

Sacralization of Violence

Any Way Out?

George Pattery SJ

Dept. Philosophy and Religion, Santiniketan

This paper surveys the phenomenon of violence in its relation to religion, as exemplified in the two recent incidents of the terrorist attack on WTC and the Gujarat Genocide. Terrorism and communal violence cannot be classified together; however, the denominator of religion operates as a commonality between them. After analyzing how and why real-world struggles get sacralized, we probe into the two responses to violence, represented by Rene Girard (theological response) and Gandhi (practical application). In spite of the many differences, both seem to agree upon the 'only way' to unwind the coil of violence.

1. Two Dates that are a Continuum

1.1. Sept 11, 2001

The terrorist attack on WTC and Pentagon was rather an abrupt act, which began and ended within hours. However within that short period, the act has acquired almost Trans-historical, Trans-temporal dimensions. In that sense, the attack is a continuum; it has been memorialized into the lives of people. From far away in India, EPW, not a

periodical that is known to be sympathetic to the US, had this to say:

No words can possibly reflect the horror of Tuesday's (Sept 11, 2001) mass murder of men, women and children – ordinary airline passengers and workers in commercial and governmental offices – by terrorists using hijacked planes to blow up the World Trade Centre in New York and a part of the Pentagon complex in Washington. Nor the psychopathic inhumanity of those who over weeks and months went about cold-bloodedly planning and executing this crime against all humankind. What has sent shock-waves round the world, even more than the actual human and physical devastation, terrible as it has been, is the realization how vulnerable even a country as powerful and as well defended against external attacks as the US is to the sort of invisible enemy who struck on Tuesday. And the next time round the enemy might choose to arm himself with chemical or biological weapons even a crude nuclear device (EPW 2001: 3491).

1.2. Feb 27, 2002 – Mar-Apr, 2002

The Godhra violence and the Gujarat genocide had a definite begin-

* The author is a Reader in the Department of Philosophy & Religion, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, and Director of Regional Theology Centre, Santiniketan.

Abstract: This paper surveys the phenomenon of violence in its relation to religion, as exemplified in the two recent incidents of the terrorist attack on WTC and the Gujarat Genocide. Terrorism and communal violence cannot be classified together; however, the denominator of religion operates as a commonality between them. After analyzing how and why real-world struggles get sacralized, we probe into the two responses to violence represented by Rene Girard (theological response) and Gandhi (practical application). In spite of the many differences, both seem to agree upon the 'only way' to unwind the coil of violence.

ning, but does not seem to have an end; rather it ends in a continuum. By mid-May, the violence and hatred are not quenched but seem to have seeped into the lives of people bringing an apparent calm, probably only to rise up like a volcano. The Gujarat violence exemplifies the continuum aspect of violence. Let us listen to an eyewitness accounts:

The torching of bogey S-6 of the Ahmedabad bound Sabarmati Express at Godhra on Feb 27, in which 58 passengers, including 26 women and 12 children, were burnt to death, is an unpardonable act. ... But, for the burned corpses of the ill-fated passengers to become the justification for armed squads of the ruling BJP and its brother organizations – RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal – to launch a pogrom that sits well with what the UN defines a genocide against the innocent Muslims of Gujarat? ... Dead bodies no longer resembled human beings: they were reduced – whenever they had not been burned to ashes – to a grotesque and pathetic sight that were a haunting reminder of the depth of hatred and the intense dehumanization that the politics of inherent superiority and exclusiveness generates (Communalism Combat 2002: “Genocide” Editorial).

Within hours of the Godhra outrage, the Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal put into motion a meticulously planned pogrom against the Muslim community. Officially the number of dead is 800. Independent reports put the figure at well over 2,000. More than a hundred and fifty thousand people, driven from their homes, now live in refugee camps. Women were stripped, and gang-

raped, parents were bludgeoned to death in front of their children. Two hundred and forty dargahs and 180 masjids were destroyed – in Ahmedabad the tomb of Wali Gujarati, the founder of the modern Urdu poem, was demolished and paved over in the course of a night. The tomb of the Musician Ustad Faiyaz Ali Khan was desecrated and wreathed in burning tyres. Arsonists burned and looted shops, homes, hotels, textile mills, buses and private cars. Thousands have lost their lives (Roy 2001: 21).

