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**Peace and Identity:  
Some Reflections on the South Asian Experience**

**by**

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Note: *Harijan* and *Young India*, referred to in the text, are journals edited by Mahatma Gandhi. Also referred to is Rajmohan Gandhi's *Eight Lives: A Study of the Hindu-Muslim Encounter* published by the SUNY Press, New York, 1986. The figures in brackets are volume and page numbers from the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*.

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## About the Author

Rajmohan Gandhi, the Eighth Annual Vernon M. and Minnie L. Lynch Lecturer on Conflict Resolution, was Bryant Wedge Visiting Professor at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR), George Mason University, Spring 1995. A Research Professor at the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi, he completed a study on his grandfather Mahatma Gandhi while in residence at ICAR.

Born in 1935, Mr. Gandhi holds a master's degree in Economics from Delhi University and is a member of the Indian National Integration Council chaired by the Prime Minister of India. In 1990 he served as Leader of the Indian Delegation to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva; from 1990 to 1992 while a member of *Rajya Sabha*, the Indian Senate, he was General Secretary of the *Janata Dal Parliamentary Party* (comprising party MPs from both houses of the Indian Parliament) and Convenor of the Joint Parliamentary Committee for Scheduled Castes (the "untouchables") and Selected Tribes.

Biographer of two major leaders of the Indian Freedom Movement, Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950) and Chakravarti Rajagopalachari (1878-1972), he is the author of *Eight Lives: A Study of the Hindu-Muslim Encounter*, written in 1984 and 1985 as a Visiting Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center. He was Chief Editor of *Himmat*, Bombay's English language news weekly from 1964 to 1981 and editor from 1985 to 1987 of two South Indian editions of India's leading newspaper, the *Indian Express*. Gandhi's many publications include *Crisis at the Top*, an analysis of Indian leadership, and *Does India Have a Future?*, the 1993 Besant Lecture in Madras.

Active since 1956 in the worldwide Moral Re-Armament Program, Mr. Gandhi has joined efforts to reduce conflict in India and other nations of South Asia, as well as Cambodia and South Africa. Repairing the relationship between India and Pakistan is his chief concern.

## **About the Institute**

The Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR) at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, has as its principal mission to advance the understanding and resolution of significant and persistent human conflicts among individuals, communities, identity groups, and nations. To fulfill this mission the Institute conducts a wide range of activities and outreach. These include academic programs at the graduate level offering the Doctor of Philosophy and Master of Science in Conflict Analysis and Resolution; research and publications; a clinical consultancy service offered by individual faculty and senior associates; public programs and education including ICAR's Annual Vernon M. and Minnie L. Lynch Lecture.

ICAR's major research interests include the study of deep-rooted conflict and its resolution, exploration and analysis of conditions attracting parties to the negotiation table, the role of third parties in dispute resolution, and the testing of a variety of conflict intervention methods in local communities as well as in national and international settings.

ICAR's Applied Practice and Theory Program (APT) draws on faculty, students and allied practitioners to form teams to analyze and help resolve broad areas of conflict addressing such topics as crime and violence, conflict in the schools and other community institutions, jurisdictional conflicts within and between governments, and conflict resolution in deeply divided communities and regions. Recent international interventions and research have been conducted in Liberia, Malta, Moldova, and the Transcaucasus.

Associated with ICAR are a number of organizations that promote and apply conflict resolution principles. These include the Consortium on Peace Research, Education, and Development (COPRED), which has developed a national program conducting policy research, curricula, and programs on peace, conflict resolution, and violence reduction with an international network of more than 300 college and university peace studies programs; the National Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution (NCPCR), which brings together annually and maintains communication with conflict resolution professionals nationwide; and the Northern Virginia Mediation Service (NVMS), offering conflict resolution and mediation services to the schools, the courts, and other community institutions across Northern Virginia and the Washington metropolitan area.

## Foreword

Professor Rajmohan Gandhi, ICAR's 1995 Lynch lecturer, born to the fourth son of Mahatma Gandhi, has a direct genetic link to the spiritual father of modern India who developed and perfected the technique of nonviolent struggle and did much to shape the post-World War II debate about how disputes might be settled nonviolently and peacefully. It is arguable whether the discipline of conflict resolution might exist today had Mahatma Gandhi not shown us the possibility and indeed the necessity to look beyond coercive politics to solve societal problems.

Rajmohan's grandfather, therefore, was a pioneer in our field; one who not only combined theory and praxis in his own life but one who led his nation in revolutionary systemic change and paid the supreme sacrifice for his beliefs. Rajmohan, grandson of Gandhi, and on his mother's side of the first Indian Governor General of Independent India, knows well how values and ethics are constrained by the exigencies of practical politics as a result of this unique family experience, which shaped his own politics and ethical concerns. As Senator and as Secretary General of the Janata Dal Parliamentary Party which stands in the Centre of India's very diverse political spectrum, he has occupied a centrist political position that would have suited both his grandfathers, especially since from this position he convened the joint parliamentary committee on the welfare of scheduled castes (untouchables) and tribes—both of which were key concerns of Mahatma Gandhi.

As leader of the Indian delegation to the United Nations Human Rights Commission and in other areas of his life, he has worked, as did his grandfathers, to express his beliefs in concrete political action. As a writer documenting and analyzing the diverse trends in contemporary Indian politics and history, he educated public opinion and a generation of leaders on the effects and consequences of significant issues of our time, from India's imposition of repressive emergency legislation in the 1970s to today's urgent need for reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims, and for the resolution of the unfulfilled aspiration of building a United India.

In all his life's work he has responded to the challenge posed by his grandfather who asked us all to "recall the face of the poorest and most helpless person whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he be able to gain anything by it? Will it restore to him control over his life and destiny...will it lead to *swaraj* (self rule) for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away." This is a

simple question but an important yardstick against which we might judge the importance of our work and question much of that which passes for “essential” in modern industrial society. Rajmohan’s own life and work has engaged this question; we at ICAR have been privileged to be able to share the benefits of his wisdom and practice and to reflect with him on what the Indian experience might teach the world in relation to justice and nonviolent resolution of conflict.

The Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution is deeply committed to an expert analysis of the conditions for stable peaceful relationships and why these at times give way to violent conflicts between persons, groups, organizations, and nations. Most of this analysis is based on the assumption that the nonviolent transformation of dysfunctional relationships is likely to prove more durable than violent transformation. Little of what passes for modern conflict analysis would have been possible without the evolution of Gandhian nonviolence principles. These are to modern conflict resolution what the theory of relativity or quantum mechanics is to modern physics. It is our great pleasure to have had Gandhi’s grandson expound these principles to us in 1995.

*Kevin P. Clements*

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ICAR publications are available to the public and to academic institutions. They are listed in this booklet and include curriculum guides and manuals; books, papers, and special reports; and a series of Working Papers and Occasional Papers including the institute's Annual Lynch Lecture.

**Eighth Annual Vernon M. and Minnie I. Lynch Lecture  
on Conflict Resolution**

**Address by  
Rajmohan Gandhi  
for the  
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution  
George Mason University  
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**Peace and Identity:  
Some Reflections on the South Asian Experience**

Being the kind of person I am, a 59-year-old man who has lived most of his life in India, a country where for almost every necessity demand outstrips supply and where you quickly accept what is available—the train, bus, flight, seat, or loaf of bread—I have been attempting, in these last ten weeks in Fairfax, to find a personal, even a physical, balance while taking in, from bottom to top and left to right, the display in your stores of cereal, bread, milk, and orange juice. The fact that I have low blood pressure makes this bid for a personal balance slightly more difficult and certainly more necessary.

From your Native Americans I learn that balance is best symbolized by the circle. This rings a bell inside me; in India to show respect to a shrine we walk round it, completing one or more circles, and a Hindu marriage is pronounced when with their steps the bride and groom encircle a sacred fire. I have found some truth in the view that if the circle or wheel represents India, the fork in the road marks the West because in India we continue doing what we have always done while the American is always choosing the road to take, or, nowadays, the button to press.

India recounts the legend of the ancient sage Agastya who, troubled by the imbalance of the earth, strode past the middle into the south of India; the earth, it is said, found its balance as a result. Needless to say, India in this legend equalled the earth. I have at times asked myself whether Gandhi, on whom I will focus a good deal this evening, might have altered his perspective had he crossed the middle of the earth, wherever it is, and travelled to America. No doubt it is also possible to speculate on what might have happened had Lincoln, or Jefferson, or George Mason, journeyed to India. In his significant tract *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Self-Rule), written in 1909, Gandhi excoriated automobiles, airplanes, railway trains, and numerous other aspects of what he called modern civilization. Gandhi was a dedicated walker in South Africa and India; in South Africa his treks



were mostly inside cities while in India he often walked from village to village.

While America has some renowned walkers, Gandhi might perhaps have revised his judgment about cars if he had to live and work in America and represent the average American—the American man-in-the-car—as he represented the average Indian man-in-the-street. I have no doubt that the impact on Gandhi's mind of America's space and abundance would have been profound. But the distribution or balance of powers, the separation of church and state, the respect for law, and the variety of America's races would no doubt have worked on his mind. We don't have to guess about some things; he is on record about what American Blacks faced and also about what was done to the indigenous people of Australia. But I rather think that America's ability to make a nation out of a variety of ethnic and religious groups, incomplete as this was, would have compelled his admiration.

Gandhi had hoped, as we all know, to find a balance between India's independence and unity and also to win independence without any violence whatever. To unite as much of India as he did, and to keep violence against the British as low as it was kept, were, in the circumstances of the time, stupendous achievements. Gandhi's well-known efforts for Hindu-Muslim reconciliation in the last year of his life, climaxed by his assassination, was heroic as well. Yet the fact remains that India was not only divided into two in 1947; it was divided amid great bloodshed. If we can find out why, it may be of help in conflict resolution today. Apart from examining this question, I will offer tonight a view of India today as well as a general view on self-determination and autonomy, a subject that is critical today in many parts of the world, and a brief look at whether ethnic boundaries should also become national and state boundaries. With luck this assorted package of elements from the past and the present will facilitate our exploration of the balance between peace and identity.

Let us recall the realities of the India of Gandhi's time. For protection against its rivals or adversaries each Indian group—religious, caste, or class—was inclined to turn to the Raj, thereby strengthening the hegemony of the Raj even as a general dislike of its alienness and the burden of maintaining it increased. British India, governed directly by the Raj, and the rulers of the more than 500 large and small princely states under British paramountcy were suspicious of their subjects and of the Indian National Congress, which had been founded in 1885 to safeguard and extend the rights of Indians. India's outcasts, too, were apprehensive of Congress's intentions, and sought British guarantees against Indian self-government, which they feared would become government by the

higher castes. When Edwin Montagu, Britain's Secretary of State for India, visited India in 1917, leaders of a group of the untouchables said to him, "We shall fight to the last drop of our blood against any attempt to transfer the seat of authority in this country from British hands to the so-called high-caste Hindus."<sup>1</sup>

Mistrust was greatest, perhaps, between Hindus and Muslims. In 1857, 12 years before Gandhi's birth, Indian soldiers working for the British—Hindus as well as Muslims—had mutinied in different parts of India. The occupant of the Delhi throne, Bahadur Shah Zafar, a descendant of the once-powerful Mughal rulers of India, declared for the rebels, although earlier he had been obliged to accede to British control. For a short time Delhi was in rebel hands, but the 1857 Rising was crushed. Because Zafar and other Muslim chiefs had supported the Rising, and Muslim sullenness after its suppression exceeded Hindu sullenness, and because the Hindus were less inhibited than the Muslims in entering the services and schools established by the Raj, the Rising was followed by a period when the British-Hindu relationship seemed closer than the British-Muslim one.

Headed by Sayyid Ahmad Khan (from 1817 to 1898), Muslim leaders not only restored the balance, they advised Muslims to be wary of the Indian National Congress and in 1906 the Muslim League was formed. By 1909 Muslims all across India were granted separate electorates for choosing their local representatives. After 21 years in South Africa, Gandhi returned to India in 1915, recruited allies, established his ashrams—in his case a combination of campaign headquarters, training center, and spiritual retreat—and conducted his struggles of civil disobedience or *satyagraha*. At the center of the national stage by 1919, the Congress became his instrument in 1920; his advent and leadership intensified the urge for freedom and took it to all corners of India and to millions of previously uninvolved Indians, Muslims as well as Hindus, women as well men, the "untouchables" as well as the high castes.

