

# **“Empowering Harmony at the Individual and Community Level”: India’s communalism as product of the politics of the elite of a religious community**

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## **Introduction**

India is witnessing social turmoil and conflict based on religion, caste, language and ethnic differences as never before. Atrocities and violence are unleashed on the poor in general and others belonging to minorities and those belonging to socio economically weaker sections of Indian society in particular. The Constitution of India was drawn up by a group of enlightened persons who laid the foundations for a secular democratic state. The maintenance of communal harmony and the prevention of communal disturbances/riots/ terror attacks/bomb blasts in several cities in India are primarily the responsibility of the state.

However in the present scenario it is imperative that individuals, groups and civil society in India actively get involved in promoting and sustaining harmony at the individual and social level.

Existing socio-economic models of development have failed to alleviate the poverty and backwardness of the people of the country. Since independence, the ruling class has strengthened the business monopolies and the urban and rural elite, as it ignored the basic needs of the people below. The traditionally dominant social groups have also hijacked the democratic process. The fascist forces have deeply penetrated and corrupted the system and they work hand in glove with neo-colonial and racist forces. The dalits, the tribals, the religious, the linguistic and the cultural minorities, the backward classes and the women are denied their cultural and social space, posing major threat to the democratic fabric of the country. Resistance against exploitation and deprivation

is mostly local and isolated now with no co-ordination and pooling of resources at national level.

Only after understanding historic genesis of communal tension, we can address the following concerns with regard to Empowering Harmony at the Individual and Community Level.

- Justice, Equality and Peace in the family, in the community, in the country and in the world.
- Harmony at the grassroots is best promoted by those whose stakes are high: the urban and rural poor.
- Putting women's concerns center-stage to ensure development is equitable and sustainable.

## History of Communalism in India

Puniyani (2005) traces the beginning of communal politics in India to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when the first industries were laid here. Industrialisation led to a rise of various associations such as industrialists, civil servants, business professionals and the intelligentsia. These associations resulted in the formation of The Indian National Congress, purely on secular principles, to put forward their demands, and the aspirations of a modern India. However, soon, under the leadership of a Hindu and Muslim gentlemen, the India Patriotic Association was formed (August 1888) in opposition to some of the beliefs of the Congress and put forward the voice of Hindu and Muslim organizations. Later, many of the people associated with this organization became members of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim league. It is also pointed out by Puniyani that the use of **religious consciousness** (concepts of Ramrajya, the Khalifat movement) by the national leadership to inculcate 'modern nationalism' amongst the people, apart from doing that, also resulted in communalization of masses.

### Partition and Communalism

What came to be known simply as 'Partition' was the final botched job of an inattentive and insensitive ruling power that never really understood its largest colony said Sir Cyril Radcliff, the English lawyer who was given just 36 days to draw a line between India and Pakistan. Partition was a seminal event in the history of the Indian subcontinent - a 'reference point' as the Indian writer and publisher Urvashi Butalia (2000) puts it in 'The Other Side of Silence', for everything that has come after. A psychoanalyst would have a field day with the modern Indian nation. So many of its neuroses - its fratricidal distrust of Pakistan, its intransigence in Kashmir, its desperate attachment to a secular nation-state amid the daily onslaughts of religion in political and social life - stem from that original anxiety, the intimation of death mocking the elation of birth. Communalism if we see is multi faceted and can be viewed in various ways. However, one of the most popular notions shared both by Engineer (1991) and Puniyani (2005) is that Communalism results due to the politics of the elite and for the elite. *Communalism is a product, not of religion, but of the politics of the elite of a religious community* (Engineer, 2002). Likewise, more elaborately, communalism is the politics of the elite and for the elite, but executed by mobilising the broad layers of society in the belief that they are joining hands in a collective endeavour to protect an order that is sanctified by religion and a time- honoured tradition. The aim is to further the political and social aspirations of the elite (Puniyani, 2005). India adopted a secular political structure during the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, due to the deep conviction of the then national leadership. Ironically, however, Engineer (2002) points out that India achieved its independence along communal lines. There were differences of opinion among the elite of the two communities in matters related to sharing of power, reservations in government jobs rather than on any religious issues or beliefs, but religion was used as a tool for gaining mass support.

Mohmed Ali Jinnah who suggested the two nation theory was not the sole representative of the entire Muslim community. While he represented the upper class Muslims, the poor Muslims were represented by the likes of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and Tayabji. Again, Engineer (1991) throws light on the fact that since there was no adult franchise at that time, and voting restricted only to the elite of the communities, a large numbers of Hindus and Muslims remained mute spectators to the partition drama. Clarifying the myth about Muslims at the helm of partition, it is stated (ibid) that only 10 percent of the Muslims had the right to vote, and of these only a few were in favour of a two-nation's theory. Only 4 percent of the total Muslim population voted in favour of Pakistan.

## **Historical Considerations**

With independence in 1947, British India was partitioned into two countries, Hindu majority India and Muslim majority Pakistan. Again, a neat division was impossible, and many thousands migrated in the violent days following partition, a period in which thousands lost their lives. India's leaders, many of whom opposed partition, argued that India would be secular state, not just a state for its Hindu majority; yet many Muslims worried that the end of British dominance would only mean the beginning of Hindu dominance in India. Some lived in the regions that became Pakistan; others moved, but many, including those without the means to move, remained in even more reduced numbers as a minority in India. Although Muslims are a relatively small percentage of the population, India is still one of the countries in the world that has largest number of Muslim.

The post Independence Congress government, led by the Prime Minister Nehru, did not want to further alarm the remaining Muslims regarding their status in independent India and, in more pragmatic terms, wanted to ensure that the Muslim leadership, which opposed such reforms, would remain loyal to the government. The Muslim leadership did not relish the idea of the Hindu dominated government reforming their laws for them. An understanding developed that any changes in personal code would be left to the community in question, leaving them a small sphere of autonomy, which, hopefully, would help hold the new country together.

## **The 'they' and 'us' divide**

One of the major factors in perpetuation of communal violence is the doctoring of the mass consciousness. The social common sense is manufactured in such a way that the targeted community is made to appear as the culprit. The classic case of 'Victim as Culprit'. And that's how so many myths percolate about the minorities. Apart from the historical myths the one's related to demographics are playing a serious role in the demonisation of Muslims in particular (Puniyani, 2005).

Sangh Parivar though deeply believes in this and propagates it; it is done in a way whereby the electoral wing does not have to resort to this propaganda making, as the RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal etc. are there to do this job, to prepare the fertile ground for electoral benefits for the Hindutva politics. The electoral wing, BJP, has to ensure that it keeps a neutral face to win over even the 'enemies' (Muslims, Christians and Communists) of Hindu nation, as defined by M.S. Golwalkar, the major ideologue of Sangh Parivar.

As such what are the facts behind the "Ham Panch Hamare Pachis" (A derogatory reference to Muslims' attitude towards family planning, meaning "We are five, one husband - four wives and have twenty five children"). The census surveys by religion totally negate this firmly held popular belief. Religion is one of the markers used in these surveys. As per 1971 survey Hindus constituted 82.7% and Muslims 11.2% of the population. The corresponding figures for 1991 and 2001 census

are Hindus 82.6% and 80.05% and Muslims 11.4% and 14% respectively. The difference in the growth pattern as we will see a bit later has more to do with socio-economic factors rather than the religious ones. Over all, this statistics shows a reasonably 'stable' (religion wise) population. That apart, even if the current differentials persist, it is not only unlikely, but also impossible for Muslim population to overtake the Hindu population for the next century or so.

