

Reconciliation process essay sample

[Countries](#), [India](#)



1. Introduction

It would have been standard practice to start an essay on Reconciliation with the description of a massacre or a recently perpetrated barbarity.

In a world situation where violence and social divisions have taken up such bizarre and horrific dimensions that people are reluctant to go out of their houses, and newspapers refer to citizens travelling by tube or bus to work as men and women of undaunted and exceptional courage, nothing could be more trite or insensitive.

If we must refer to massacres and acts of barbarism which incident do we refer to?

What will draw the attention of the reader?

We could use the images of men jumping out of the top stories of the Twin Towers, or the photographs of an American female soldier, Lindsay England, leading naked and defeated enemy soldiers at the end of a dog's leash, only because they belonged to the same religion as the men who flew the jets into the towers on September 11, 2001.

Possibly, the world is going through the worst of times.

The survivors of the Second World War believe otherwise and some have stated to the writer that it was worse in those days, the six years from 1939 to 1945.

Maybe they are right. Possibly the events that are underway today are better than having to see a raving madman gassing six million people in an attempt

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to wipe out a complete race, or in having the President of the most powerful country on earth, a free democracy with hundreds of top class universities and thousands of distinguished thought leaders, asking his air force to go and nuke cities full of civilians, knowing that his decision would kill hundreds of thousands of infants, men, women and children; and then having the courage to look the world in the eye.

There is nothing more pointless than discussing whether our times are better or worse than the days of Hitler and Churchill except to know, understand and realise that we, as citizens of the world have learned nothing at all from history and remain just the same; deeply divided, prejudiced and violent to the extent of being murderous.

The issue vexing every aware person today is a concern about the future and the chances of this generation, or possibly two more, being able to survive the current dangers to humanity, not just from climate change but from the spiral of divisiveness, polarisation and hatred that appears to have engulfed the planet. Cataclysm has never looked more likely.

The one possible solution to the threat that is not just looming, but upon us, is from reconciliation, from being willing to be able to listen to the other side and from being able to give and take.

Reconciliation however seems to be far away, a distant pipedream in a situation where a thousand conflicts are underway, in practically every country of the globe and where the leaders of the two major warring peoples, the flinty eyed President of the United States and the Jesus like but

openly murderous leader of the world's most committed terrorist organisation, Osama bin Laden can not even think of giving any quarter, revelling in their roles of messiahs of extermination and forcing new conflicts to open in distant geographical areas. For all purposes, violence and extermination appear to be the solutions that the leaders of the peoples of the world are looking at today, not reconciliation.

The purpose of this essay is to look at the causal factors for this global development of eye to eye confrontation, the prevailing efforts to resolve this potentially apocalyptic situation as also the possibility of reconciliation between confronting ideologies and peoples, with particular reference to the relevance of religion.

2.. Divisiveness in Society

The divisiveness present in society is pervasive across continents and very few are the people who are not affected by the phenomenon. It is quite possible that some small homogeneous societies, in distant geographical areas, with their inaccessibility rendering them out of reach of civilised societies, are not divided. The hunter gatherer societies in isolated islands in the Indian Ocean, some tribal societies in South America, small Himalayan nations are possibly free of divisiveness, an ironic and telling comment on the munificence of civilisation.

Apart from these examples, the writer is hard pressed to find a single region, country or society without deep divisions.

The greatest cause for concern is the conflict between militant Islam and other communities, Christian, Jewish and Hindu. Islam, the world's youngest religion, founded in the seventh century A. D. is today followed by twenty percent of the world's population and is the second largest religion in the world. Starting from the deserts of Central Asia its followers have carried the religion far and wide, to Indonesia and Malaysia in the east to the United States in the west. The world's most explosive flash points today, in urgent need of redress, relate to stand offs between Muslims and others.

The United States, the UK and their allies are in the middle of hostilities in Iraq and Afghanistan with pro Islamic forces. Severe retaliatory military action, which was sparked off by the terrorist attacks carried out by the Afghanistan based Islamic group Al Qaeda on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001 was followed by the military occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq and a global terrorist threat to the lives and property of US and UK citizens. These threats were translated into reality through planned citizen bombings in Madrid, Bali and London and led to tremendous disenchantment and alienation between the Muslims and other communities.