Gandhi soon found, however, that one Indian's freedom was another's fear. The 1937 provincial elections, the first held under an Act that gave significant albeit restricted powers to legislatures and governments elected in the provinces, proved a watershed. Congress won control in eight out of eleven provinces and formed governments that appeared Hindu rather than all-Indian to many Muslims. Though Gandhi preferred that there be a place for the Muslim League in these ministries, he was unable to push such coalitions through since Congress leaders at both provincial and national levels successfully resisted this. As a result, the League's charge that Congress was a Hindu body was believed by the Muslim masses.

The second World War, fought in the name of freedom and democracy, was the second watershed; it made Indians more impatient for independence and the British more cautious. Congress demanded a share in central government; Britain responded by curtailing the powers of the provincial governments. Unwilling to be seen as rubber-stamping the Raj's decisions, Congress ministries resigned during October and November 1939. Thus Hitler's war destroyed what might have been seen as Congress's compact with the British under which Congress ministries governed eight provinces in an India ruled by the Raj. The Raj and the Muslim League now found an affinity. March 1940 marks the third watershed with the Muslim League's demand in a resolution adopted in Lahore for Pakistan; from this point on Britain held that it could not sacrifice Muslim aspirations at the altar of Congress's demand for independence.

Gandhi's response to the demand for division was that he could not agree that Hindus and Muslims were two nations. India was a joint family, said Gandhi, adding, however, that he could understand its Muslim members living in Muslim-majority areas choosing after independence to live separately. Loyalty to the Indian sentiment for freedom and concern at the Raj-Muslim League affinity produced Gandhi's "Quit India" campaign of 1942, the gravest threat to British rule after 1857, as the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, put it in a cable to Churchill.<sup>2</sup> It also sent virtually all Congress activists behind prison walls.

### **The Gandhi-Jinnah Talks of 1944**

Released from prison in the summer of 1944 because he was thought to be dying, Gandhi recovered and wrote to Mohamed Ali Jinnah, president of the Muslim League, proposing a meeting. Jinnah agreed, saying they could meet in his house in Bombay. Because of Jinnah's poor health, the talks at 10 Mount Pleasant Road commenced only on September 9, 1944, and continued until September 27th. The two met 14 times, Gandhi walking on each occasion to Jinnah's residence. Newspapers printed pictures of the two smiling. Many in India prayed.<sup>3</sup>

But the talks failed. Gandhi proposed a Congress-League accord with a provisional Congress-League government in New Delhi and separation (in the form of Pakistan) of all contiguous Muslim-majority districts in the North-West and East of India if a plebiscite in the areas, held after the transfer of power from Britain, went in favor of such a separation. In the event of separation, said Gandhi, mutual agreements could be entered into for defense, commerce, communications, and other essential matters. Jinnah described the proposal that Gandhi put forward "a parody and a negation" of the League's Lahore resolution, offering "a maimed,

mutilated, and moth-eaten Pakistan.” Jinnah said he had to have all the province of Bengal, the western part of which had a Hindu majority, and all of the Punjab province, the eastern part of which did not have a Muslim majority. Second, to Jinnah, the “bonds of alliance between Hindustan and Pakistan” that Gandhi proposed in the treaty of separation seemed to clip Pakistan’s sovereignty. Third, while Jinnah wanted Pakistan before the British left and while it was still under British auspices, Gandhi envisaged partition coming “as soon as possible after India is free.”

Gandhi’s offer was the spelling out of a resolution supporting self-determination that Congress had adopted in 1942; he claimed that in substance it also met the call of the League’s Lahore resolution, which only referred to “areas” where Muslims were in a majority and did not speak of the whole of the Punjab and Bengal. But Jinnah seemed convinced that the two provinces in their entirety belonged to Pakistan and he wanted Pakistan before freedom because he did not trust Congress to permit separation once it controlled India. Rajagopalachari, a Congress leader who had encouraged Gandhi to seek an accord with Jinnah, pointed out that if a Congress-controlled India were capable of denying separation, it could also undo it after it occurred, for the British were unlikely to leave behind an army to sustain partition. In his view, there was no “material difference arising out of the order in which the two events, withdrawal of British domination and partition, take place.”<sup>4</sup> However, both Jinnah and Gandhi thought the difference significant, Jinnah because of his mistrust of Congress, and Gandhi because of his national pride, wanting Indians, not the British, to decide India’s future.

The Pakistan secured by Jinnah three years later was an area almost exactly what Gandhi had offered (and he had rejected) in 1944.

## **The Lessons**

The virtual identity between the Pakistan debated by Gandhi and Jinnah in 1944 and the one reluctantly accepted by all concerned in 1947 suggests that a partition in peace and concord, so different from the historical reality, had perhaps been a possibility. Although alien rule was personally humiliating to Gandhi and widely resented by all Indians, Gandhi and the Indian people may not have lost tangibly by recognizing and talking to “the third party,” the British, at an Indian negotiating table. While Gandhi participated in many an Indo-British encounter, some on the battlefield and some at the table, and in several Congress-League exchanges, he disliked a three-sided negotiation; British involvement in what he saw as the problems of the Indian family was unacceptable to him. Yet, by virtue of its power, Britain sat at the table anyway and the eventual

outcome of freedom-in-partition was indeed settled in a three-sided negotiation. It should be added that there is no evidence that if Gandhi had offered a division under British auspices Jinnah would have accepted "small" Pakistan in 1944; however, Muslim suspicion of Gandhi would have been allayed and Britain, too, would have become less distrustful of him. Such gains might have dispelled some of the bitter clouds that were soon to fill India's skies.