Similarly what about four wives to the Muslim male? Is it possible at all? On first count it is immaterial whether a man is having one or more wives as the total number of children depends on the number of women, which does not get influenced by polygamy. If at all, this number of women has more to do with the prevalence of social practice of female infanticide and 'bride burnings' in the areas where the practice of extortion by parents of 'grooms' called dowry is prevalent. Secondly, the male/female ratio cannot permit the 'luxury' of four wives to the Muslim males unless three-fourths (75%) of them go without marriage. As per 1981 census the male/female ratio for Muslims was 1.068 and for Hindus 1.072 i.e. for every 1000 Muslim females there are 1068 Muslim males. One has to conceive of gigantic mental acrobatics, in the light of these statistics, to believe that all Muslim males can have four wives. As such a slightly earlier but relevant statistics of polygamy (1961 census report) totally smashes the myth of Muslim polygamy; unless the social trends have worsened drastically, which obviously have not. As per this the incidence of polygamy is highest among the Adivasis (15.25) followed by Buddhists (7.9), Jains (6.72) Hindus (5.80) and followed by Muslims (5.70).

From the above it will be interesting to draw the religion based fertility patterns. These patterns differ within Muslim community itself, they vary from region to region as per the socio-economic and educational levels of the community concerned. Those in the better socio-economic and educational ladder have lesser population increase, while those on the lower rungs of socio-economic educational ladder have higher rate of population growth. This conforms to regional, urban and rural distribution as well. Birth rate in Malabar region of Kerala, whose Muslim population is 40%, is significantly lower than those in Uttar Pradesh with a Muslim population of 15%. The contrasting case is that of Kashmir, a Muslim majority state. Here the Fertility rate of Hindus is almost twice that of Muslims. Here again the birth rate was lower 31.4 (per thousand) than in U.P 36.5, M.P 36.4, Bihar 34.8 and Rajasthan 33.4 (per thousand).

Also let us have a look at urban rural divide. More than on third of the Muslim community is concentrated in the peripheral and decaying areas of urban economic life. Incidence of urban poverty is higher among them by 17% (vis a vis Hindus). The number of Muslims living below poverty line is close to 65%. They are generally living in older areas of modern cities, which are well known for poor sanitation, lack of health facilities and basic amenities. On the top of this the repeated outburst of communal violence against them is 'ghettoizing' them with the result that improvement in their lot is becoming more and more difficult.

And lastly what about the Muslims not taking to family planning? In Islamic countries like Turkey and Indonesia family planning methods are quite popular. In Turkey for example 63% of the population in the reproductive age group uses contraception and in Indonesia the figure is 48%. In India the number of Muslim couples in the child bearing age practicing family planning in 1970 was 9% (Hindus 14%) and in 1980, 22.5% (Hindus 36.1%) (Operation Research Group, Baroda 1981). Thus, the number of additional Muslims taking to family planning is keeping pace with the number of Hindus doing the same. Like all other social programmes family planning is also linked with socio-economic status, level of general social awareness, etc. We will be repeatedly encountering this fact that a large number of Muslims being in the low socio economic strata share these statistics more with other socially disadvantaged sections of society.

Politician use of abusive and abrasive language to distort the Demographic facts in a way does not

come as a surprise as it has been the major fodder on which the communalism has been feeding itself. Whatever be the far reaching implications of such statements, it is sure the communal politics will keep resorting to such myths to strengthen itself.

## **Faces of India's political pogrom**

There have been pogroms in India before, every kind of pogrom-directed at particular castes, tribes, religious faiths. In 1984, following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the Congress Party presided over the massacre of three thousand Sikhs in Delhi, every bit as macabre as the one in Gujarat. At the time, Rajiv Gandhi, never known for an elegant turn of phrase, said, "When a big tree falls, the ground shakes". In 1985 the Congress swept the polls. On a sympathy wave! Twenty four years have gone by but nobody has been punished yet!

Whipping up communal hatred is part of the mandate of the Sangh Parivar. It has been planned for years. It has been injecting a slow-release poison directly into civil society's bloodstream. Hundreds of RSS shakhas (branches) and Saraswati Shishu Mandirs (Hindu religious schools) across the country have been indoctrinating thousands of children and young people, stunting their minds with religious hatred and falsified history. They are no different from, and no less dangerous than, the madrassas (Islamic schools) all over Pakistan and Afghanistan which spawned the Taliban. The whole enterprise has a formidable religious, ideological, political, and administrative underpinning. This kind of power, this kind of reach, can only be achieved with State backing. Madrassas, the Muslim equivalent of hothouses cultivating religious hatred, try and make up in frenzy and foreign funding, what they lack is the State support. They provide the perfect foil for Hindu communalists to dance their dance of mass paranoia and hatred. (In fact they serve that purpose so perfectly; they might just as well be working as a team.)

### ***Attacks on Muslims:***

Under this relentless pressure, what will most likely happen is that the majority of the Muslim community will resign itself to living in ghettos as second-class citizens, in constant fear, with no civil rights and no recourse to justice. What will daily life be like for them? Any little thing, an altercation in a cinema queue or a fracas at a traffic light, could turn lethal. So they will learn to keep very quiet, to accept their lot, to creep around the edges of the society in which they live. Their fear will transmit itself to other minorities. Many, particularly the young, will probably turn to militancy. They will do terrible things. Civil society will be called upon to condemn them. Then President Bush's canon will come back to us: "Either you're with us or with the terrorists."

### ***Attacks on Christians:***

Attacks on nuns, churches and Christian refugees across India are stoking fears that Hindu extremists are planning to target minority communities as the country prepares for a general election. The worst anti-Christian violence in India since independence 60 years ago came in Kandhamal district, in the state of Orissa in 2008. Hindu fanatics attempted to poison water sources at relief camps holding at least 15,000 people displaced by mob violence, local activists alleged. Hundreds of Christian refugees in the region were told not to return to their homes unless they converted to Hinduism.

In Chattisgarh, central India, two nuns from the Missionaries of Charity, the order founded by Mother Teresa, were beaten by a mob when they took four orphans to an adoption centre.

A spokesman for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India said: "These nuns are known for

spending their life for the service of the poorest of the poor in the world. In India most of the beneficiaries of their services belong to the Hindu society.”

A church was burnt down in Karnataka, southern India, the state that recorded the highest number of anti-Christian incidents in India last year. There were also reports of violence in Madhya Pradesh, central India.

More than seven months after Orissa's tribal-dominated Kandhamal district experienced widespread anti-Christian violence, 3,100 people belonging to the minority community are still living in relief camps being run by the administration. About 25,000 people took shelter in 19 relief camps when communal violence was at its peak in the district in the aftermath of the killing of Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Lakshmanananda Saraswati and four others on August 23 last. The number of people living in the camps has decreased slowly but the 3,100 people in six camps are not willing to leave as they are being told by the communal forces that they can return to their homes only as Hindus. The camps are at Raikia, Tikabali, K. Naugaon, Mandasar, Mandakia and Tiangia, according to Kandhamal District Collector Krishan Kumar.

The Church properties are being sold all over Madhya Pradesh, after terrorizing, humiliating and brutalizing Christians in the state.

### ***Attacks on Dalits:***

Caste based discrimination and atrocity against dalits community is alarmingly increased all over India that lead to bloody and brutal killing of dalits everyday. These anti-social activities committed by so called caste Hindus terrorize the dalits in almost many parts of India. The extent and occurrence of dalit atrocity is rampant like an epidemic in many parts of India. In many states such as Bihar, Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, U.P., M.P., Karnataka and several parts of Tamil Nadu and AP the violence against the Dalits reached to newer heights. The severity of violence's against dalits is beyond any human comprehension as dalits are lynched, murdered and mutilated. This kind of violence is not seen even in animal world.

There is hardly any day goes by when dalits are not killed, harassed, socially boycotted by the upper castes. Dalits houses are burnt, physical violence against dalit woman like rape, terrorizing the dalit woman by parading naked on streets, cutting genitals of dalit children's, beating elderly dalits are rampant and it is like an epidemic in rural areas and villages across India. The so called caste Hindus cannot tolerate dalits for no reason. The dictatorial attitudes of upper caste Hindus go beyond any legal authorities, the law and order is in serious danger due to this anti-social elements, so to say that any social activities of dalits such as marriages, temple festivals, funeral proceedings of dalits cannot go smoothly without violence and dalit killings because the Hindu's cannot stand a dalit wearing a decent cloth, a dalit should not ask for minimum wages in rural areas, they are not allowed freely to participate in political meetings and activities, dalit bridegroom cannot ride a mare in front of upper caste Hindu's, the dalits have to step down voluntarily from the above said activities otherwise he or she and the marriage party has to face the wrath of the upper caste Hindus, this is particularly common in the ignoble Rajputana state called Rajasthan.