Increasingly Indian nationalism has come to mean Hindu nationalism, defined not through regard for itself, but through a hatred of the Other. And the Other, for the moment, is not just Pakistan, it’s Muslim (Roy 2001: 28).

The fascists did not create the grievance, they seized upon, upturned it and forged from it a false sense of pride. They have mobilized human beings using the lowest common denominator: religion (Roy 2001: 30).

2. Religion: the Common Denominator for Violence.

Religion seems to be a common denominator to violence in the terrorist attack and in communal riots. Both are acts of violence and are inspired and legitimized by religious ideologies. Osama bin Laden believes that in order to protect Islamic faith and practice, he has to defeat the US; the Hindu fundamentalists hold that pure Hinduism can flourish only by creating a Hindu *rashtra* in India and the Muslims are the roadblocks. They have to be eliminated if possible. In terms of the act itself, the attack on US is named as terrorist

attack; whereas the violence in Gujarat is communal and public. There are differences between terrorism and communal violence, and it is not recommended that they be clubbed together. However, we look at them together in order to reflect upon the common religious factor in them.

In both these incidents, there is a religious legitimization of violence. The terrorists and the communalists are convinced that what they do is right and ought to be done. They also receive indirect social approval from the public. If not, such acts would not have been possible. The terrorists and the communalists across the world, perceive that their religious ideologies and cultural identities have been under threat. This is true with regard to the Palestinian Muslims, the Irish Catholics, and the Sikh militants, Christian Identity groups in the US or the Zionists in Israel. Since they have been violated, they feel justified in violating others. The main intention seems to be to preserve their religious and cultural identities. The 'Other', who threatens their identity, has to be fought. This ideological base of violence has been sold to the public that acknowledges this reasoning. Violence behind terrorism and communalism is not merely out of a human propensity for aggression, but flows out of religious or else internal convictions.

3. Symbolism in Violence

The religious dimension is reinforced by the symbolism that is employed in the acts of terrorism and communal violence. In choosing the location, time and object of attack or in the

manner in which the terrorists and the communalists behave or comport themselves, religious imageries abound.

3.1. For Osama bin Laden the WTC and the Pentagon are two 'symbolic spaces' representing the economic and military power of the evil empire – the US – and it is his divine mandate to attack them. For the Hindu communalists Babri Masjid represented a violation of Hindu religion and therefore it had to be demolished. For the Muslim fundamentalists to attack the *kar sevaks* in Sabramati Express signified attacking those who pulled down the Babri Masjid. By targeting such centres, they were giving a message to the public: that the mightiest empire is vulnerable and that the Hindus are not totally safe in India. The centrality of the space, time and the audience in terrorist attacks have been studied by Juergensmeyer and he opines that in these attacks there is a war between the secular and the religious. Terrorists want to show that they can control the public space and that the secular governments are not in control (2000: 23-143). In the communal riots too message is given to the secular governments that religious ideology will have to prevail. It is to claim the public and secular space for the religious; it is to access the secular space for the sacred.

3.2. The timing of the attack is significant in that it captures the attention of the public or of the religious minded people. The Kar sevaks undertook the journey to Ayodhya during 'Ram navami' so that it found an acceptable chord in the public. As Juergensmeyer says the terrorist attack

involves special timing so that a dramatic effect is brought about. On the one hand they choose an auspicious time for violence so that the public attention is drawn; on the other hand, by their acts, their day acquires transcendental dimension. Today, Sept 11 has acquired a trans-historical significance; so also Dec 6th in India or Feb-March for Gujarat.