No doubt Gandhi had to ensure that he was not lending credence during the independence movement to an influential British line, voiced by Churchill among others, that Indian divisions were permanent and required a permanent British presence. Evidence that Britain was glad of Indian divisions and used them is conclusive. There is, to start with, the well-known entry in the 1909 diary of Lady Minto, the Viceroy's wife, that separate electorates for Muslims meant the "pulling back of 62 million people (India's Muslim population at the time) from joining the ranks of the seditious opposition."<sup>5</sup> In 1925 Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India, wrote to the Viceroy, "I have placed my highest and most permanent hopes in the eternity of the communal situation." In 1937, Winston Churchill said to Viceroy Linlithgow that it was his hope that the Muslims would act as "a counter-check" on Congress and that "the Princes' India will preserve a separate entity." Any effort to "unite" India, added Churchill, was to him "distressing and repugnant in the last degree."<sup>6</sup>

If British presence was temporary and they were in fact going to leave, they should let go and allow Indians to learn to live with one another without outside help, was Gandhi's understandable attitude. Yet he could have been more flexible in his stand that Indians alone should decide on division. He was ambivalent about the history of Britain's role in Indian divisions. In *Hind Swaraj* (Chapter 7, 1909), he wrote, "The Hindus and the Mahomedans were at daggers drawn. This, too, gave the [East India] Company its opportunity." In London, however, in 1931, he said that the Hindu-Muslim quarrel was "not old...but co-eval with the British advent" (*Eight Lives*, p. 315). In April 1947 Gandhi told Mountbatten that though he "did not hold the British responsible (for the origin of Hindu-Muslim animosity), their policy of Divide and Rule had kept the tension very much alive" (*Transfer of Power*, Vol. 10, p. 47). He paid tribute to Britain in remarks he made in July 1947 deploring India's impending division: "The British carried on their rule in India for 150 years and...accepted the fact that politically India was one nation. They also tried to develop it as a nation and to some extent succeeded. Before them the Moghuls had made a similar effort but they were less successful. Having first unified the country, it is not a very becoming thing for them to divide it." [88:281]

We must not forget that in 1918 Gandhi had made a bid to recruit soldiers for the Empire or that in September 1939 he had responded to the outbreak of Hitler's war with a strong statement in Britain's favor. Gandhi had a warm spot for the British as well as an instinctive appreciation of their influence and no wish to annoy them unduly, but there was a limit to the unreciprocated friendship he could offer if he wished to represent the Indian people who had little sympathy for their alien rulers. If Gandhi drew his strength from the Indian people, he was also limited, in his strategic options, by their sentiments. Likewise, there was a limit to his offers to the League, which strained the loyalty of his Hindu following; his approach to Jinnah in 1944 was strongly attacked. Apart from ruling out Britain as a legitimate "third party," Gandhi at times appeared to play a partisan role on behalf of the Congress (which he saw as the vehicle of Indian nationalism) when he might have been more effective as an "outsider." This seemed to be the case in the summer of 1946 when three British Cabinet Ministers spent three months in India in an attempt to satisfy the demands of both Congress and the League.

A third failure, at coalition-building, has already been alluded to. We have seen his inability in 1937 to arrange a coalition with the League in the United Provinces, but note should also be taken of his failure to forge an alliance with the Unionists of the Punjab, a party with a strong Muslim base, long reluctant to support the Pakistan demand. An accord forged by Congress with the Unionists and another with non-League and non-Congress Muslim forces in Bengal might have isolated the Muslim League, but the pro-British and pro-landlord posture of the Unionists got in the way in the Punjab. In Bengal, curiously enough, it was the anti-landlord flavor of many non-League Muslims that deterred the often pro-landlord Bengal Congress from an alliance. In the late 1930s and early 1940s Gandhi tried to promote an understanding with the Unionists. As far as Bengal was concerned, he wooed Suhrawardy and Fazlul Huq, prominent leaders of the League, from 1946 to 1947. Yet his efforts do not cancel his and Congress's failures; in part at least they are attributable to complacency, inflexibility, and arrogance in Congress, weaknesses that Gandhi was unable to remove. Success would have detached major Muslim constituencies from Jinnah's influence.

If there has to be a summing-up of the inadequacies in Gandhi's efforts to preserve Indian unity, we can say that on crucial occasions when the two goals were in conflict, his passion for freedom from the alien power took precedence over his passion for Hindu-Muslim unity and also that at times he mistakenly equated power for Congress with Indian freedom. Should he have put unity before independence and made that his

first goal? Could he have? Would India have followed him then? It is enough, I think, to raise the question.

### **Violence in an India Guided by Gandhi**

We may look next at the balance between independence and peace, again in the context of Indian history. A few days after Partition and Independence, a Black educator from the United States, Professor Stuart Nelson of Howard University, asked Gandhi in Calcutta about the communal violence of 1946 and 1947 that seemed to contradict the nonviolence of the Indian movement for freedom. Gandhi replied that he now doubted the genuineness of that nonviolence; in fact, Indians had “harbored ill will and anger” against the British, while claiming to resist them nonviolently. Their resistance had been “inspired by violence,” not by “a respect for the better element in the English people, which they were trying to awaken by self-suffering.” Added Gandhi, “The attitude of violence which we had secretly harbored, in spite of the restraint imposed by the Indian National Congress, now recoiled upon us and made us fly at each other’s throat when the question of the distribution of power came up.” Implying that he had failed to see this “secret violence,” Gandhi said his “vision had been clouded.” These remarks were recorded by Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, the sociologist serving as Gandhi’s aide, and published in his *My Days with Gandhi* (pages 170-1).

If something had clouded Gandhi’s vision, what was it? Let us note that Gandhi’s remarks are not quite fair to himself and to the movement he led. There is no evidence that the same people took part in the nonviolent campaigns and in the communal violence from 1946 to 1947, and there is plenty of evidence that Gandhi was keenly aware of Indian violence. Nonetheless, it is true that the movement for freedom triggered a variety of power struggles of which the communal riots were a tragic and ugly manifestation. Aware of Indian divisions, Gandhi strove vigorously to keep India nonviolent; however, communal suspicions and hates exploded into violence.

