

Road to Sangam: Gandhian Ideology and Communal Harmony in India

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“If my faith burns bright as I hope it will. Even if I stand alone, I shall be alive in the grave and what more speaking from it.”

Mahatma Gandhi

It is universal law that bodies get destroyed but the philosophy, thoughts given, propagated by that body remains forever. This is applicable to all the saints and philosophers of the world. In times of crisis, the teachings and thoughts help us to overcome all the physical and mental barriers. Mahatma Gandhi is the philosopher produced by 20th century. He stands for the values of goodness in human beings. He is the one who proved by his actions that human heart has infinite potential to love, to sacrifice and to live together peacefully. He is the saint produced in times of anxieties. His philosophy has preached to control animalistic brutality, to seek the cooperation, spiritual longing, to fight non-violently to overcome human hatred and bridge the gap between two different aspects of human existence. He has underscored the importance and relevance of Lord Buddha's principles of love, compassion, non-violence in the age of excessive materialism, nuclear phobia, and advance technology.

Today, in the age of globalization and cyber revolution, blind race for power and control over natural resources, religious fundamentalism, international terrorism, we need Mahatma Gandhi to break the ritualistic violence all over the world. It is not only to establish peace but also to assert the Gandhian values to provide amicable environment for human beings of different religions, ethnic and cultural groups.

Present paper is an attempt to analyze the importance and practical implementation of Gandhian values to bring together different sects especially and Hindus and Muslims particularly and Muslims divided into two ideologies specifically as portrayed in a Gandhian film *Road to Sangam- Let's re-unite*.

Road to Sangam, directed by *Amit Rai*, asserts the need and relevance of Gandhian ideology of non-violence, love, compassion, peace and communal harmony. It underscores the courage of a common man to overcome his fears of boycott by society and community at the cost of his ideals and his devotion to his work. It portrays the dilemma of Muslim community from north India which still relish the golden past of Moghul Empire and powerful status as well as shrinks on remembering mass exodus of Muslims to Pakistan after Partition of Indian subcontinent.

It doesn't portray any significant Hindu character except Dr. Banerjee who neutralizes Hashmat's agony. It is in camera view of Muslim community that is dwelling on pendulum of loyalty to nation in which they reside and loyalty to religion in which they are born. When these two differing identities overlap or replace each other, it causes psychological turmoil in the minds of Muslims who are Indian first and then Muslim. But when their faith in God or loyalty to religion is considered primary and superior as compared to loyalty to nation, the alignment process of 'being a true Muslim' or 'being a *kafir*' brings disturbance in personal as well as communal and social life.

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If religious identity is asserted over national identity, the issues regarding extremism, patriotism as well as personal ethics and questions related to existence are raised.

Road to Sangam addresses the issues that are haunting Indian Muslims today. Here, Mahatma Gandhi came to their rescue. He metaphorically becomes the salvation for those Muslims burning in the inferno of self-doubt, hatred and public suspicion of being 'other'. It asserts that Mahatma Gandhi, his ideology would help all Indians generally and Muslims particularly to accommodate in Indian multicultural milieu.

Amit Rai has used a Sufi Qawalli, "*Ham Par Bhi Thoda Sufiyon Sa Rang Chadha De*", that highlights the confluence of two cultures. It also highlights the need of communal harmony and peace of mind that would set the human life at ease in social, political, cultural as well as religious life. It highlights the changing times and values that have disturbed the life of people. It also brings the deterioration in value system and communal discordance as: "*Majhabi Log Ab Mazhab Jatane Nikale Hai / Nasamaz Log Apna Ghar Jalane Nikale Hai / ... Nafarat Se, Adavat Se, Burai Se, Badi Se / Kaise Tune Jeet Li Ye Jung Bata De / Ham Par Bhi Thoda Sufiyon Sa Rang Chadha De.*"

It hints at the call to a savior who will save this world from terrorism, extremism, hatred and violence. It highlights the relevance of Gandhian ideology in the world full of instability, disbelief, self doubts, cruelty, suspicions, alienation and its impact on human life.

