was passing sensation, for the state of Congress politics was discouraging enough. In the place of ideals there were intrigues, and various cliques were trying to capture the Congress machinery by the usual methods which have made politics a hateful word to those who are at all sensitive." In such an environment, students who had forsaken their studies naturally went back to their books. Lawyers who had boycotted the courts recommenced their practice.

Even through the non-cooperation movement was directed against the government, it is clear that Gandhiji worked constantly with one eye on Hindu-Muslim Unity. He therefore set about trying to woo the Muslims by fully supporting the Khilafat movement. But Dr. Hedgewar and Guruji sensed danger in that move. In fact, they did not relish the newfangled slogan of 'Hind-Muslim Unity'. They once met Gandhiji to explain their viewpoint. Without mincing words, Hedgewar questioned Gandhiji: "There are in India people of various religions like Hinduism, Islam,

Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, etc. Whywrote to Appaji Joshi. Appaji immediately went and met Gandhiji and invited him:

"Please do- come whenever it is convenient for you. You will be most welcome." That was the day of silence for Gandhiji. He wrote on a slip of paper "I shall come at 6 tomorrow morning and shall spend an hour and a half there."

The next day, i.e. on 25th December 1934, Gandhiji arrived at the Sangh camp punctually at 6 a.m. All the Swayarnsevaks offered their pranam to him. Gandhiji was accompanied by Mahadev Desai, Mirabehn and a few others. After seeing the camp in its impressive get-up, Gandhiji patted Appaji on his back and said: "I am really delighted. I have not witnessed such a sight anywhere in the country before." He then inspected the kitchen. Food was prepared and served to over 1,500 people without the least fuss or confusion; the cost to each Swayamsevak came to just one rupee and a certain quantity of grain, and all the expenses of the camp were met by this; the Swayamsevaks themselves made up the short falls, if any. All this information astonished Gandhiji.

He later visited the sick ward and the tents of the Swayamsevaks. He was people of all castes and classes harmoniously engaged in work without any reservations. In order to confirm his observation, he interrogated the Swayamsevaks themselves. Their response was uniform: "There are no differences like Brahmin, Maratha, Aspris, hyas, etc., in the Sangh. We are in fact not even aware of what castes many of our Swayamsevak brethren belong to; nor are we interested in knowing it. It is enough for us that we are all Hindus." Gandhiji asked Appaji, "It appears almost impossible to ward off the evil of untouchability from our society. How has this phenomenon been made possible in the Sangh?" Appaji replied, "feelings of high and low, touchability and untouchability can be abolished only by emphasizing the inherent oneness of all Hindus. Then only will the spirit of fraternity be reflected in their sincere behaviour, and not merely in words."

By then it was time for the general assembly. The bugle was sounded. All the Swayamsevaks stood to attention. Flag was hoisted. In accordance with the Sangh custom, Gandhiji also joined Appaji in offering pranam to the Bhagawa Flag.

Gandhiji then visited the stores. Provisions and various requisites had been neatly arranged. There was a decorated it prominently displayed. Mahatmaji looked at it intently and enquired, "Whose portrait is this?"

"That portrait is of Dr.Hedgewar," replied Appaji.

"Is that the same Dr. Keshavrao Hedgewar you mentioned when we were talking about untouchability? How is he connected with the Sangh?"

"He is the Chief of the Sangh. We call him the Sarsanghachalak. All the activities of the Sangh are carried on under his guidance. It is he who has started the Sangh."

"Will it be possible to meet Dr.Hedgewar? If possible I want to hear about the Sangh from him directly."

"He is due to visit the camp tomorrow. If you desire, we shall bring him to you." Gandhiji then returned to his Ashram.



Next morning, Dr.Hedgwar arrived at the camp. That evening the valedictory function was held under the presidentship of Bhopatkar of Pune. Afterwards, at Gandhiji's invitation, Dr.Hedgwar went to meet him, accompanied by Appaji Joshi and Bhopatkar. The discussion between Dr.Hedgwar and Gandhiji extended for over hour. The general trend of discussion was as follows.

After preliminary exchange of courtesies, Gandhiji turned to a point uppermost in his mind:

"Doctor ji, your organization is admirable. I am aware of the fact that you were for many years a Congress worker. That being so, why did you not build such a volunteer cadre under the aegis of a popular organization like the Congress itself? Why did you float a separate organization?"