Gandhi knew well the face of Indian violence. In 1919, the year of the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre in the city of Amritsar, he had identified and condemned Indian violence along with the violence of the Raj. During his 1921 non-cooperation campaign, when on one occasion Hindus and Muslims jointly attacked Parsis, Christians, Jews, and Europeans in Bombay, Gandhi said “The *swaraj* (independence) that I have witnessed during the last two days has stunk in my nostrils.”<sup>7</sup> When the Chauri Chaura killings occurred in 1922, he suspended the Indian movement, admitting “brutal violence by the people” and saying: “There is not as yet

in India that truthful and nonviolent atmosphere which and which alone can justify mass disobedience" (*Young India*, February 16, 1922).

Following his release in 1944 from detention (since 1922) in Poona, he voiced disagreement with the violence that had marked the "Quit India" defiance that he had inaugurated. When Hindu and Muslim ratings in the Royal Indian Navy jointly mutinied in February 1946, Gandhi predicted that violence-inclined Hindus and Muslims would turn against one another. In November 1946 he recalled: "When I was in detention in the Aga Khan Palace (from 1942 to 1944), I once sat down to write a thesis on India as a protagonist of nonviolence. But as I proceeded with my writing, I could not go on. I had to stop. There are two aspects of Hinduism. There is, on the one hand, the historical Hinduism with its untouchability, superstitious worship of sticks and stones, animal sacrifice, and so on. On the other hand, we have the Hinduism of the Gita, the Upanishads, and Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, which is the acme of *ahimsa*..." [86: 134] As for untouchability, in August 1946 he had written as follows to Vallabhbhai Patel, who on independence became India's Deputy Prime Minister, "Who are the people who beat up Harijans (the untouchables), murder them, prevent them from using public wells, drive them out of schools, and refuse them entry into their homes? They are Congressmen, aren't they? It is very necessary to have a clear picture of this." [85: 102]

Gandhi was not blind about Indian violence but he tended to lose sight of it from time to time or on occasion to disregard or risk it in his pursuit of national self-respect; the latter took precedence over the eradication of Indian violence, no matter how much this violence pained or disgusted him. Gandhi's British antagonists never underestimated his passion for shaking off alien rule. Wavell, for instance, Viceroy from 1943 to 1947, felt that Gandhi was far and away the "most formidable" foe of the British empire and that "he certainly hastened the departure of the British, which was his life's aim."<sup>8</sup> Penderel Moon, one of the Raj's officials, spoke for many British when he wrote, "The deliverance of India from British rule, which admittedly was Gandhi's chief political aim, would appear also to have been the dominant purpose of his life. He himself would have denied this."<sup>9</sup>

"He himself would have denied this..." The sentence shows awareness, as well as skepticism, about Gandhi's claim of a purpose larger or higher than ridding India of British rule. Wavell, Moon, and others thinking like them felt the steel in Gandhi's nonviolent arm; they did not—or did not want to—feel the seeker of Hindu-Muslim unity, the enemy of untouchability, the dreamer of a nonviolent world. Many in the Raj were no doubt baffled by one who seemed resolved to wrest power



from their hands but disdained to keep it in his own. Numberless face-to-face encounters, analyses, and intelligence reports had showed the Raj that Gandhi was not interested in money, office, pomp, or power. The Raj also possessed evidence that Gandhi spent much time and energy in talks or correspondence with individuals on their personal problems and in nursing the sick in his ashrams.

Those in the Raj who could not reject the evidence before them summed him up as "strange" while some denied it and called him a hypocrite. Wavell wrote that he felt "malevolence"<sup>10</sup> in Gandhi; he also thought Gandhi's objective was "the establishment of a Hindu Raj."<sup>11</sup> When a Hindu extremist killed Gandhi, Wavell referred to it as "an unexpected end," whereas Gandhi was fully expecting precisely that sort of end as were some of his colleagues. While other British Viceroy or Secretaries of State did not notice any animus, several whites, like Louis Fischer, said: "He had no animus. He was incapable of hatred...he wanted to liberate India in order to liberate England from India."<sup>12</sup>

We may see Gandhi as having two inner voices, one representing truth and the other India, at times finding them in accord and at other times painfully torn between the two. He saw national self-respect as a spiritual or religious virtue; India, too, was truth to him. He was also aware that national self-respect could cloak Indian cruelties, hence the strain in his life. We can perhaps say that fighting on the one hand the eternal battle of truth versus untruth, he also led the historic battle of India against Britain and a political battle on behalf of the Indian National Congress. In his capacity as leader of a political movement, he took some options that seemed irresistible or unavoidable but which troubled some of his closest friends, for instance, Charles Andrews, the poet, and Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, and, eventually, Gandhi himself.

That India found freedom from fear through Gandhi is the verdict of many an Indian and non-Indian observer or contemporary; that India became hate-free or nonviolent because of him is no one's verdict. It may be true that the movement for independence led by him was largely and, in comparison with other liberation movements, remarkably peaceful; yet Gandhi's India did not shed violence. Reminding everyone of his early timidity and at times confessing even in his later years to a lack of confidence in his fearlessness if attacked, Gandhi in fact faced threats, imprisonments, physical blows, mobs, and opposition without flinching and inspired a great number of his compatriots to do likewise. His 1897 strides through the Durban mob that had threatened to lynch him (in the event he was kicked and beaten but saved by Mrs. Alexander, wife of the police chief) and his 1939 walk through the ranks of sword-carrying foes in Rajkot

dramatized his personal bravery as did other instances. His bare-chested, open-air, unprotected life amidst currents of hate also testified to it. His political forthrightness was likewise plain. "Fearlessness—yes, I would say fearlessness was his greatest gift," remarked Nehru in 1955. "And the fact that the weak little bundle of bones was so fearless in every way, physically, mentally, it was a tremendous thing which went to the other people too, and made them less afraid."<sup>13</sup>

Way back in 1897, F.A. Laughton, a white lawyer working for Dada Abdulla, Gandhi's first client in South Africa, remarked after watching Gandhi's attitude to the white crowd threatening to lynch him, "Intimidation is out of the question because, if he knew the Town Hall were going to be thrown at him, I believe from what I saw that he would not quail."<sup>14</sup> India absorbed the courage Gandhi taught but did not accept the futility of anger and hate that he also taught. "Fear not" was simpler, more comprehensible, and more attractive than "hate not." "My mission," he said in 1940, "is to convert every Indian, whether he is a Hindu, Muslim, or any other, even Englishmen, and finally the world to nonviolence for regulating mutual relations whether political, economic, social, or religious" (*Harijan*, January 13, 1940); the words "even" and "finally" reveal his priority for which he claims religious sanction. "I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbors" (*Harijan*, March 29, 1936); he has to serve people if he is to serve God; his nearest neighbors are Indians.