Road to Sangam begins with the scene where someone (probably Tushar Gandhi) is withdrawing a wooden box from Orissa State Bank, locker room. The wooden box carries the ashes of Mahatma Gandhi. 20 kalash spread all over India to merge into rivers. Tushar Gandhi requested to merge this AsthiKalash as it was done in 1948. The Kalash is brought to Allahabad. Symbolically, Mahatma Gandhi enters into Allahabad.

A bomb blast in Uttar Pradesh initiates the suspicions, arrests and atrocities against Muslims. Terrorist organizations such as SIMI are mentioned. All Muslims are gathered together to protest. A religious leader, Maulana gives expression to the common problem of Muslims. Muslims are suspected for every violent and destructive activity. His expression points out the harassment of the minority groups in the Majority of Hindus in India. The suspicion and hatred alienates them from common life and pushes them towards terrorism. Maulana says:

"Is mulk me jab bhi koi bhi kahi bhi koi hadsa hota hai to uska seedha asar hamari kaum par kyon padata hai? Agar is mulk ki hukumat dahashatgardi par kabu pane par khud nakaam hai to uska gussa ham par nikalagi is tarah se – hamare dukano, hamare gharo, hamare madaraso par chhape marker, kanha ka insaf hai? ... agar masumo ko sataya jata rahi, begunaho par julm hote rahe to aatankwaad phaiega ki nahi?"

Nawab Kasuri Sahab expressed the same views about questioning their loyalties, "*Hamein unhe Batana hai ki is Mulk mein hamari kya haisiyat hai. Hamein jo chunana tha, wo ham azadi ke bad chun chuke hai. Pata nahi yeh mulk hamein kab chunega.*"

All Muslims protest before high-court. They are beaten in lathi-charge. Farhan dies in that while jumping from gate. In protest they declare the work-off and boycott on participation in daily governmental or non-governmental activities. Hashmat is injured in lathi charge. He closes his shop as per the decision of the Masjid Committee.

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Hashmat is interviewed for his work of repairing an engine. From the reporter he comes to know that he is repairing the engine of Gandhi Smruti Vahan. It is the same Ford Car that carried Mahatma Gandhi in his last journey. A Smruti Kalash of his ashes was forgotten in the bank locker at Orissa. After 50 years, it is brought to Allahabad to immerse his ashes into Sangam. Hashmat who has boycotted the work is torn between duty to nation and duty to religion. He prefers the duty to nation first and goes against the sentiments of his community.

Hashmat is sandwiched between his ideals, secularism, and communal feelings of his community. Hashmat asks a rikshwalla about the fatwa and boycott of Muslims on participation in day to day works in governmental and non-governmental organizations. Rikshwalla focuses on basic need of human beings is his daily bread and butter for which he has to work. Religion would not provide it him without working as he says:

ima bagawat ki ka baat hai. Riksha hamara roji-roti hai, aur hamar aap grahak hai. Ima kaum se ka lena dena, aur kaumwa ka hamar khana wana thode hi na det hai. Ima jabardasti ki ka baat hai aur ye Hindustan hai Pakistan aur Talibaan thode na hai.

It clarifies his dilemma. Hashmat decides to repair the engine of Ford Car. He gives importance to national duty over religious sentiments. He tries to persuade his friends but they snatch the keys of his shop. He sits on the steps of his shop for two days and nights without taking food. He chose Gandhiji's *Satyagrah* to fight against his community in a peaceful and righteous way. He is threatened to be outcasted by the members of his community. But he continues his satyagrah and asks, '*Aap log bura mat maniyega, par ham yeh janana chahte hai ki yeh gadi gandhiji ka na hoke kisi Musلمان ka hota ya Jinnah ka hota to ka aap hamko rokhte?*'

Hashmat looks at the situation from objective point of view. He also focuses that Muslims celebrate the victory of Pakistani team by cracking crackers. He even cites the examples that photos of Inzamam, Shoeb Akhtar, Parwez Mushrraf, Saddam Husein, and Osama Bin Laden in Muslim shops, salons and horse-tongas. He highlights that such freedom of expression is given in India and when he expressed his views why his community fellows oppose and boycott him.