"It is true that I worked in the Congress. I was also the Secretary of the Swayamsevak Dal at the time of the 1920 session of the Congress, when my friend Dr.Paranjpe was the Dal President. Subsequently the two of us tried to build such a volunteer cadre inside the Congress. But our efforts were not successful. Hence this independent venture"-replied Hedgwar.

"Why did your attempt fail? Was it for want of financial assistance?"

"No, no! There was no dearth of funds. Money can be a great help, doubt. But money alone cannot accomplish everything. The problem that faced us was not one of money but of attitudes."

"Is it your opinion that noble-hearted people were not there in the Congress, or that they are not there now?"

"That isn't what I meant. There are many well-meaning people in the Congress. What are at issue are certain basic attitudes. The Congress has been formed primarily with a view to achieving a

political end. Its programmes have also been drawn up accordingly, and it needs volunteers to arrange for these programmes. The Congress leaders are therefore used to looking upon volunteers as unpaid servants who arrange chairs and benches during meetings and conferences. The Congress does not seem to believe that the problems of the nation can effectively solved only when there is a large and disciplined body of dedicated Swayamsevaks who are eager to serve the country of their own accord and without waiting for inspiration from elsewhere."

"What exactly is your conception of a Swayamsevak?"

"A Swayamsevak is one who would lovingly lay down his life for the all- round upliftment of the nation. To create and mould such Swayamsevaks is the aim of the Sangh. There is no distinction between a 'Swayamsevak' and a 'leader' in Sangh. All of us are Swayamsevaks and are therefore equal. We love and respect everybody equally. We give no room for any differences in status. We love and respect everybody equally. We give no room for any differences in status. This is in fact the secret of the remarkable growth of the Sangh in such a short period without any outside help, money or publicity." "I am indeed very glad. The country will certainly be benefited by the success of your efforts. I have heard of the vast following the Sangh has acquired in the Wardha district... How do you meet the expenses of such a huge organization?"

"The Swayamsevaks themselves bear the burden, each offering his mite as Gurudakshina."

"It looks as if your entire time is consumed by this work. How do you carry on your medical profession?"

"I have not taken to medicine as a profession."

"How then are you supporting your family?"

"I am not married."



Gandhiji was evidently taken by surprise. In the same surprised tone he said, "I see - you are not married! Very good. That explains the remarkable degree of success you have achieved in such a short duration!"

At the end, Doctorji said, "I have probably taken too much of your time. I have no doubt that, with your blessings, our efforts will succeed. Permit us to take your leave now."

Gandhiji came up to the door to bid farewell, and said, "Doctorji, with your character and sincerity, there is no doubt you will succeed." The conversation shows and otherwise also Hedgewar had great respect for the Mahatma. But the three incidents, viz., the Moplah Riots, the Khilafat Movement and the denunciation of the VandeMataram which had disturbed him and Golwalkar most. However, it was the third incident, i.e., the betrayal shown by the Congress towards the martyrs and the heroes of the nation by promising to drop certain stanzas from the National Anthem, which had set their head reeling. To kill the national spirit at the behest of the Maulana just to appease Muslim fundamentalists was nothing but a cruel joke with the nation. If the Congress could tolerate the insult to the National Anthem at the very hands of its President, Maulana Mohammad Ali, at the Kakinada Session, could it not easily compromise with the national ethos without remorse? If the Congress could think of killing its own heroes, could it not go to any length in future in the game of power politics, even to the extent of selling the nation to powerbrokers without any pangs of guilt? Surely, either national heroes nor national symbols nor national ethos were safe in the hands of the Congress, Guruji concluded.⁸

Guruji knew why and how the Congress was born in 185 to watch the interests of the British more than those of the Indians. No doubt, with the passage of time and the advent of leaders like Aurobindo, Tagore, Tilak and Gandhi, it had gone somewhat national in its outlook but at the

bone-marrow level it was supposed to carry the inherent seeds (sanskars) of disloyalty with which it was born; and which could play a mischievous role any time in future. It was this dubious role of the Congress in torture which disturbed him most because the history of its birth and the role it had played in the early years did strengthen his devotion. Surely, the future of India was not secure in the hands of the Congress in the long run because of the dubious germs it carried from its very birth.