Gandhi admitted the intensity of his nationalism. "My nationalism, fierce though it is, is not exclusive, is not devised to harm any nation or individual," he said in 1931. (*Young India*, March 26, 1931; my italics.) Tolstoy, who shortly before his death in 1910 called Gandhi's South African work "most fundamental and important," supplying "most weighty practical proof" of the effectiveness of nonviolence, was uneasy about the nationalism he detected in Gandhi. He and Gandhi agreed on nonviolence and "bread labor" but not on nationalism, which, in Gandhi's case, may also be seen as righteous indignation. Gandhi doggedly sought to make it as righteous as possible, to confine the indignation to "the system," and to treat Indian independence as only the stepping-stone to a new world. Yet a core of nationalism remained in him, rallying Indians, inspiring colonized people everywhere, hurting the British, disappointing men like Tolstoy, Tagore, and Andrews—and veiling Indian ills, including violence, that preceded British rule and were to survive it. It was this nationalist sediment that to some extent "clouded his mind." Though admitting its effect, he was not sorry; he told Nelson that but for the "illusion" he had harbored, India would not have reached the point of independence.<sup>15</sup>

## **The India of the Present**

The pulls of identity continue to strain unity and peace in South Asia where the religious overtones of violence and the violent overtones of religion are constant realities. The conflict in Kashmir had its beginnings in 1947 when Pakistan was established as a Muslim homeland and Pakistanis claimed Kashmir because a majority of its people were Muslims; Islam is a rallying cry for important sections of Kashmiri militants. Religion and its symbols are prominent in the conflict involving the Sikhs in India's Punjab. In the Northeast of India some insurgent groups allege threats to their Christianity. In the dispute in Bhutan the allegedly illegal Nepali settlers are Hindus in a Buddhist state. The Hinduism of a majority of Sri Lanka's Tamils and the Buddhism of most of the island's Sinhalese are key issues in the Sri Lankan conflict. In Pakistan, rivalries between Islam's Sunni and Shi'ite sects have destroyed lives. The Chakmas rebelling in Bangladesh are a small Buddhist minority in a predominantly Muslim country.

The tensions generated by unemployment, unfulfilled expectations, and malfunctioning or nonfunctioning democratic and civic institutions seem to flow swiftly toward religious fault lines and trigger eruptions that recall the past. But we must also note religion's violent face. If in one place *jihād* is seen as a religious obligation and the execution of blasphemers is viewed likewise and if the goddess wielding a sword dripping with blood or a god with trident, bow-and-arrow, mace, or discus are popular icons elsewhere, it is clear that God-worship and sword-worship are as two sides of the religious coin which the devout Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh must carry for admission into the chambers of the faithful.

This seems to be religion's dominant note in South Asia, but dominant only in the sense of being loud, prominent, glaring, and intimidating and not necessarily the way that religion is understood by a majority of Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs.

There are striking ironies. Islam came to India not only on fast horses and with upraised swords—though it did come like that, too, and raiders who claimed to be Muslims did desecrate and destroy Hindu and Buddhist places of worship—but, arriving in India, Islam also walked to the humble cottage of the weak and untouchable Hindu despised by his supposed high-caste superiors. When, a thousand years ago, Sufis and other Muslims broke bread with the untouchable Hindu, sat with him, ate with him, put an arm around him, and spoke of equality and brotherhood under the One God accessible to all, the untouchable felt dignity for the first time and was likely to embrace Islam. Now, however, it is at times the Kalashnikov

against the rib that gives the feel of Islam, as the weak responds with secret curses and the strong reaches out for his gun. But the ironies are not confined to Islam; violence in the name of the Buddha marks the island of Sri Lanka that treasures his relic and is a custodian of his message and the story of the Sikhs is not dissimilar. The founder of that religion sought about six centuries ago to purify Hinduism and simplify its teaching, and he sought also, through a gift of poetry, to reconcile Hindus and Muslims with mercy at the heart of his message. Today, at times, the Sikh drumbeat is for justice with strokes that suggest revenge.

As a Hindu, I may be allowed to linger longer with Hindu ironies and to refer to those relating to the well-known Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, both composed well before the Christian era. We can say, simplifying things a bit, that the two epics mean to a Hindu what a blend of the Bible, Shakespeare, and a history of great wars might mean to a Christian in the West, providing a taste of ethics, faith, drama, valor, and sadness. When the great stories end, the good are victorious over the bad, but the good have their questionable moments and the bad their admirable ones.

Most Hindus, boys and girls, are raised on the epics. In their adolescence and even as adults, many Hindus have cried at the tragedies recounted in these classic tales. Children are to this day named after the heroic characters they celebrate; one of the most popular Hindu names for males is Karan, protagonist on the evil side in the *Mahabharata*, a noble one maltreated by Fate.

Rama, the godlike hero of the *Ramayana*, is portrayed as an incarnation of God unaware that he is more than man while the *Mahabharata* features Krishna, an incarnation of God who knows who he is. The epics grip the Indian imagination like nothing else but centuries ago Rama and Krishna broke loose from the epics and became Hindu India's most popular names for God. In need or anguish, praise or thankfulness, Hindus take the name of Rama or Krishna as God or Christ or Allah is invoked by those of other faiths. Other Hindu names for God include Siva, Sankara, Narayana, Hari, and Ishwar, to give some examples, but popular preference is for Rama and Krishna and when those names are uttered, the utterer usually thinks not of the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* but of an Almighty and Merciful God. So plain is this meaning of Rama and Krishna that several devout Muslims and Muslim poets in India also use the terms interchangeably with Allah, Khuda, or Rahim (the Merciful). Gandhi was only one of millions of modern Hindus who used Rama for God, and a common daily greeting exchanged by many in India, not very

different from “Good morning,” is “Jai Ramjiki,” or “Victory to Rama,” “ji” being a suffix of respect.