3.3. “Terrorism will not last without being noticed” (Juergensmeyer 2000: 139). Terrorism and communal violence would be pointless without an audience. While the general public remains one of the targets, there is also specific communication to a particular community or nation. In the case of the WTC attack, the US remains the specific audience and in Gujarat violence, the Muslims in Gujarat. Terrorism and communal violence are public performances today. They are often done for the screen so that the public may watch. In the Gujarat riots it is reported that Muslim women were raped in front of the camera, and the Hindu symbols of *trishul* and om were marked on their private parts, and later, people watched these movies. This public display of horror and violence conveys the message that ‘Muslim’ space represented by their women is occupied and that they remain occupied people as long as those marks on their bodies remain. They remain in Hindustan at the concession of the Hindus. The occupation of ‘the Other’ is easily done once the religious symbols are marked on them. The *kar sevaks* adorned themselves with saffron scarf and *trishul* as they went around looting, raping and murdering the Muslims.

3.4. This way of transcendentalizing the space, time and performance in the act of violence is enhanced when there is the mediation of religious symbols. Religion is at the service of violence. The worst is that the rich sources of images that move, beautiful images – the Ayodhya group, a blue skinned Krishna in his tribanga pose, Siva with the Ganga flowing from the knot of his hair, the eternal Mother whose palms are stretched out to bless – have been put at the service of irrational anger and hatred (Ramanathan 2002: 25).

Through symbolization of space, time and events, and by employing direct religious symbols, the terrorists and the communalists transcendentalize their violence. Their struggle and violence acquire cosmic and eschatological dimensions. For bin Laden the war with America is a war that is fought in favour of God, His messenger, and the Muslims. For the Christian Identity groups in the US, the Bible presents a God of war, who fights the metaphysical conflict between good and evil. For the Hindu fundamentalists, in order to preserve *sanatana dharma*, the foreigners – the Muslims, the Christians (the impure ones) – have to be fought against. It is not a struggle of one or two days; it is a millennial struggle the end-victory of which is assured by God. In the vocabulary of Hindu fundamentalists and of terrorists, one can perceive also a metaphysical duality between the spiritual and the material, the enemy representing the latter. In the history of religions, one notices ‘salvation armies’ who are ready to participate in the eschatological warfare: be it jihadi

groups, dal khalsas, the Bajrang dals or soldiers of the cross. “What makes religious violence particularly savage and relentless is that its perpetrators have placed such religious images of divine struggle – cosmic war – in the service of worldly political battles” (Juergensmeyer 2000: 146).

4. Interrogating Violence

We need to interrogate these religious moorings of modern violence. Why is that religion in modern times needs violence? Why is it that terrorism and violence requires religion? How do the believers accept the divine mandate to annihilate others with such certainty and conviction? Why religious violence at this point of time?

Religions speak of the cosmic battle between the powers of evil and righteousness. The biblical God sides with the victimized Jews in Egypt and even fights with them in their struggle against Pharaoh. The fight in the Gita is to bring back the order in the world that has been temporarily disrupted. The infidels have to be fought against so that one true Allah is adored. In all these, the struggle is to establish order; the fight is to terminate violations and violence. They are in fact symbolic fights in order to bring back the reality of order and harmony. The line between symbol and real is rather thin. How do we distinguish between symbolic violence and real violence? When does the eschatological and cosmic fight between the evil and the good enter the arena of daily and worldly conflicts? “The cosmic struggle is understood to be occurring in this world rather than in a mythical setting.

Believers identify personally with the struggle. The struggle is at a point of crisis in which individual action can make all the difference” (Juergensmeyer 2000: 161.). When the real world-struggles get interfaced with cosmic struggle, then the violence of the act gets sacralized.

4.1. Does religion *per se* advocate violence? One could assume that religions propose an eschatological fight against evil; the struggle against evil is perceived by the believers as involving suffering and at times violence. Such perceptions depend upon interpretations. Scriptures unfold the religious truth in an on-going, progressive way, and the believers at a given point of time might perceive a particular struggle as part of the cosmic struggle and advocate violence as legitimate. Conclusively, however, it could be said that all religions teach the effusion of love and harmony, and the apparent legitimization of violence *per se* is temporary and incidental. We shall come back to this question later in this paper.