Hashmat's devotion to his work is considered as disrespect to communal feelings. As a result of his disobedience to Masjid Committee orders, Hashmat is boycotted by his community fellows and friends. He expresses his turmoil as, "*Jab unki baat mankar ham dukan band kar ke baithe the tab ham sacchhe Musalman the aur ab jaise apna baat rakha to majhab ke khilaf ho gaye. Ye ham logo ko kaunsa rog hai? Kauno baat ho majhab se jod dete hai.*"

His wife advises him not to hurt the feelings of his community. But Hashmat believes that 'work is worship'. He tries to convince Masjid Committee that, "...ham jis aadami ka kam kar rahe hai, wah unka apna hai. Isi desh ka hai, janha ham rahte hai."

Maulana blames Hashmat for tarnishing the image of Islam. Hashmat argues positively, "*Saccha Musalman Wo Hai Maulana Sahab Jiski Zubaan Aur Aankh Se Kisi Ko Taqlif Na Pahuche. Ham Kab Samzenge Jisko Jo Karana Hai Karake Jate Hai Aur Yanha Hamari Saari Kaum Shaq Ke Ghare Me Aa Jati Hai. ... Iske Liye Police Aur Sarkar Jitni Kusurwar Hai Utne Hi Ham Bhi.*"

Hashmat is debarred from the Masjid Committee. He rejects all judgments given against him and pursues all Muslims to help him to remove these communal barriers and work for nation.

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He has witnessed the last journey of Mahatma Gandhi, his efforts to establish peace in the riots of Nauakhali through photographs in Gandhi museum. *Amit Rai* has used original video tracks to enhance the gravity of the issue. Hashmat tries to convince his friends. He adopts Gandhian ways to bring his friends together. He is attacked by a Muslim youth, Zuber. But Hashmat reacts non-violently. He overcomes the fear of being killed and faces the truth.

While trying to convince his friends to help him morally in his mission to repair the engine, Gandhiji's favorite Bhajan is repeated and people from all religion, states are offering floral tribute to Gandhiji. It suggests the communal harmony and Hashmat's efforts to bring the order and harmony in their life.

Hashmat who has embarked on the Gandhian Path tries to heal the wounds that his community has suffered from. He wants to prove that Muslims in India love this country as anybody else loves. He wants to be the part of rally on *Road to Sangam*. He requests the authorities of Gandhi Museum : *"Ham Log Ye Sabit Karna Chahte Hai Ki, Ham Log Bhi Utne Hi Watan Parast Hai Jitney Ki Aur. Agar Ham Sarkar Ke Khilaf Kam Band Kar Sakte Hai To Inke (Gandhiji) Aakhir Safar Mein Shamil Hone Ke Liye Bhi Dukan Band Kar Sakte Hai."*

Hashmat also requests Masjid Committee members and his friends to participate in this event of national concern:

Yeh Kasauti Ka Samay Hai Aur Aaj Agar Ham Kadam Piche Karte Hai To Phir Hame Khud Se Hi Puchana Hoga Ki Ham Log Is Desh Mein Kya Kar Rahe Hai? Agar Is Desh Ko Azad Karanewale Neta Ko Ham Izzat Nahi De Sakte To Phir Ham Yahan Kahe Hai? Ka Ham Yahan Maheman Hai? Ham Sab Hindustani Hai, Aur Ye Hi Hamara Watan Hai. Kal Wo Aadmi Khud Hamare Ilake Se Gujrga. Us Gadi Par Baithkar Jo Hamane Banaya Hai. Aur Aap Sab Janate Hai Ki Use Banane Ka Hausala Aur Jajba Aap Hi Logo Ne Diya Hai.