The immense constituency of Rama and Krishna was irresistible for Hindu extremists and fundamentalists who resolved to appropriate the figures of Rama and Krishna for giving battle to Muslims. This required forcing Rama and Krishna back into the epics, turning them into rulers and warriors, forcing the epics into history, and forcing history into the present. The battles of the epics were portrayed as an anticipation, if not an actual description, of a conflict between aggressive Muslims and innocent Hindus. The God of all thus became commander of a Hindu army as well as the mascot of a mob pursuing the helpless. But campaigns to sell a product or a thesis need a truth on the back of which a distortion may ride; fortunately for the Hindu extremists a truth pregnant with explosive potential was available—the fact that in the year 1528 a mosque had been built by a Muslim commander in the town of Ayodhya where, according to the *Ramayana*, Rama was born.

It is also a fact that the Hindus of Ayodhya refer to the neighborhood where the mosque was built as Rama’s birthplace. Thus it was that a drive was launched for turning the mosque into a temple dedicated not only to Rama *per se* but to the child Rama, who could tug at the heartstrings of millions of Hindu women. The adult Rama was portrayed as a national hero, “a politician,” said a campaign supporter, and the mosque as a symbol of India’s humiliation at the hand of Islam. Religious and nationalist emotions were united in a lethal compound, as were love and hate, with a subtext suggesting that if the mosque was an unwanted presence, so also were India’s Muslims unless they humbled themselves. Though never raised, even by radical Hindus, as an issue until from 1949 to 1950, except locally in Ayodhya, this 1528 mosque became the subject of the most impassioned debate in the India of the late 1980s and early 1990s. On December 6, 1992, a mob claiming to be devotees of Rama demolished the 464-year-old mosque, sparking violence in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. More than 2,000 people, a majority of them Muslims, were killed in different parts of India and a number of Hindu temples damaged or destroyed in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In many cases, fortunately, Hindu neighbors saved Muslims sometimes by hiding them. One extremely poor Hindu woman in Kanpur who had harbored a Muslim couple said afterwards before a TV camera that attackers looking for the couple asked her to shout “Victory to Rama,” but the words would not come out of her mouth for she had seen blows struck to the sound of the cry.

Another sign of this devaluation and distortion of Rama was the opinion of a group of young men in North Gujarat who assured me in the

summer of 1991 that Rama had taken birth to defend Hindus from Muslim atrocities, a view of chronology that should be measured against the pre-Islamic, pre-Christian origin of the *Ramayana*. But then the drive against the Ayodhya mosque should be set against the infinite love and mercy of Rama as seen by Tulsidas, Nanak, Kabir, and hundreds of lesser poets and innumerable others of different races and creeds, including Father Bulcke, Belgian priest and noted scholar of the Rama story and compiler of a famous Hindi-English dictionary used alike by supporters and critics of the drive aimed at the mosque as well as by Gandhi.

Like the mosque, Gandhi, too, was targeted by Hindu radicals and dubbed an appeaser of Muslims who polluted Hinduism by likening Allah to Rama and Ishwar. On anger-arousing cassettes turned out by the million, Hindus were told by one of the star speakers of the temple campaign, Sadhvi Ritambhara, a young woman in saffron (the Hindu color of renunciation), that Gandhi stood for turning the other cheek to the attacker but now Hindus had to hit back. Radical Hinduism portrays Gandhi's nonviolence as an import from the Christian West and violence in India as an import from Islam.

As for Krishna, there is a drive for the removal of a mosque intimately linked to the Krishna legend in Mathura, like Ayodhya, a town in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state. A mosque in what perhaps is the holiest Hindu city, Varanasi or Benares, also in Uttar Pradesh, has been the third principal target of radical Hindus, who have been mobilized by *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP), the World Hindu Council, a body curbed from time to time by the Government of India. The *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* refers often to a list of more than 3,000 mosques it views as illegitimate though it has declared that a surrender of the Muslim claim to the three mosques in Ayodhya, Mathura, and Varanasi might suffice. The last few weeks have seen a rise in the tempo of the three-city campaign. Some Muslim voices have asked whether the VHP will drop all other demands if the Muslims abandon their claim to the site where the Ayodhya mosque stood, but the probability of a consensus on such a formula is hard to assess and it would be easy for hardliners on either side to damage a consensus should it emerge. Moreover, while any accord seen as being based on the honorable abandonment of a claim would stand a chance, an impression of submission to coercion will only whet the resentment of one side and the appetite of the other.

The Ayodhya conflict was undoubtedly influenced by the year-round serialization, on India's government-controlled television, of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* during much of the period of turbulence. Audiences watching the epics were some of the largest in television's

history. Unfortunately, there is a lack of solid information on the nature and extent of the impact on conflictual behavior of these serializations. That the Rama and Krishna of the epics were compellingly and week after week brought before the eyes and minds of India undoubtedly assisted the strategy of the VHP and its allies. Not surprisingly, the creator of one of the series was conspicuously honored at one of the rallies of the temple radicals. Yet, and here is another typical Indian irony, the script writer of the *Mahabharata* series, which drew a bigger audience than the *Ramayana*, Rahi Masoom Raza, is a Muslim. And, moreover, it is by no means certain that the serialized epics' lasting contribution was anger at the Muslims. It is true that cruel violence and passionate oaths of revenge seemed to mark almost every *Mahabharata* episode, but so did revenge's sour taste and consequence; a stark void was the final result of mutual violence, despite the victory of the so-called "good" side. And, again, the "bad" side, like the "good," was unmistakably Hindu. Being *pre*-Muslim, the epic could not be *anti*-Muslim.

Muslim insecurities heightened or engendered by the campaign of targeting the mosques raise the question of a Muslim's real and constitutional rights in India. As far as the latter is concerned, all significant political parties, including the leading one on the Hindu right, the Bharatiya Janata Party, assert that they see the Indian state as nonreligious and a Muslim's rights as equalling a Hindu's. But a difference of course exists between what the Indian Constitution provides and the conduct of officials, including those in the police and the lower courts.