The violence and attack on dalits are so horrendous that dalit people live in constant fear, insecurity and torturous life. It is a gross human rights violation, state governments like Maharashtra where the recent Khairlanji murder of entire dalit family members, states like Haryana where 5 dalits were lynched like animals in a day light under the blessings of law and enforcement (the local police), raping of minors as young as 5 year old dalit girl, mutilating and cutting hands, legs and genitals of children's, adults and olds, parading dalit woman naked in broad day light in the presence of entire village people are few of the thousands of examples of organized and well planned caste brutality against dalits. Dalits are treated all over India as cheap dirt or less than animals and this sad status

of Indian society is displayed with detailed information with graphics to the world by digital media. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century where the information spread at the speed of light to entire world, sadly our local authorities, political leaders and law enforcement is sitting quite and encourage such heinous crimes go unaccountable in India. No human being should ever tolerate such heinous crimes committed by anti-social caste Hindus.

### **Identity Politics: The Shah Bano controversy**

For a country like India where religion plays an important part in politics, Shah Bano case is not the sole example of appeasement of minorities or of bending the law. The existence of personal laws is in itself an indicator of a constitutional bias towards maintaining religious harmony. They have been legal in India since the British period. The importance of personal laws lies in the fact that India is secular nation with a sizeable concentration of several different religious groups.

But personal laws have been criticized for their orthodox approach and for disadvantages to women due to them. Women rights and religious rights remain at conflict due to the disparities in religious laws. Critics also point out the fact that while divorce is within the purview. The distinct sphere of “personal law” was codified under British rule. To administer their colony, they did away with various legal traditions to come up with a single legal code, yet allowed some limited legal pluralism in one sphere, the laws relating to the family. The colonial rulers persistently viewed India as made up of irreconcilable religious communities. Whether this was an accurate description or part of a policy of “divide and rule” is still a subject of debate. Given the varied peoples and practices subsumed under the categories of “Hindu law” and “Islamic law,” this notion of communities with singular legal traditions was problematic.

The court decision, written by a Hindu, not only over-ruled Muslim personal law but included a demand for a uniform civil code, which would do away with Muslim personal law altogether. This double blow caused much concern among many Muslim politicians. At the same time, an ongoing agitation to destroy the Babri mosque was being rekindled by Hindu extremists. Anti-Sikh riots in the wake of Indira Gandhi’s assassination had caused much death and destruction. Perhaps because the Shah Bano ruling seemed part of broader anti-Muslim or anti-minority political trend, it led to unexpectedly large protests:

The agitation started as a cautious protest call during the Friday prayer, but quickly developed into a mass movement all over the country, to the surprise of both Muslim and non-Muslim leaders. Coordinated as a “shari’a (Muslim law) protection week” by the newly formed All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), hundreds of thousands of Muslims gathered in October 1985 at rallies against the Shah Bano verdict and for upholding the status of Muslim personal law. The size and spontaneity of the mass rallies – such as the 300,000 people who gathered in Bombay... indicated the frustration and a sense of insecurity had been fermenting for a long time among the Indian Muslims, especially in the major cities (Hansen 1999, 149).

Notably, other individual Muslims and Muslim organizations spoke out in defense of the Supreme Court decision and Shah Bano. Cabinet Minister Arif Mohammad Khan argued that the Muslim Women’s bill was anti-constitutional, anti-Islam and inhuman, and several Muslim groups sent protest letters and demonstrated against the bill (Engineer 241). In spite of this diversity of Muslim opinion on the matter, the mass rallies and political power of the bill’s proponents were important considerations. Although Rajiv Gandhi had won in a landslide, in 1985, his Congress Party had lost a number of Muslim dominated districts. Muslims’ votes for Congress Party were important in upcoming state elections. Muslims are a sizable minority and had been a key constituency of the



Congress Party since independence. Continuing autonomy in the area of personal law would be a key assurance that minority interests would be preserved by the Congress Party.

Shah Bano, the elderly woman abandoned by husband, was a sympathetic figure at the center of this case; the public could not help but be concerned. The Hindu nationalists, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), portrayed themselves as champions of women through critiques of women's unequal treatment in Muslim law, although they failed to launch a comparable critique of their own personal laws' unequal treatment of Hindu women. The BJP even convened a "Muslim Social Justice Conference" in Bombay, resolving to help Muslim women achieve justice while criticizing Muslims who defended their personal law. Bal Thackeray, a Hindu nationalist politician, argued in an interview: "The issue is not of religion, but of poisonous seeds of treacherous tendencies.... Those who do not accept our Constitution and laws should quit the country and go to Karachi or Lahore (in Pakistan) .... There might be many religions in the country, but there must be one constitution and one common law applicable to all..." (Engineer 243-5). This politician and the Congress Party's emerging rival, the BJP, drew on the Shah Bano case to reinforce their arguments for a uniform civil code.

Shah Bano also became a cause among many women's organizations. Some, such as the Joint Women's Programme, a national association with members of various religious backgrounds, were inspired to issue a Memorandum and organize demonstrations to fight against the Muslim Women's Bill and support a uniform civil code for all women. Muslim women were divided on the issue: Some Muslim feminists and others sympathetic to Shah Bano's situation supported the court decision, while other activists lobbied for the bill. For example, in Pune, "200 women, many of them Muslim divorcees, staged demonstrations... to register their strong protest against the Muslim women bill," and 200 Muslim women from Madras sent a letter to Rajiv Gandhi also opposing the bill; on the other hand, a memorandum from the Muslim Women's Graduate Association of Bombay favored the bill (Engineer 237-242). Many progressive women liked the idea of a uniform civil code but worried that their own activism on this issue could facilitate the Hindu nationalists' more xenophobic advocacy of the same cause. The religious and ideological divisions among women over the Shah Bano case diluted the political force of their demands.

The bill is a setback to the goal of achieving a uniform civil code. It also retrogrades our endeavor towards national integration as it tends to discriminate between Muslim women and women of other communities and therefore the Muslim community from other communities. (Engineer 235-6).

### **Ideological Attacks on Secular forces**

Further on, Mr. L. K. Advani, the leader of the BJP, gave the party a new direction. Nehruvian secularism was criticised and the word pseudo - secularism was coined for it, arguing that it was only meant for Muslim appeasement. The demand for a Uniform Civil Code was made. This demand was further aggravated by the agitation of the orthodox Muslims, who strongly opposed the Supreme Court decision to allow maintenance to divorcee Shah Bano, since they considered it interference in the divine Muslim personal law. Under pressure, Rajiv Gandhi, the then prime minister, passed a bill, Muslim Women's Protection (of Rights on Divorce) to that effect, changing the law for Muslims. This was a great setback to secularism and a great opportunity for the BJP to exploit this passage of bill as a move of appeasement politics by the Congress. Puniyani (2005) reiterates that the BJP politics has made maximum capital of the fact that successive Congress regimes have struck compromises with the religious fundamentalist leaders of the Muslim community. However, it should be understood that the condition of Muslims based on economic standards and social privileges is abysmal. If at all the opportunist political policies of the Congress have struck compromises with the religious leaders of the minorities and kept the minorities in a very poor condition, then in that sense the government policies have been directed against the



oppressed (ibid).

Another balancing act of the Congress – the opening of the Babri Masjid doors for the Hindus for prayer was manipulated by the BJP in gaining support from the lower caste and rural Hindus, since Ram is worshipped across all castes and classes. It launched a strong movement for the construction of the Ram temple, thus beginning the Mandir-Masjid dispute for its political gains. The BJP support, which up till now was restricted to the upper caste urban Hindus, could now increase manifold, thus brightening its chances of gaining power at the centre too.