5. Sacralization of Real-World Struggle

5.1. For the present we shall take up the other side of the question, namely, why do the real-world struggles involve religions? Juergensmeyer, in his analysis of terrorism, points out that the real-world struggle gets hooked on to religion when the struggle is perceived as a defence of the basic identity and dignity of a people or an individual. It acquires a cosmic dimension where the metaphysical struggle is continued in this worldly struggle and wherein gods

are involved (2000: 162). The struggle is perceived as a spiritual warfare against the sense of humiliation that had been experienced by particular groups such as the Irish Catholics, the Arab Muslims, the Hindu fundamentalists etc. Furthermore, the struggle is never lost because the goals are reified and deified: for the Muslims and the Jews the land is God-given; for the Hindus, Bharat is the *punyabhoomi*. Once it is thus deified, the positions are inflexible and the struggle is the fulfilment of a holy writ. Once the contested elements like the land or a building are sacralized, use of violence gets justified, and the worldly opponents get demonized. This naturally flows into the creation of martyrs and demons, sacrificial victims and the satanized enemies (Juergensmeyer 2000: 182). Incidentally, it may be said that while analyzing the satanization of the US by the Muslim fundamentalists, Juergensmeyer exonerates the US completely, ignoring the latter's history of complicity with the oppressive military regimes in South America, the horrifying Vietnam War, and its support to military and dictatorial regimes across the world, as and when it suited American interests. "...The US support for corrupt and authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world – which ensure their survival by persecuting legitimate political opponents and constricting the political space – is driving Islamist activists underground, forcing them to take up the gun and hit back at their oppressors. Osama bin Laden may be an extreme example of Islam gone wrong but there are many who harbour genuine grievances against the US." (Shivsankar 2002).

5.2. While this seems to be the process by which a real-world struggle gets sacralized, further inquiry is needed as to why particular violent groups or cultures feel the 'identity problems'. Each terrorist attack or communal violence has its own specificity and this has to be analyzed from the social sciences' perspective. However one may address these violent acts from its general typologies and raise questions. Why at this juncture, at the birth of the third millennium, when the entire world is racing on the 'high-tech super-highway' do we witness the rise of religious and rightist fundamentalist strikes? It looks that it is not in spite of globalization and high-tech communication that violence surfaces, but rather, at least partially, because of them.

5.3. The advances in communication technology have brought about heightened world consciousness about human rights, environmental and social concerns. As a result lobbying and advocacy at national and international level has increased human solidarity, particularly in times of disaster. However, high-tech culture and globalization have their own negativities. Today the arms and eyes of technology can invade the privacy of peoples and cultures, rape mother earth and denude the forests creating ecological imbalance. Its advance has pulverized the debate on alternate sciences and technologies (Visvanathan 2001: 13). At the economic level, financial institutions are rewriting the global landscape. The unpredictable movement of market forces makes the individual institutions and states helpless and volatile to the forces of the invisible hand of the free-market economy. At the politi-

cal level, the nation-state is becoming more and more powerless and helpless. The decision making and the shifts in market trends are at the dictates of dreary network of agencies like the GATT, WTO, and IMF. Ironically, terrorism is becoming the reverse side of transnational politics and transnational economics, especially in its invisibility, exemplified in the terrorist attack on Sept 11. "Terrorism has no country. It's transnational, as global as an enterprise like Coke or Pepsi or Nike. At the first sign of trouble, terrorists can pull up stakes and move their 'factories' from country to country in search of a better deal. Just like the multinationals" (Roy 2001: 22).