Hindu extremists have held for several decades that only those viewing India as both their homeland and their holy land are worthy of Indian rights, a formulation first made by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. If this was his definition of an Indian, he also said that a Hindu is "he who calls and considers himself a Hindu." In his view, Muslims, too, can call themselves Hindu and they can, if they consider India holier than the Middle East, have full Indian rights as well. These definitions create obvious problems. The logic of the homeland/holyland test would not only cast doubt on the loyalty to India of Muslims and Christians but would imply that Buddhists cannot be loyal in Japan or in Sri Lanka, for, after all, the Buddha was born in the foothills of the Himalayas. And it would imply that Hindus cannot be loyal citizens in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, or anywhere outside India.

Caste is the other great Indian fault line. Not only separating but grading human beings by birth, and perpetuating the allocation by confining marriage to one's category, the caste system produces daily conflicts between those who seek to enforce its rules and others striving to

defy the rules. Those ignoring or defying its rules include a growing number of the supposedly higher castes; but by any test, whether of income, housing, schooling, jobs, or health, the lower castes and the outcasts are still at the bottom. The implications of this for the future of peace in India are obvious.

I may be allowed also to mention the burdens and sorrows of the women of South Asia. India had a woman Prime Minister for years, and at present women head governments in three South Asian countries: Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. But the elevated status of some of our women cannot make up for practices such as the elimination of the female fetus, rejection at birth of a girl child, denial of education, extortion of dowry, and other cruelties against the female sex in our part of the world. If this shames me, I am proud, on the other hand, to point out that women are in the lead and often in the majority among those striving to build bridges within and between countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

There is a connection, of course, between happenings in India and those in Pakistan and in the Islamic world as a whole. Intolerance in Pakistan fuels intolerance in India, and vice versa. How India treats its Muslims, and what it does over Kashmir, will have wide repercussions but the opposite is also true. Evidence that minorities in Muslim-majority countries are not accepted as equal citizens is bound to have some effect on Indian attitudes and eventually on the condition of Muslims in India, even when the latter have nothing to do with policies in Muslim lands.

### **Identity, Self-Determination, and Security**

South Asia and its neighborhood offer several bids for autonomy, self-determination, and independence. We can think of Tibet, Kashmir, the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka, Sind in Pakistan, Punjab, and parts of the northeast of India, and also of Afghanistan and Tajikistan. An idea of the nature of the problem is conveyed by a document on Kashmir issued by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). This document contemplates separate exercises of self-determination in half a dozen or more parts of Kashmir, including a Muslim-majority part under Indian control, a Muslim-majority region under Pakistani control, another Muslim-majority area under Indian control but dominated by Shiite Muslims, a similar Shiite-majority region under Pakistani control, a Buddhist-majority area under Indian control, and a Hindu-majority area under Indian control. A significant minority, the Kashmiri Pandits, most of whom have felt obliged in recent years to leave the Kashmir valley, seem excluded from this "solution," however.



If this complex solution looks tidy to some, they should realize that on the ground each of these six areas have enclaves that in religion, sect, or language go against the regional grain; and the solution also does violence to the consideration of contiguity. A political unit broken up into separate slices or pockets may make practical sense if the territories in between are inhabited by friendly people, but if friendliness can be assumed, why splinter? Other questions arise. Would self-determination include the option of independence or be confined to joining India or Pakistan? How about self-determination for pockets within each region? Will the larger states of which these areas are now a part, India and Pakistan, and the people in the larger states, agree to self-determination in the six or more parts of Kashmir? If self-determination leads in some cases to secession, would it trigger a process of disintegration in India or Pakistan? Would it trigger an anti-minority backlash in these countries?

Parallel or similar questions would arise over Tibet and China, the Tamil-majority parts of Sri Lanka, and the other areas where separatism is a force. And when everything has been considered, would it not perhaps be wiser to seek a compromise that provides the substance of what is asked for, as well as long-denied peace, without risking fresh rounds of disruption and higher levels of violence?

### **Ethnic Heterogeneity and Peace**

The ICJ document cited above seems to connect stability to ethnic homogeneity, a linkage encouraged by the recent spate of ethnic conflicts, yet its logical end would be global apartheid made tidy by a relocation of tribes and races into separated portions of land. Not a very stable solution, I think.

Tensions no doubt race towards religious or ethnic fault lines but also towards other fault lines such as those carved by the indifference of rulers, the disparities of class or the rigidities of political factions. Is Japan's ethnic homogeneity the secret of its relative success as an economy and a polity? Will China's substantial ethnic homogeneity ensure a successful transition to democracy?

I will not attempt to go into these questions, but will return to what I started with, namely America's success in showing that a nation is more than a race, a tribe, or a clan, that a people's link to their country is more than a question of who their ancestors were. The very word "ancestors" reminds us of those who were eliminated and others who were enslaved and I know of the volcanoes of unrest in America's valleys of joy. Yet I cannot forget the remark of a woman that my wife and I met on a train in

India a few months ago, whose ethnicity I could not readily make out; we discovered that she was born in Ecuador and living in New York. I asked her how she saw herself. I was curious, you see, about her identity. "I'm American," she replied with pure conviction, "I am grateful for what America has given to me."

No doubt aided by space and abundance, no doubt aided by the forced sweat of slaves and by the forced retreat of those who were here first, no doubt aided by the fact that many of those who came here were able to leave their histories physically behind in the countries they left from but also because of a bold vision the builders of the United States of America created, and their sons and daughters continued, a nation greater than the bloodline. It is an achievement I salute. Perhaps the challenge for America today is to move from demonstration to the world to interaction with the world so as to assist in turning the world's ethnic and religious boundaries from fault lines into highways of discovery.

How this may happen is a question for reflection. Are we listening enough to those across the political, ethnic, cultural, or religious border? Are we willing to take in the hurts and histories of groups other than our own, to recognize that ours may not be the only group to have done or suffered much? Such self-questioning may have to accompany any passion in us on behalf of our group or our people. If the self-questioning leads not to many answers but to another question that may not be such a bad thing, especially if the question is, "Who are my people?"

*April 3, 1995*

## Endnotes

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