### **Building up of Tension**

The decade of eighties was the most dangerous one where the communal forces succeeded in consolidating its political base. In this decade a large number of riots resulted into massive human misery all over the country, including Vadodara in 1982. Shiv Sena had also provoked communal violence in a lot of places in Maharashtra. Anti Sikh riots took place in November 1984, followed by Ahmedabad riots in February 1985 which lasted up to October '85, primarily with the aim to topple the then Chief Minister, Mr. Solanki who had come to power using the KHAM (Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi, Muslim ) formula. Engineer (ibid) believes that it was the success of this strategy that encouraged the BJP to involve Dalits into its fold by making them proud of their Hindu identity. Identity is concerned with the self esteem and self image of a community – real or imaginary- dealing with the existence and role – who are we? What position do we have in society vis-a-vis other communities (Shah 2001). It was this very search for identity of the Dalits in the Indian society, which was exploited by the Hindu communalists to further their goals.

Also, the Shah Bano case generated tremendous heat in India. It proved that fundamentalist minorities can exert pressure on government and judicial decisions. The mainstream media disapproved the decision. The opposition BJP reacted strongly against the Congress party's policies which according to BJP reflect "*Pseudo-secularism*".

The 1985 riots of Ahmedabad were followed by 1987 and 1989 in Meerut and Bhagalpur respectively. In 1989 general elections, V. P. Singh and others joined hands with the BJP to topple the Congress, and this time, the BJP won 88 seats from the 2 seats in the previous elections. Thus, the BJP finally got a stronghold and the Masjid- Mandir issue had played a vital role in it. The Rathayatra of Advaniji in 1990 was the final stroke, where he gathered tremendous Hindu support; even while more than 300 riots broke out in different parts of the country. Puniyani (2005) points out the cleverness with which the objective of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement was twisted and presented as not just the issue of construction of the temple for Lord Ram but also to reawaken national self esteem, and a cause not only for religious unity but national unity. Another point worth noting was the very little resistance that the rath yatra received, whether it was from political parties or social activities, barring that which came from the respective administrative quarters in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the form of arrest of Mr. Advani and shooting down of the Sangh Parivar vandals. According to Banerjee (2002), two visibly disturbing trends emerge. One is the capacity of religion to make any mass movement successful in India and the second, the increasing dependency of the secular and leftist parties on state administration rather than mass education and mobilization to resist communalism. *Political situation in India in the decade of the nineties was defined by identity politics*. The Babri Masjid was demolished in December 1992 leading to large scale communal riots throughout the country, including Mumbai, Bhopal, Surat and Ahmedabad. Gujarat Riots of 2002 against Muslims and Communal attacks on Christians by Hindu militants during this decade have permanent scar in the psyche of the religious minorities, may they be Muslims, Christians or Buddhists.

## Gender, Identity and Violence

Denial of human rights and fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of India by the fundamentalists by imposition of dress code, not granting right to work and attacks on female headed households have been objected by women's rights groups through out the world. Extreme form of punishment meted to women by the fundamentalists is in the form of stoning to death of "an adulterous woman" by the assembled community. During the last decade innumerable women in several countries have lost their lives in painful and undignified manner at the hands of self-appointed 'custodians of morality'. 'Honour killing' has become most widespread among all types of fundamentalists and communalists throughout Asia, Africa and the Middle East not only among the tribals, but among so called civilized sections of the nation states. Girls and boys are punished for talking or marrying boys or girls from other religious groups even in progressive states such as West Bengal and Kerala. Caste Panchayats in Hariyana have brutally killed and publicly hanged young lovers or newly married couples for caste hindu-Dalit marriages. Recently, the law court of Shariat in Nigeria has passed a judgment of stoning to death to a mother of an infant, Ms. Amina Lowal for adultery. There has been an international uproar against the judgment. As a result, for the first time, the state has not executed the decision of the Shariat.

**Sex Segregation:** The fundamentalists forces have prevailed upon the state to enforce sex-segregation in Iran, Albania, Sahel in West Africa, Pakhtun, Malaysia and Turkey. (Hjarpe, 1983). "Women in Saudi Arabia live complex existence which mingles strict traditions and codes of conduct with modern demands of education and freedom." (Megalli, 2002). Non-entry of women in the stadium and sports complexes is practiced in several theocratic states. On 22-1-2003, the chief justice of Afghanistan ordered nationwide ban on cable television and coeducation. (WLUML, 2003).

Al Badr Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Jabbar, an offshoot of Lashkar-e-Toiba pasted a poster outside the government Higher Secondary School in Kashmir asking girls to discontinue their studies on December 19, 2002.

**Dress Code:** Kashmir conflict has created a situation of great fear and insecurity in women's lives. (Dewan, 2002). Those who opposed the imposition of burqa by Kashmiri militant had to face dire consequences. Under Taliban rule, Afghanistan went to absurd lengths to implement Islamic laws that made women's life a never-ending punishment. It imposed ban on drivers of all types of vehicles from carrying women not wearing *chador* or *chadri*. It also prevented women from washing their linen in rivers and deserts. (Pevrin, 1997). A senior Shiv Sena leader, Mr. Nanak Ram Thavani has urged the federal and state governments to formulate and implement a dress code for girls in all schools, colleges and other teaching institutes. (WLUML, 2003).

Within hours of the expiry of their deadline for muslim women and girls to wear *burqa*, the Kashmiri fundamentalist militants killed three women, including 2 students and a teacher on the morning of 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2002 at Hasiyot in Thanamandi tehsil of Rajouri district. (*The Indian Express*, 27-12-2002)

Girls throughout India get attacked by conservative forces for wearing denim and T shirt. Couples get beaten up for getting cozy in parks, sea beaches, attending dance parties or celebrating Valentine's Day. Jan 24, 09 attack by members of the Sri Ram Sene on young women in a Mangalore pub in which the Sene members had accused the women who go to pubs of violating Indian tradition created nationwide uproar. As a result, even Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader L.K. Advani had to say, "I strongly condemn the attack on girls in Mangalore. There can be no compromise on this. It is wrong and against Indian culture and ethos. Girls and boys will have their own ways, and you may not approve, but it is wrong to attack them for it." (Thaindian, 2009)

**Moral Policing:** Culture policing or moral policing is a term that is much discussed as it has devastating influence on young women. In fact, much of our society is split by the debate on culture and moral policing. This comes into evidence especially during Valentine's Day celebrations. There have been instances of right-wing mobs violently attacking shops and restaurants in the past and the protests continue. Also, many young couples have been driven away from sea-fronts and beaches, by conservative factions who do not like public display of affection. There have been protests against beauty pageants and bars and pubs have been shut down.

Culture or moral policing is an attempt to control the cultural and moral atmosphere prevalent in society. LGBT groups have been targeted for violent attacks and verbal abuse and face discrimination in jobs and housing.

**Attacks on Right to Work:** Women were the first targets of theocratic states in the neo-colonial phase and the post liberation phases in the Middle Eastern, the Mediterranean and the North-West Frontier countries. In all these countries, women bravely fought along with their male comrades against the imperialist forces. But once, the "revolution" or "the national liberation" was attained, the fundamentalist forces dumped women into the four walls of domesticity. Arab News, the Saudi English language daily has revealed that Saudi women are more concerned about finding good work in tough jobs than being veiled.

The Kashmiri militant group, Lashkar-e-Jabbar has asked Muslim women to quit their jobs and stay home, or face punishment, including death. (*The Times of India*, 21-1-2003).

In spite of the threats by the fundamentalists women are entering male bastions such as foreign services, diplomatic missions, judiciary, military, and police force, sports such as soccer, political bodies, academic institutions, and industrial chambers even in the theocratic states.

**Attacks on Female Headed Households:** Fundamentalists of all hues perceive female headed households as eye-sore and make all efforts to persecute, stigmatise, isolate, marginalize and terrorise deserted, divorced, single and separated women leading an independent, economically self-sufficient life with dependent children or senior citizens. They don't accept, women as heads of the household. Wherever, the fundamentalist forces have become powerful, the female-headed households face persecution and witch-hunting.