5.4. Globalization attempts to homogenize cultures and economies, creating large domains of 'exclusion and inclusion'. Local identities and boundaries get blurred as the new mobile elite feel extraterritorial exhilaration and the invisible hand of market economy reaches all over. As a result, excluded cultures and peoples search for identities. In that search for identities, they fall back on the primordality present in their culture and religion. This primordality – specifically historical, geographical and religious – cannot be disturbed by the market forces and therefore groups fall back on cultural and religious fundamentalism. This is one of the ways in which religions get drawn into violence.

5.5 The high tech-globalized economies have produced a monoculture of consumerism. As Eric Fromm says: [...] to consume is one form of having, and perhaps the most

important one for today's affluent industrial societies. Consuming has ambiguous qualities. It relieves anxiety because what one has cannot be taken away; but it also requires one to consume more, because previous consumption soon loses its satisfactory character. Modern consumers may identify themselves by the formula: I am = what I have and what I consume" (Fromm 1976: 36). We have come the full circle of this consumerism. Many of the religious and ancient cultures view this consumerism as anti-religious and anti-human, and they identify modern consumerist culture with western Christianity and more especially with America. The Muslim world sees America as anti-God and anti-religious because of its consumerist and capitalist culture. A section of the Hindus thinks that modern consumerist culture is a threat to the Hindu way of life and they hold western Christianity responsible for it. The conflict between modernity and tradition, with its plus and minus, pushes more and more traditional societies into the margins and they fight for identity, often in a violent and fundamentalist way. They search for a space that is truly theirs, and which is not threatened by free market economic culture. Religion and culture then become the only resort. The Islamic and Hindu revivalism at this point of time, taking even violent turns, can be partially explained by this rationale of defending true religiosity and cultural identity.

5.6. There is in India a revolt of the upper middle class and the elite, especially from India's business community and from the ranks of Hindu nationalists, to reinvent India in terms

of a mono-cultural religious nationalism based on Hindu majority ideology. This they argue will help India to hit the super-highway of market economy and to make India a nuclear powered nation-State. In this search for making India a macho-nation-state in par with other advanced countries, the protagonists fall back on religion and culture because others can never supersede them. The west can't defeat India on its religious and cultural ethos. The majoritarian and communal violence is a fall out of this attempt. Religion becomes handy in this venture. There is also a sense of humiliation that Hindu religion feels due to centuries of colonialism, first by the Mughals, and then by the British. Fifty years of independence have not made India a competing advanced nation. The humiliation and frustration push a section of Hindu society to forge a pan-Hindu base in order to make its presence felt at the global level. To build such pan-Hinduism, they reason, a certain amount of violence, specially against the alien minorities is inevitable, albeit sanctioned by a religious ideology.

5.7. In the name of nation-state building, crude violence has been done to peoples and cultures by displacement of large groups of people, by deforestation for the sake of massive dams, large scale mining and firing ranges. These so-called national projects have subsumed local cultures and identities. Their protests have not taken a religious tone. However there are definitely cultural underpinnings that will not die off easily.

These real-world struggles get sacralized when the identity is linked with one's primordiality, namely culture and religion. Then it becomes the concern of a people and their identity. It is a struggle in which 'gods' take part. It becomes a *dharma yudha*, a *jihad*, a crusade. Violence is sacralized and legitimized. At least a section of the public would then support it directly and a large section of the people would render indirect and silent support. Terrorism and violence will not last without being noticed and acknowledged by the public, however small in number.

6. Responses to Religious Violence: Girard and Gandhi

In mid-April this year, newspapers carried titles like "Gandhi's Sabarmati burns, "Jesus' Bethlehem is under siege." These were not imageries of some past acts or literary devices; they were actual reports. Gandhi's Sabarmati and Gujarat were literally burning for weeks; Jesus' birthplace was under siege by Israel. We take rather a quick glance at two responses to violence as propounded by Girard and Gandhi.