Hashmat knows if Nawab Kasuri would participate; all Muslims would participate in the rally. While discussing Partition as a scar on the psyche of the Muslims, Hashmat heals the wounds of Nawab Kasuri Sahab.

Hashmat analyses the event of Partition. He believes that, *"Batwara Mulk ka nahi, musulmano ka hua hai..."* He comes to conclusion that if Muslims in India want to live a progressive life, they will have to forget the scars of partition and hatred. By doing so they would be able to merge into the mainstream society of India. He finds a safe and secure future in India. He feels that in the name of religion Pakistan has become the hideout of terrorism. He blames Jinnah and other politicians for the division of country for sacrificing eighty percent Muslims across the border. He asserts the need to understand the gravity and sincerity in Indian milieu he says *"Kam-S-Kam Hindustan Mein Ham Apane Pairo Par Khade Hai. Jin Kattarpanthiyo Ne Pakistan Ki Kurban Li Hai, Wahi Hindustan Ki Tarrakki Ke Ade Aa Rahe Hai. Dahshatgardi Ko Jihad Ka Nam Dekar."*

He admits that political situation in India is still not completely favorable for minorities. But he believes that proper communication between these two communities would release the tension between them. He wants to start this mission of peace from his own community by participating in Mahatma Gandhi's last journey to Sangam. Nawab Kasuri Sahab expresses that no one needs Gandhi in India today. Hashmat rejects it politely and says, *"Na. Na. Ham Logo*

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Ko Jarurat Hai. Allah Har Bar Pagambar Nahi Bheja Karata. Yeh Koi Ittefaq Nahi Hai. Ye Ishara Hai Uska, Aaj Kai Salo Bad Wah Phir Se Hamare Bich Se Gujarega. Use Izzat To Bakshana Hoga. Wah Hame Phir Se Milane Aaya Hai. Aur Hame Is Baat Ka Naaz Hai.”

Nawab Kasuri Sahab remembers the atrocities havoched on Muslims during Partition. Hashmat reminds him that Muslims too have havoched atrocities on Hindus and Sikhs. He tells the need of the hour is to decide whether to remember the black and blood stained pages of history and continue with their suffering or forget this all and embark on new journey of peace and progress.

Nawab Kasuri Sahab agrees to come in the rally to Sangam to pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi for his values and immortality of his thoughts and ideology that would help every human being to survive in times of anxieties.

Gandhi is Road to Sangam

Thus Mahatma Gandhi becomes the *Road to Sangam* for all communities in India. He washes out the hatred and cleans the minds of people to become a mainstream river of progress to flourish and live harmoniously as the Reporter reports:

“Who says Bapu and his thoughts are outdated. His thoughts would be relevant in this world till humanity resides in the hearts of human beings. Bapu is a lighthouse that transmits the light to the remote and unreachable part where darkness prevails. A single lonely person, whose name, whose thoughts have brought various communities together on this Sangam.

Really, we have seen two confluences on this Sangam, first, of rivers (Ganga, Jamuna & Sarswati) and second, confluence of various religions.

Then question is what the factors that disintegrate us are? We have to ask ourselves what are these – is it regionalism, extremism, terrorism or dirty politics?

To conclude, Hashmat a true patriotic Muslim asserts the need of Mahatma Gandhi's ideology. He brings forward the idea that a true nationalist person can serve his nation by worshipping his work. The belief in ones duties would help country to develop in right direction. He wins the hearts of his friends and community fellows by non-violent ways. His strong belief in truth and his conviction in his belief helped him to fulfill his duty and to bridge the gap between two communities in a peaceful manner. His sincerity in God with open-mindedness and courage to oppose the religious zealots yielded good results for him. In a true sense, he has brought both the communities on *Road to Sangam* in the vehicle of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy.

Reference:

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