**Communalised Education:** In the X National Conference of The Indian Association of Women's Studies the issue of communalisation of school and college textbooks was discussed at length as representatives of different states reported that there was "a systematic attempt by the Sangh Parivar to 'educate' young and old through schools, shakhas, temple networks, satsangs, etc. Through such education which encompasses a whole range of institutions, the Sangh Parivar has managed to draw into its fold large number of women, who in turn seem to transmit this hatred to their children." (IAWS, 2003)

Changes in the curriculum that is being pushed through the National Curriculum Framework and the new NCERT text-books portray women only in highly regressive patriarchal terms within the framework of the family. They have targeted women's movement as being responsible for the break-up of the family. Many women's studies scholars have interpreted Gujarat tragedy as a failure of education that created brutalised masculinity.

Kashmir situation has jeopardised education of women. The same happened in the ULFA affected areas in Assam and LTTE prone areas in Jaffna (Sri Lanka). The Christian fundamentalists in Latin America are no different. All of them use young women in suicide squads and as cannon fodder for their barbaric agenda. In the camps of Vishva Hindu Parishad, young girls are brain-washed first

with an ideological investment of communal education (“Muslims will outnumber Hindus”, “Muslim men are lustful and Muslim women are breeders”, “Muslims are born criminals”, “Caste system is crucial for racial purity”, “*Shudras* and *ati-shudras* are pollutants”) and at the same time given training to use weapons (lathis, swords and daggers). (Vaz, 2003)

Communal mindset created by Hindutva forces is so powerful that young college students of, the enlightened Wilson College got a humorous article based on stereotypes about “MUSLIM” as a murderer, drug seller, a cheater in cricket, kidnapper, terrorist, published. Its title is PAKISTANI MATH QUESTION PAPER. The very first question signifies man-woman relationship among the Muslims. It goes like this:

“Abdul was sent to jail for murder. He has seven wives in his house. Abdul distributed money to his wives in such a proportion that the youngest and the most recent wife receives maximum and oldest wife gets minimum, and each wife gets double of her former competitor. Abdul has 1700 Rupees left in his house. Abdul’s oldest wife needs at least 25 Rupees per month. Find out the time when Abdul will have to break jail to come out and come out so that his wives don’t have to starve.” There are innumerable websites with similar constructions that demonise Muslim men.

The most widely circulated cassettes of the speeches and slogans by Sadhvi Ritambhara, the crudest version of Hindutva ideology provides Ram centered and RSS-led perspective that has nothing in store for women but “Agni pariksha” (i.e. enter the fire to prove chastity and purity). Sadhvi Ritambhara’s speeches and pet slogan “If there has to be bloodshed, let it happen once and for all” during Ram Janmabhoomi campaigns organised by Hindutva forces between 1986-1990 played crucial role in massacre of Muslims in the 1992 riots. (Sarkar, 2001)

**Ban on Inter-caste, Inter-religious and Inter-racial Marriages:** Obsession about racial, caste and religious purity are so deep in the psyche of fundamentalists that have strong aversion against inter-mixing and inter-marriages among citizens of different caste groups, religious communities and racial backgrounds. Newspapers are full of incidences of torture, abduction, forced abortion, lynching, and murder of newly married couples with different caste, religious, ethnic or racial backgrounds. Even the state and criminal justice system miserably fails to provide adequate protection to such love marriages. Such couples have to face social boycott, can’t easily get jobs, accommodation and school admissions for their children.

Conversion of husband or wife as a conditionality for “allowing” couples to get married is a logical extension inward looking mentality generated by the fundamentalist mindset.

## Communalised Violence Against Women

The communalised violence women have experienced recently in Gujarat is unprecedented in terms of the degree of state complicity, the unashamed valorisation of these acts of depravity, the horrific participation of women in the violence and the creation of an implacable wall of hatred that provides the reason and then the justification for its spiral effect. It took us fifty years to document excesses against women during the Partition. One wonders how much longer it will take now.

Religious revivalism, cultural nationalism and anti-west feelings should be understood in the context of last three hundred years of history of slavery in Africa and two hundred years history of colonization of Asian and Latin American countries by Europe. Devastating effects of humiliation as a result of racial insults, physical and social injury of slave trade and colonial rule is seen in terms of destruction of social confidence. We can say the same about ‘Dalits /the untouchables’ in India with an uphill task being “winning the war against humiliation”.

'Dialectics of Colonized Mind' is such that global ideas of democracy and personal liberty are labeled as "Western ideas", intellectual and scientific history of the world that has mixed heritage gets distorted and touted as "Western" and religious fundamentalism and international terrorism play havoc with people's lives and use innocent youth as cannon fodder in attempts to "get even" with the West (Sen, 2006).

'The Western leaders have facilitated authoritarianism and militarism, a breakdown of civil order and educational and health services, and a veritable explosion of local conflicts, intercommunity strife and civil wars' not only through diplomatic moves but also through macro economic policies that ensure super-profit (through neo-colonial exploitation of the poor economies) for the Transnational and multinational corporations controlled by G8. Poverty and inequality within and between the nations escalated by economic globalization are creating massive recruiting grounds for the foot soldiers of the terrorist camp.

While talking about culture, Sen (2006) says that culture is not uniquely significant in determining our lives and identities; class, race, gender, profession, politics also matter. There are great variations in the same cultural milieu. Culture does not sit still, it changes. Culture interacts with other determinants of social perception and action. There is a need to examine the exact relation between cultural liberty and the priorities of multiculturalism. Cultural captivity does not help. "There is a great need for broadening the horizon of understanding of the other people and other group...."

There is a need for theoretical and conceptual clarity. Theories can influence social thought, political action and public policy. Conceptual confusion about people's identities turns multidimensional human beings into one dimensional creature, living human beings into cartoons.

It is disturbing to note a neglect of gender concerns in the meta narratives. Women's rights groups in all parts of the globe have rallied against myriad issues that play havoc with women's lives as a result of identity politics. Family laws based on religion are discriminatory towards women in matters such as marriage, divorce, custody of child, maintenance, alimony, land rights, as well as the right to stay in matrimonial and parental home.

African feminists have fought against genital mutilation. Indian women's rights organizations fought against *Sati* (widow-burning). Even while describing wars Bangladesh (1971), Somalia (1993), Bosnia (1993) and communal riots in India, Prof. Sen does not mention how women were brutalized/repeatedly raped and forcibly made pregnant by the 'men from enemy camp' as a target for ethnic cleansing. According to Prof. Sen 85% of arms sold internationally in the recent years were sold by G8 and the international women's movement has been at the forefront of anti-war struggle. Currently wars are waged in 200 places on this planet and for G8 wars have been the most profitable venture.

In this disturbing global and local context, rays of hope have been provided by inspiring community-based initiatives as follows:

### **Rajendra Sachar Committee Report:**

The Rajinder Sachar Committee, appointed by the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India was a high level committee for preparation of a report on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community of India.

In the field of literacy the Committee has found that the rate among Muslims is very much below than the national average. The gap between Muslims and the general average is greater in urban

areas and women. 25 per cent of children of Muslim parents in the 6-14 year age group have either never attended school or have dropped out. Muslim parents are not averse to mainstream education or to send their children to affordable Government schools. The access to government schools for children of Muslim parents is limited. Bidi workers, tailors and mechanics need to be provided with social safety nets and social security. The participation of Muslims in the professional and managerial cadre is low. The average amount of bank loan disbursed to the Muslims is 2/3 of the amount disbursed to other minorities. In some cases it is half. The Reserve Bank of India's efforts to extend banking and credit facilities under the Prime Minister's 15-point programme of 1983 has mainly benefited other minorities marginalizing Muslims. There is a clear and significant inverse association between the proportion of the Muslim population and the availability of educational infrastructure in small villages. Muslim concentration villages are not well served with pucca approach roads and local bus stops. Substantially larger proportion of the Muslim households in urban areas is in the less than Rs.500 expenditure bracket. The presence of Muslims has been found to be only 3% in the IAS, 1.8% in the IFS and 4% in the IPS. Muslim community has a representation of only 4.5% in Indian Railways while 98.7% of them are positioned at lower levels. Representation of Muslims is very low in the Universities and in Banks. Their share in police constables is only 6%, in health 4.4%, in transport 6.5%.