6.1. Girardian Thesis on Violence. This is not the place to elaborate on the entire argument of Girard. Besides his own works, a number of studies have appeared evaluating Girard's claims. (See: references). His theory illumines a lot of religious and cultural mechanisms like exclusion, scapegoating, sacralization etc. However, his claim that mimetic theory is the foundation for all institutions; that there was a primal murder and consequently the primordial origin of reli-

gions and cultures in sacrificial scapegoating etc are grand theories that are more speculative than empirically justifiable. It is also questionable whether mimesis is the origin of human consciousness; or whether it could be simply accepted as one of the primitive drives in the human being. However, his mimetic theory deserves attention in so far it highlights how violence erupts. Our desires are not spontaneous. Our desires arise from our awareness of a lack within us: a lack not only of possessions, but also of being. Mimetic desire means that we desire an object because it is desired by another / a model. The object becomes more attractive because someone else desires it. This model can easily become the rival, and then mimesis leads to jealousy, rivalry and violence. The only way out is to scapegoat a victim whose dead body will bring an untold peace in the community. Violence is thus sacralized and ritualised.

For our purpose we could say that Girardian findings confirm that there has been and there is sacralization of violence. What we are more interested in is the biblical response to the sacralization of violence. According to Girard, sacralization of violence is the natural human way. However, the biblical revelation in a unique way de-sacralizes violence. God in Jesus chooses to be the victim of violence, becomes the scapegoat of the murderous traits in humans and thus unmasks the violence in humans. As the victim of violence, the suffering servant absorbs in him all the violence and evil of the world, and in return pours out unconditional love. His love is not mimetic, nor diminishing.

The more the violence, the more is the love. This unmasking of violence also happens through Jesus' many teachings, especially in the parables. For Girard such unmasking of violence by choosing to be the victim happened only in biblical revelation and this is the secret hidden since the foundation of the world. Girard has been criticized for making this unique claim for Biblical revelation and to call all other sacrifices a process of sacralization and a mechanism of containing violence. For our argument, his thesis is worth considering for determining the true role of religion with regard to violence. If the genuine function of religion remains the unmasking of violence and pouring out of unconditional love to absorb all the hatred and violence of this world, religion not only does not sacralize violence, but in fact works against it.

6.2. Gandhi's Perception of Violence. Gandhi accepted the inevitability of a certain amount of violence in daily life in view of eating and drinking: i) for the sake of health and hygiene lower beings have to be destroyed occasionally. "It is violence, yet duty" (YI, 2 & 21 Oct 1926); ii) for protecting other lives and for averting grater evil, one had to use violence; iii) one may have to protect people in one's care: "He who refrains from killing a murderer, who is about to kill his ward (when he cannot prevent this otherwise) earns not merit, but commits a sin; he practises no *ahimsa* but *himsa* out of a fatuous sense of *ahimsa* (YI, 4th Nov 1926); iv) he also condoned mercy killing in extremely hopeless situations. (YI, 4th Nov 1926).

Jealousy and lust are different shades of violence and Gandhi admitted its presence in his early life with his wife (Gandhi 1985: 38). Likewise he held all secrecy to be sin. "Secrecy, in my opinion, is a symptom of violence, therefore, definitely to be avoided, especially if the freedom of dumb millions is the goal. Hence all underground activity ... is taboo" (Pyarelal 1956: 37). Extorting money, stopping trains, pillage and abusing an opponent during a *satyagraha* struggle were treated as forms of violence (CW XV: 221; XVIII: 462). Unnecessary consumption and holding on to what the world needs, amount to violence." (CW XIII: 37; CW XLIV: 58). He admired the bravery and the commitment of Subhas Chandra Bose and Jayaprakash Narayan, but held that their violent method was not a lasting solution to Indian problems (CW LXXI: 113-115). Every sort of armed rising was considered a remedy worse than the disease requiring to be cured (CW XVII: 483). Terrorism and deception, besides being violent, are the weapons of the weak (CW XVIII: 271), just as anarchism is a 'sign of fear' (CW XIII: 214). In short, he believed that every form of violence is untruth, and therefore irreligion.