Guruji was also doubtful about the ideology of the Congress. He saw that the Congress party was not a party of disciplined soldiers wedded to one ideology but a conglomeration of souls of different hues coming together on a common platform which was open to all. Anybody and everybody could come and go at will without scruples, could clash and shout at one another when their own interests - local, regional, personal or communal-clashed.

He also saw that the Congress was riddled with one ideological problem from the very day of its inception. And for that very reason it had to adopt the "Policy of Appeasement" towards Muslims. The problem was that the Congress could not be considered a national body by the British Government until and unless it came to represent all the religious communities. In other words, for the Congress to be national in character in the eyes of the British Government, all the communities, especially Muslims, had to take part in its activities. Thus, the problem with the Congress was to seek cooperation from all communities, especially Muslims, whether they came forward or not; and then and then only the British Government would take into the demands of the Congress. To seek that cooperation from the Muslims - in order to be considered national - the Congress could go to any extent even to the extent of being ridiculous. For example, it paid for the fare and other expenses of Muslim delegates traveling to the Congress sessions. Surendranath Banerji noted: "Our critics regarded the National Congress as a Hindu Congress, and the opposition papers described it as such. We were straining every nerve to secure the cooperation of our Mohamedan fellow-countrymen... We sometimes paid the fares of Mohammedan delegates and offered them other facilities."

Swami Shraddhananda, a great social and religious figure and an eminent leader of the Congress in those days, had given some interesting details of the 1899 Congress Session at Lucknow:

"Tickets were issued to every Muslim 'waiz' delegate free of charge. Messing fee of Rs. 10 per head, too, was not charged from the Muslim delegates while they were served with all the delicacies of 'Dastar-Khan'... And these waiz' delegates stopped in the Pandal only a few minutes in the beginning and were to be found enjoying creature comforts under the refreshment shamianah outside the pandal for the rest of the sitting..."

"The majority of Muslim delegates had donned gold, silver or silk embroidered chogas (flowing robes) over their ordinary coarse suits of wearing apparel. It was rumoured that these chogas had been lent by Hindu moneyed men for Congress tamasha. And of these the majority was admitted free to delegates' seats, board and lodging. Sir Syed Ahmed's anti-Congress League had tried in a public meeting to dissuade Muslims from joining the Congress as delegates. As a counter move the Congress people lighted the whole Congress camp some four nights before the session began and advertised that ingress that night would be free. The result was that all the chandukhanas (opium dens) of Lucknow were emptied and a huge audience of some thirty thousand Hindu and Muslim delegates were elected or selected..."¹⁰

At the level of constitution also the Congress tried to appease Muslims. In its Allahabad session of 1888 under the Presidentship of Tyabji, it adopted a resolution which declared that the Congress shall not discuss any fresh subject or pass any fresh resolution which the Hindu or Mohamedan delegates opposed unanimously or near-unanimously.



This amounted to granting the power of veto to Muslims, however small their numbers might be in the Congress, to torpedo any policy or programme of the party. Having accepted this slippery position, the Congress started its, downhill journey with increases speed as the days passed.

This was how the Congress, Golwalkar thought, began bending over backwards to please the Muslims and let them go ahead with their divisive tendencies. Instead of giving them lessons in emotional integration, in being one nation and sharing common national aspirations and common joys and sorrows, it encouraged them to be separate in all walks of national life, especially in politics.

Gandhiji enjoyed a unique position in national in national politics. Golwalkar had a soft spot for him, especially for the ideal Gandhi who, after a long ordeal of 21 years in South Africa, came to India in 1915 with pions hope of changing the destiny of his mother-country. He also appreciated his stere life, truthful nature, and above all his full and final commitment to the concept of Purna Swaraj.

Golwalkar's credo was to fight against anti-nationhood forces. He introduced an apolitical disposition in Indian politics, an antidote to Machiavellian mode of power-grabbing. In fact, he spelled out the 'service concept of power which seems a far cry in the present system ridden with corruption, self-seeking and expediency. He advocated the age-old dictum of spiritualizing man with elevated consciousness as a base on which the moral structure and the politico-economic superstructure could be built. And this is precisely what Gandhi preached and practice. If one makes an in depth story of both these two great men of modern India one hardly finds much difference between their thinking and approaches. Outwardly both may look apart but he real soul of India is very much visible in both of them.



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