In the absence of developmental investment among socio-economically and culturally stigmatised sections of society, the youth turn to terrorist forces are captured by the terrorists of all hues to be used as cannon fodder. With this perspective in mind, after nation-wide communal carnage after breaking of Babri Moske in 1992, in several cities of our country, Neighbourhood Committees comprising all religious groups have started functioning, the most successful of them are in several suburbs of Mumbai.

### ***Peace Begins from Home...A Case Study of Women's Grievances Cell of Mohalla Committee Movement, Mumbai***

Mohalla Committee Movement (MCM) in Mumbai was formed with a firm understanding that the quest for peace is an eternal pursuit for human fulfilment. Peace or absence of antagonistic, violent, or destabilising conflict is essential for existence to become life, for survival to become human. Human beings can become human and humane only in conditions of peace. Creativity, spirituality, individual and collective achievements attain grandeur and glory only when there is peace. Qualities of compassion, forgiveness, love, sharing and universal solidarity become cherished and sought after virtuous attributes only when a community, society or nation is at peace – within and without. War on the other hand, internal or external, civil or military, declared or undeclared valorises bravery – the capacity to kill or be killed – the destruction of human life and accomplishments; it mocks compassion and conscience; it belittles refusal to erect artificial walls that divide human beings in the name of one identity or the other; it glorifies the destructive principle and devalues the principles of creation and life. The war mongers are invariably persons with few qualms of conscience, ever ready to eliminate and exterminate human life, emotions, thought, ideas, and achievements.

MCMs were formed in Mumbai to counter communal frenzy during Bombay riots in 1992-93. In the words of its founder member Julio Francis Ribeiro, "After the riots in Mumbai in 1992, a long term, interventionary and developmental solution was deemed necessary. The creation of Mohalla committees was one of the solutions proffered and their proliferation in various areas of Mumbai has made a measurable difference in the life of this metropolis. These committees were seen as simple, people-centred and appropriate mechanisms through which peoples' participation in the peace process is highlighted." MCM made a crucial contribution to restore peace and confidence among different communities. Moreover, it promoted developmental activities such as education, civic issues and programmes for youth and students. As MCM has a gender-sensitive approach and does

not believe that 'Women's issues can wait', it decided to focus on women- both in the community as well as in the domestic arena.

### **Formation of Women's Grievance Redressal Cell**

Women in the communities have been mainstays of the MCM. Women's response to the proponents of 'World Peace' was 'Peace begins from home'.

Peace of course can have two faces, two forms- Public and private. Peace in the community, go hand-in-hand with the peace in the family life. Hence the need to deal with domestic violence and women's grievances. There may be an apparent stability and absence of conflict in situations of successful intense repression-beating, abuses, psychological torture wherein all dissent is brutally, immediately, and surgically suppressed. This is a condition in which only one group (men, in-laws, bully neighbours) dominates, in which women's views and dignity is not allowed to exist.

The other situation is one in which democracy and human rights reach their pinnacle in each and every core of the community and domestic lives. It is the condition in which there are always avenues of settlement of differences and disputes without a breakdown of the framework of mutual respect, recognition of the rights of the other, and belief in good faith of the 'adversary'. It is the condition in which negotiations and persuasion are the methods of overcoming even major digressions in points of view. It is a condition in which people have the right to be different and where difference is not denied. It is also the state of affairs in which difference is not a cause of hierarchy, where the other is not the enemy or the lower or the higher being.

To create such condition, the MCM initiated a project- Women's Grievance Redressal Cells (WGRC) in March 1997, first at the MIDC and on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1998 in Andheri (E) to enable women of different communities to come together on a common platform.

### **Distressing Condition of Women in the Community**

While working in the community, MCM activists realised that women were doubly oppressed, both socially and economically and hence needed an outlet to voice their grievances. Most of the women led submissive lives and suffered in silence. Ironically, even though communal harmony prevailed in the area, marital conflicts disturbed the peace and tranquillity of the families. Many of them had to face physical violence their personal lives.

Even so they were apprehensive of lodging a complaint at the police station, either out of fear of society or due to fear of retaliation/ backlash from the family members, especially husbands. It was in this background that the members of MCM along with the police conceived the idea of WGRC in order to help women in distress.

These Cells made the people aware of a common link between women and the community they live in. As a result, effective outreach programmes were developed and major extension activities were initiated to promote peace, communal harmony and constructive activities for area development. These Cells, being projects of MCM are working in collaboration with the local police and 3 NGOs function twice a week at the MIDC and Andheri (E) police stations.

Awe inspiring experiences of these two Cells, motivated the members of MCM to start similar Cells in Bandra, Nagpada and Worli.

### **Objectives of WGRC:**



1. To work with individual women and men, families, groups and communities to create harmonious gender relations and to promote ethos of cultural pluralism.
2. To give the women a listening ear and to take cognisance of the offences perpetrated on them.
3. To coordinate with the police in cases of crimes against women.
4. To conduct training programmes/workshops for women as well as the family members on wide range of issues and themes concerning multicultural existence, developmental problems and skill and capacity enhancing projects.
5. To network with women's organisations and other like-minded organisations for collaborative work.
6. To facilitate and mediate out of court settlements and if needed, to organise legal services for women at affordable rates.

### **Approach of the WGRC:**

As the thrust of the Cell is on mediation and reconciliation, all the concerned parties are invited to the Cell and given a fair chance to voice their grievances against each other. Some of the meetings can be very time consuming. However in some cases, redressal process is shorter and cases quickly get resolved.

Due to consistent activities of MCM in the community, the Women's Cell could get easily established and legitimised as many women who approached the Cell were also the members of MCM and attended MCM meetings regularly in their respective beats.

The following examples delineate the processual dimension of WGRC's intervention:

#### ***a. Easing of tension between Hafeeza Shaikh and Vimal Pawar (MIDC)***

*For several years, Hafeeza and Vimal were at loggerheads. Even though their fights revolved around issues such as garbage and drainage, their anger and hatred towards each other was immense. Both had lodged complaints and counter complaints against each other at the police station. But to no avail, the animosity between the two continued to prevail. Finally, the duty officer at the police station asked them to visit WGRC.*

On visiting the WGRC, both complained bitterly against each other. While Vimal blamed Hafeeza of witchcraft, Hafeeza blamed Vimal for provoking the fights and instigating the neighbours against her. It was evident that both did not want reconciliation. It was a Herculean task for the members of the Cell to bridge the gap between the two as they belonged to two different communities. However, after a continuous dialogue with them at the end of the third session, both agreed to bury the past and forgive each other. The Cell members were jubilant as they were able to resolve the problem that existed for many years and most importantly they were able to bring about peace in the area, especially since Hafeeza's was the only family from the minority community living in a majority dominated area.

#### ***b. Reformed Swami and relieved Vasanthi (Andheri)***

*Vasanthi, a young girl, married C. Swamy in 2003. However, on the very next day of her marriage, her husband demanded money to set up his business. She was shattered. In order to keep her marriage intact, she borrowed a small amount of money from her father and gave it to her husband.*

*Still he continued to harass her mentally and physically for more money. Moreover, he forcibly took her gold ornaments and sold them for a large amount of money. Torture by her husband was so her unbearable that she left her matrimonial home to live with her parents. Her parents felt so cheated by their son-in-law that they decided not to send Vasanthi back and decided to call off the marriage. It was at this point in time that distraught Vasanthi approached the Cell and related her woes to the members. Vasanthi's husband was subsequently called to the Cell and there was a major showdown between the spouses. The members made uphill effort to seek reconciliation between them. But it was only after the second session that Vasanthi's husband agreed to return the money and jewels and do a service job. After the third meeting both the spouses agreed to give their marriage a try and Vasanthi returned to her husband. They are in touch with WGRC and the Cell members have found that Swamy has changed for better.*

### **Nature of Grievances**

1. Marital conflicts (wife-beating, extra-marital relationships, alcoholism, unemployment, financial constraints)
2. Problems concerning in-laws
3. Disputes with neighbours
4. Conflicts with kith & kin
5. Sexual problems (impotency, violent sexual encounter, pervasive and lustful behaviour)
6. Love affairs resulting into elopement & marriage
7. Divorce, desertion, maintenance, illegal second marriages

### **Support Work of WGRC for Women in Distress**

<b>Year</b>	<b>MIDC</b>	<b>Andheri</b>	<b>Bandra</b>	<b>Worli</b>	<b>Nagpada</b>
1997	60	-	-	-	-
1998	150	140	-	-	-
1999	150	150	60	115	135
2000	160	155	50	120	155
2001	170	165	45	135	160
2002	175	170	60	135	170
2003	175	173	75	160	185
2004	195	190	75	190	210
<b>Total</b>	<b>1235</b>	<b>1143</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>1015</b>

### **Legal Intervention**

The cases that could not be resolved through negotiation were either referred to the family court at Bandra or to individual lawyers. Some women filed their petitions in the family court for maintenance and divorce while others sought the help of their lawyers in connection with illegal marriages, child custody and dowry demands made by their husbands. An advocate from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) also helped with her legal expertise at the Cell at MIDC.