Unlike the votaries of Ahimsa of his time, Gandhi did not make of non-killing a blind fetish, but rather transformed it into a *resistant tool* for 'putting one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant, of defying the might of any unjust empire (CW XVIII: 133), and into a *compassionate attitude* of good will towards all life that embraces even sub-human life in pure love (CW XXIII: 25). This he was able

to do because of his perception of the magnitude of violence.

• The violence of daily life and personal violence formed only one dimension of violence. He was more concerned about the structural violence that is embedded in the social, political, economic, educational, cultural and civilizational institutions. His seminal book *Hind Swaraj* was on the one hand an exposition of the embedded systemic violence of the western institutions, and on the other hand, a rejection of the violent and dogmatic positions of some of the Indians of that time, including V.D.Sarvakar and his two dogmatic books titles *Mazzini* and *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*. "Hind Swaraj is not merely a document against violence, it is also a document against the system which sustains violence, and against the system sustained by violence" (Chaudhuri 1998: 190). Among the forms of systemic violence, the following may be cited: violent modern culture, violence of foreign rule, the state violence, and the missionary violence (Pattery 1996: 38-46). By unmasking the violence inherent in the various institutions, Gandhi has shown how violence has been sacralized in and through modern systems. If Girard has claimed that all institutions and cultures are attempts by the humans to contain violence, Gandhi manifested how in fact the modern institutions are violent. However, Gandhi will not agree with Girard in his claim that all institutions owe their origin to violence.

We are discussing the sacralization of violence. Gandhi helps us to clarify that it is not only when religion is

overtly used or mentioned that violence gets sacralized. Modern symbols of worship like the free market economy, the nation-state, the foreign rule by the multi-nationals, consumerist life-style etc are also analogous agents of violence. On the one hand they embody invisible violence and on the other hand, they have acquired such a place in modern life that they have substituted the role and function of religion as such. The modern institutions are sacralized in terms of their place in modern life, and at the same time they themselves represent violence.

6.3. Gandhi's Response to Violence. The theory and practice of non-violence has been studied extensively by scholars for the last fifty years or so. We shall not elaborate on them. We shall limit ourselves to Gandhi's response to the phenomenon of sacralization of violence. Gandhi did not work out a mechanism of ritualizing violence either in religious sacrifices (as Girard elaborates), nor in puritanical non-violent observances as the Jains did. His response to violence is first and foremost to expose the mechanism of violence within individuals and in the socio-cultural systems. He held the system to be responsible for much of the violence of his time. He perceived that violence is permeating the socio-economic, political and religious systems. It required a holistic approach to deal with violence. This included a positive and pro-life approach; it also required a negative approach to shun all violence, to disown all violent behaviour and to unmask all kinds of violence.

6.4. Gandhi's approach to violence in relation to the sacralization of violence seems to be unique. In order to get out of the cycle of violence, Gandhi advocated 'self-suffering love', that sides with the victim of violence and allows the violence of the 'enemy' to fall upon oneself. This readiness to suffer the violence and not to retaliate requires great courage. "To fight with the sword does call for bravery of a sort. But to die is far braver than to kill. He alone is truly brave, he alone is a martyr in the true sense who dies without fear in his heart and without wishing hurt to the enemy" (CW LXVII: 422). To let oneself be the victim so that the coil of violence may break itself is the strategy of Gandhi.

Gandhi learned the first lesson of this self-suffering love from his father's reaction to his confession of stealing. On reading his confession, his father cried silently and Gandhi said: "Those pearl-drops of love cleansed my heart and washed my sin away [...] This was, for me, an object-lesson of *ahimsa*" (Gandhi 1985: 27-28). Gandhi undertook many fasts in order to manifest the object lesson of self-suffering love, though many have criticized the implicit 'force' involved in the act of fasting. According to Gandhi, a genuine fast is a direct act of resistance to untruth; it is an immediate appeal to the conscience of the wrongdoer; it relies on one's own inner spiritual strength. In this sense 'fasting' epitomizes the meaning of suffering in non-violent resistance as an eminently 'transforming pedagogic act'.