## **Teamwork between the Police and WGRC members**

In all the Cells, the police constables are a part of the team. Their presence helps WGRC to get a better insight on the problems faced by numerous women and moreover it gives an opportunity to empathise with the victims in need of help. The police also play an important role by visiting the home of the victim and inviting the spouse to the Cell for mediation.

## **Follow-Up Work**

WGRC visits the homes where the conflict is of a serious nature so as to assess the prevailing situation. If the relationship continues to be strained, the spouses are once again invited to the Cell for further mediation.

## **Empowerment of women through Education**

WGRC believes that public education is the major tool to women's empowerment. Hence, it organised five workshops on gender sensitisation at Bandra-Kurla police station for the police personnel of the west region. The team from the legal aid cell of justice and peace commission conducted sessions on The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, laws related to women and crimes against women. The five-day workshop provided legal training to three hundred police personnel that included constables, sub inspectors, inspectors and assistant commissioners of police. Even women police took active part in the workshop that was divided into a lecture, a group exercise and a slide show.

WGRC has also organised workshop on women and health, counselling, legal provisions, communication skills and unlearning communalism through creative methods of role-play, story telling, group exercises, street plays, screening of films, vocational training programmes, haldi kumkum samaroha, rangoli and poster competitions and teaching precautions like first aid, fire extinguishing skills.

## **Commemoration of International Women's Day**

8 March, International Women's day, that symbolises solidarity, sisterhood and strength of women, has been a focal point for women from all five Cells to meet at one place and get a feeling of empowerment. For the past seven years, the Cell has been celebrating this day with vigour and enthusiasm reflected in singing of group song, experience sharing, presentation of annual progress report, speeches of dignitaries and children's stage shows. These events have instilled a feeling of confidence and leadership qualities in women.

## **Pre-emptive measures**

Knitting Communities together has been the most effective tactic for preventing communal conflagration. In 2002, after the communal carnage in Gujarat, there was a lot of tension in the community. Women Grievance Redressal Cell (WGRC) worked with the police and held meetings all across the city through the MCM. WGRC also participated in the MCM-organised painting competitions, cultural programmes on communal harmony, sports like volley ball, gymnastics and athletics, table tennis and 'cricket for peace' as friendly and healthy competitions to inculcate a spirit of recreation to counter cut-throatism and promote peace making. After these programmes, many participants have expressed their feelings, 'Until now we were very scared and prejudiced about the police and did not feel we could approach them. But these past few days have helped us to overcome this.'

## **Study Rooms**

The other strategy implemented by the Mohalla Committees has been in the setting up of study rooms, as in many slum colonies young students do not have a quiet space where they can study. Often many of them need help with their studies. By using the classrooms of local municipal schools, which are free and unused in the evenings, the Mohalla Committees have been able to provide a much-needed service to their communities.

### **Twelve steps (1997-2009) to Women's Empowerment**

During the last twelve years of its existence, WGRC, has played an important role in cementing the bonds between communities, spouses, neighbours and enlightened the youth. It is an acknowledged fact that WGRC has played a useful role in forging a meaningful relationship between individuals in the family and also expanded the meaning of family that encompasses the whole community. At the time of communal tension (at times of religious festivals, release of controversial films depicting inter-religious love marriage, during ongoing unsecular episodes happening elsewhere) both police and the Cell members play a proactive role and display courage of conviction to diffuse the tension. This has been possible due to the close and constant co-operation between the police and the Mohalla Committees.

The work of MCM has been successful only in areas where police officers have taken personal interest and have ensured that the right kind of people are inducted in the Committee. After seven years of functioning of the WGRC, both the communities and the police have realised that the process requires constant vigilance and evaluation. WGRC member are torchbearers of women's dignity, bodily integrity and gender-justice. Activities of WGRC have brought women's issues on the agenda of MCM. Now, members in the community accept that women's rights are human rights.

This experience of MCM needs to be replicated through out the nation.

### **Approaches to Peace & Conflict Resolution**

All those who are involved in peace building, peace keeping and peace making are our natural allies. There are following approaches to conflict resolution:

#### **A. The UN Initiative:**

"The process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavior changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence; both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, inter-group, national or international level". Peace Education Working Group of UNICEF is focusing on schools and colleges with this perspective.

Educationists promoting tolerance and peaceful existence are working at three levels

- **Transformative Education:** Unlearning casteism, sexism, communalism, ethnic chauvinism, racism
- **Collaboration in Reciprocity:** Mutual respect, respect for plural lifestyles- dress code, food habits, music, art, craft, aesthetics, cultural-national history
- **Dialogue among Cultures:** Cross cultural get-to-gathers, festival celebrations, quiz, study tours of shrines, liberative dimensions of religions

**B. Mahatma Gandhi's views on violence** are extremely relevant in the contemporary context

where he says, "If I can have nothing to do with the organized violence of the Government, I can have less to do with the unorganized violence of the people. I would prefer to be crushed between the two. For me popular violence is as much an obstruction in our path as the Government violence. Indeed, I can combat the Government violence more successfully than the popular. For one thing, in combating the latter, I should not have the same support as in the former. I make bold to say that violence is the creed of no religion and that, whereas nonviolence in most cases is obligatory in all, violence is merely permissible in some cases. But I have not put before India the final form of nonviolence. I object to violence because, when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent."

Gandhian institutions organize camps, study circles, public lectures, peace marches and discourses on conflict resolutions in a participatory democratic manner.

### **C. Global Appeal of Dr. Martin Luther King (Jr)**

"Nonviolence in the civil rights struggle has meant not relying on arms and weapons of struggle. It has meant noncooperation with customs and laws which are institutional aspects of a regime of discrimination and enslavement. It has meant direct participation of masses in protest, rather than reliance on indirect methods which frequently do not involve masses in action at all. Nonviolence has also meant that my people in the agonizing struggles of recent years have taken suffering upon themselves instead of inflicting it on others. It has meant, as I said, that we are no longer afraid and cowed. But in some substantial degree it has meant that we do not want to instill fear in others or into the society of which we are a part. The movement does not seek to liberate Negroes at the expense of the humiliation and enslavement of whites. It seeks no victory over anyone. It seeks to liberate."

As per this approach, Conflict Resolution refers to the process of resolving a dispute or a conflict permanently, by providing each sides' needs, and adequately addressing their interests so that they are satisfied with the outcome. Civil Rights Movement was built by Dr. Martin Luther King with this understanding and there is resurgence of interest in this philosophy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century among a section of youth.

### **D. Culturally Sensitive Approach:**

Amnesty International, while taking care of survivors of violent conflicts in Sri Lanka, Central Asia, Bosnia, Somalia used psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, and counseling. Care givers are taught effective conflict resolution and peace building skills to build bridges of cultural understanding and mutual respect through art and media, Conflict analysis and prevention; Mediation and conflict resolution; Post-conflict peace and stability operations; Religion and peacemaking.

Anti War Movement of 1970s: "No to Bombing of Vietnam", opposition to the US invasion in Afghanistan and Iraq were governed by this approach.

### **E. No Peace without Social Justice**

Justice and Peace Commissions established after communal carnage in several parts of India believe in the philosophy of Sarvajana Hitay, Sarvajana Sukhay (Working in the interest of all and to bring happiness to all) through solving burning problems of community. At the same time, they are committed to

- **Retributive Justice:** International War Crimes Tribunals Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Gujarat: Punishing the guilty

- **Restorative Justice:** Rebuilding shattered lives
- **Reconciliation:** Collaborative work, community based work, trust building

Moverover, through community work, peace festival, human rights education, such initiatives exposing the game of Competitive Communalism between Majority & Minority communities carefully engineered & crafted by their elites to retain their power-base Hindu-Muslim, Shia-Sunni, Muslim-Christian’.

Use of child soldiers as cannon fodder by fundamentalists/ terrorists has been challenged by Mothers’ Associations and People’s Initiatives in Kashmir, Manipur and Nagaland. In the recent Ethnic Strife in Kenya, Multi tribe alliance against Kibaki from wealthy Kikuyu tribe has highlighted crosscutting of economic divide & identity politics.

JPC’s appeal is high as it sees religion as an ethic that informs human actions/ projects and draems of integrated humanity founded on peace & justice. It deconstructs the discourse around monolithic construction of “Muslim” identity or “Christian Identity” and projects concerns for social justice, gender justice and distributive justice. It countering with examples and data exaggerated sense of paranoia about Muslim or Christian identity in our country that keeps in check all the other contradictions & solidarities. JPC also respects liberation theologies within Hinduism, Sufism, Christianity, Buddhism, materialist school.

#### **F. Approach of Conflict Transformation:**

Through Media Development, Child Protection, Project Management, Humanitarian Assistance, Human Rights Protection, human development-Health, education, employment and accountability of refugees. There are three stages of Conflict Resolution

- **Peace building** is the process of restoring normal relations between people. It requires the reconciliation of differences, apology and forgiveness of past harm, and the establishment of a cooperative relationship between groups, replacing the adversarial or competitive relationship that used to exist. E.g. OLAKH, PUCL & SAHIYAR (Vadodara).
- **Peacekeeping** is the prevention or ending of violence within or between nation-states through the intervention of an outside third party that keeps the warring parties apart. Unlike peacemaking, which involves negotiating a resolution to the issues in conflict, the goal of peacekeeping is simply preventing further violence. (The UN Peace Keeping Force, UNHCR in Afghanistan).
- **Peacemaking** is the term often used to refer to negotiating the resolution of a conflict between people, groups, or nations. It goes beyond peacekeeping to actually deal with the issues in dispute, but falls short of peace building, which aims toward reconciliation and normalization of relations between ordinary people, not just the formal resolution which is written on paper. (Peace rallies, appeals, efforts thro’ media)

In Manipur: 2004 Hunger strike, Nagaland: Women’s Protest, Burma: Peace Rally, Tibet: Demanding comprehensive dialog with H.H. the Dalai Lama, Latin America: Mothers of Missing Children have been at the forefront of Conflict Transformation. All over the world women’s groups have been highlighting “Women’s Rights are Human Rights” every year from 25<sup>th</sup> November to 10<sup>th</sup> December (The UN human Rights Day).

Efforts of Sisters Without Border, Doctors Without Border and Citizens without Border are guided by the approach of conflict transformation.

## **G: To give peace a chance, make peace the story:**

While reporting every media personality must have faith: "In every conflict, there is always something retrievable". It is very important to popularize peace journalism. Public felicitations of persons involved in rescue operations and rehabilitation such as nurses of Cama Hospital in the midst of terrorist attack on 26-11-08 and hundreds of unsung heroes & heroines.

Popularise efforts of global, national and local networks involved in peace-making. For example, The Thousand Cranes Peace Network is made up of groups and individuals who are willing to fold a thousand paper cranes (or as many as they can manage) as a symbol of their hope for, and commitment to, peace and non-violence. A visit to the Peace Park and the Peace Memorial Museum allows the visitor a glimpse into the horror of the world's first use of the atomic bomb against people on 6 August 1945. It is a reminder that we must work together to make sure that such a tragedy never happens again.

## **Five Priorities for Conflict Resolution and Peace:**

Practitioners involved in Conflict Resolution are unanimous in their conviction about five core principles and they are:

- Dialogue, communication, networks- Centre for Studies in society and Secularism (CSSS), Mumbai has been doing this for past two decades thro' research, documentation, training of people of all stake groups.
- Contemplation-Communalism Combat, (Hate Hurts, Harmony works) a monthly magazine provides platform for debate and discussion on political economy of conflicts and ways to resolve them.
- Community Life-Moholla Committee Movement is doing illustrious work that must be replicated everywhere.
- Justice, peace & integrity of creation in solidarity with the most vulnerable- JPCs must attract all types of professions.
- Simple living, Solidarity for Social/Economic Justice: All approaches, from A to G advocate socio-economic and gender justice.

## **Focus on Youth:**

Through sports for peace, quiz for peace, songs for peace, debate/discussion on peace, painting for peace, theatre for peace, politics for peace, rereading history of wars & peace and interfaith dialogues the youth can be motivated towards philosophy of Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam for Local as well as Global Harmony. The concept of vasudhaiv kutumbakam- the world is but one family - culture of peace and global citizenship should be inducted into all aspects of human life and education, especially humanities.

Let us celebrate and promote the spirit and philosophy of satyam, shivam, sundaram (Truth, Goodness, Beauty) and live life purposefully and peacefully.

There is a need to create Peace Museums and Peace Galleries to help promote a better understanding of other people and cultures around the world. Organisation of Peace Festivals and Peace Rallies. In 2004, over one million people in different part of our Globe had candle light marches to stop US invasion in Iraq.



## Conclusion

The quest for peace is an eternal pursuit for human fulfilment. Peace or absence of antagonistic, violent, or destabilising conflict is essential for existence to become life, for survival to become human. Human beings can become human and humane only in conditions of peace. Creativity, spirituality, individual and collective achievements attain grandeur and glory only when there is peace. Qualities of compassion, forgiveness, love, sharing and universal solidarity become cherished and sought after virtuous attributes only when a community, society or nation is at peace – within and without. War on the other hand, internal or external, civil or military, declared or undeclared valorises bravery – the capacity to kill or be killed – the destruction of human life and accomplishments; it mocks compassion and conscience; it belittles refusal to erect artificial walls that divide human beings in the name of one identity or the other; it glorifies the destructive principle and devalues the principles of creation and life. The war mongers are invariably persons with few qualms of conscience, ever ready to eliminate and exterminate human life, emotions, thought, ideas, and achievements.

In this context, for empowering harmony at the individual and community level, liberal humanism needs to be backed by solidarity, service and authority. Social activists like us have

- To organize and mobilize men, women and children to reiterate and reinforce the importance of secular values for a harmonious coexistence.
- To create pressure groups to condemn acts of violence and exclusion and to propagate actions and initiatives to promote peace and inclusion.
- To reaffirm secular values and multiculturalism for maintaining and strengthening democratic values based on respect for human rights.
- To encourage, facilitate and establish similar networks/coalition of citizens to promote secular values, religious tolerance, democracy and human rights and accelerate women's participation in secular movements striving for equality and justice.
- To counter violence on women, dalits, minorities, tribals and to contribute to the efforts for gender justice, social justice and distributive justice.
- To consistently raise our voices against fundamentalism and communalism and to initiate action against all forms of discrimination.
- To expose the consistent abuse of religion, tradition, national and cultural heritage by vested interest and to gain legitimacy and political power.

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**P.S.**

\* Dr. Vibhuti Patel, Director, PGSR

Professor and Head, Post Graduate Department of Economics

SNDT Women's University, 1 Nathibai Thakersey Road, Churchgate,  
Mumbai-400020 Mobile-9321040048 Telephone-26770227 ® and 22052970

E mail: [vibhuti.np@gmail.com](mailto:vibhuti.np@gmail.com)