The philosophical founding of this self-suffering love, this act of enjoining

oneself with the victim's perspective, is rooted in the Gita and in the Gospels. Gandhi's insight into the selfless action of the Gita (*nishkama karma*) highlights the point. "When there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or *himsa*. Take any instance of untruth or violence, and it will be found that at its source is the desire to attain the cherished end" (Desai 1948: 132). "He who would be *anasakta* (selfless) has necessarily to practise non-violence in order to attain the state of selflessness. *Ahimsa* is therefore a necessary preliminary. It is included in *anasakti*, it does not go beyond" (CW LXXII: 393). The fearlessness that is required for *ahimsa* comes from the inner strength or from the soul-force.

The other source of his self-suffering love is the Gospels (the Sermon on the Mount) and the person of Jesus. Towards the end of the twenty-one days' Delhi fast undertaken by Gandhi in September 1924 (Gandhi described his fast as prayer of a bleeding heart for forgiveness of sins unwittingly committed), which was occasioned by the Hindu-Muslims riots, C.F. Andrews wrote in *Young India*: "Instinctively my gaze turned back to the frail, wasted, tortured spirit [Gandhi] on the terrace by my side, bearing the sins and sorrows of his people. With a rush of emotion there came to memory the passage from the book of lamentations – "Is it not nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see, if there is any sorrow like unto my sorrow. And in that hour of vision I knew more deeply in my own personal life, the meaning of the Cross" (Thomas 1969: 314.). S.K. George would say, "Gandhi's response to violence made

the Cross a working principle of redemptive-suffering-conquering love overcoming evil everywhere" (George 1947: 24.). Gandhi had in a sense realized the non-violent pedagogy of the Cross and applied it to his struggle in unmasking and conquering violence.

Thus, we could say that because of his perception of the sacralization of violence by the existing socio-political institutions, Gandhi chose to unmask that violence by adopting a strategy that would unwind the recoiling violence. His way was a self-suffering love: one allows oneself to be the victim voluntarily and courageously so that the might of violence may end. To that extent, we could say that Girard remains substantiated in his theory that it is in identifying with the victim and letting the violence fall back on oneself that one enables the cycle of violence to break. Gandhi, however, did not restrict this mechanism to the realm of ritual sacrifice nor to the 'sacred' in religion. Unlike Girard, Gandhi finds neither a founding murder for the origin of violence, nor foundational death for the unwinding of violence. Gandhi unmasked the sacralization of violence in secular institutions. Then he brought the mechanism of dealing with violence (self-suffering love) into the public arena, releasing it from the sanctuaries of religious rituals. The pedagogy of self-suffering love, according to Gandhi, is exemplified in the basic teachings of all religions. On his part, he unmasked the violence of the secular and its pretenses to be the sacred; he also enabled the sacred to present itself as non-violent and self-suffering love.

In conclusion, we go back to Arundhati Roy. She said with regard to the Gujarat genocide that “they (Hindutva) have mobilized human beings using the lowest common denominator: religion.” In a sense she is right to say that for the modern times, religion is the lowest of human denominators. It is the free market economy consumerism, multi-nationals and the like that are the denominators today. It remains true, however, that religion with its primordial appeal works to mobilize people to fight for an identity, even if that projected identity is a false or fabricated one. The role of religion as social organization seems to be dubious. In the wake of religion-related terrorism and communalism – be it in Palestine, in Ireland, in Gujarat, in

Afganistan, in Oklahoma, in New York – serious and critical study of religions is called for. We also need to critically look into modern institutions like the nation-states, market economy related institutions like WB, IMF, GATT (all symbols of modernity), and to unmask the violence embedded and sacralised in them. The response to terrorism and communalism is not to increase more state-sponsored violence and state-dominated religion, but to embody more desacralised secular institutions and more self-critical religious practices. Violence can easily be ‘sacralized’ through the legitimization of religion; but religion can also discover the true sacred in non-violent and non-diminishing love.

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