As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continue to rage with ground control firmly in the hands of the far better equipped and armed western states, a number of Islamic terrorist organizations working alone or in tandem are targeting geographically dispersed civilian targets through surreptitious and brilliantly planned terrorist strikes, using freely available explosives and their own ingenuity. These young Jihadis have succeeded in convincing the world that the battle has not ended, that they can and will try to hit ordinary

people at a time and place of their choosing, that everyone is under threat, and that nobody is excluded.

This has obviously resulted in retaliation upon members of the Muslim communities living in the west. The alienation and perception of enmity is growing by the day.

Central Asia is also in the middle of turmoil.

The five Central Asian republics—Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—were part of the Soviet Union until its collapse in 1991. Under Soviet rule, Islam was brutally suppressed, and that intolerance has continued under the post-Soviet regimes.

Religious repression, political corruption, and the region's extreme poverty (unemployment rates exceed 80 percent in some areas) have created a fertile climate for militant Islamic fundamentalism. Often funded and trained by such organizations as Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda and the Taliban, guerrilla movements like the IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) have recruited a staggering number of members across the region and threaten to topple the governments of all five nations.(Jihad, 2006)

In India the divisions between the majority Hindu and the Muslim community is becoming wider and bitter every day. India was divided on religious lines in 1947 when the British decided to leave, Pakistan being carved out of predominantly Muslim populated areas. The subsequent migration and rioting cost millions of human lives and created a divide that is becoming sharper and bitterer. In Kashmir, Hindu-Muslim battles have caused huge

loss of life and the degradation of one of the world's most beautiful places. India is now a deeply divided society prone to bombings, attacks, religious persecution and growing animosity among its citizens.

The situation in Palestine and Israel is too well known to need documentation, an area of bitter confrontation in which Jew and Muslim have been locked in murderous confrontation for more than fifty years, where hardly a day goes by without loss of life and numerous wars have destroyed hopes of prosperity and peace.

Apart from these areas of extreme strife, serious divisions exist in many other areas and situations. Sinhala Buddhists and Hindu Tamils have been warring in Sri Lanka for more than twenty years and there does not seem to be any end in sight. In India, the upper caste and lower caste Hindus are engaged in discord, which is mainly social and political but keeps on taking violent overtones.

Where do we go from here, apart from heading deeper and deeper into the morass of mistrust, alienation, misunderstanding and increased violence. The only reason why the world has until now not seen a nuclear holocaust is because the larger nuclear capable nations have been able to keep the bomb out of reach of the terrorists and have themselves, confident in their vastly superior firepower, not felt the reasons for nuclear deployment. Considering the excesses that the world has seen in the past hundred years, even the most gullible would take protestations of nuclear responsibility on the part of the big five with anything but a fistful of salt.

3. Causes of Divisiveness

Divisiveness would not have happened in society but for the role of men, driven by very personal motives of greed, fame, wealth and power, both at the individual and collective level. Even if we do not consider the atrocities of the distant past, recent world history gives us enough examples of the extent to which mankind goes for immediate and perceived benefits, actions that end up in devastating peoples and nations and whose effects are felt for centuries.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the world saw the great and violent migration of the white people of Europe. During this period the white seafaring people of Europe, mainly the English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch fanned out all over the world, to the Americas in the west and to Africa, Asia and Oceania in the east, deceiving, conquering and enslaving all of humanity in the name of trade, commerce and religion. Within a couple of hundred years practically every country in the world was being ruled by one or the other of these nations, their people suppressed, treated with violence, systematically exploited; burdened with a yoke that would take them two hundred years to remove.

This was followed by the enslavement of the black man. Millions of Africans were captured from their homes and villages, bound in chains and brought to Europe and America to live lives of enslavement, working without money or freedom, living out animal like lives building the houses, cities and farms of their captors.

The twentieth century, a century of civilization, a time peopled by the likes Einstein and Gandhi, an era of ideas of emancipation, freedom and liberty, when such occurrences should have been downright unimaginable, saw the rise of Hitler, Stalin, Mao ze Dong and Idi Amin, men whose peculiar predilections and half crazed actions led to the persecution and deaths of millions of innocents.

In this context, does reconciliation have any relevance?

Powerful men in responsible positions committed these crimes against humanity. In fact, the frequency and regularity of such heinous and barbaric acts made them appear to be part of normative human behavior rather than the exception. Apart from their inherent evilness, these deeds also resulted in enormous divisions in society and among peoples.

It becomes much easier to understand the deep divisions that exist in world society after a brief recapitulation of history. It puts a different perspective on the apparently illogical Indian resistance to the entry of multi nationals and Foreign Direct Investment because, try as hard as you can, it is difficult to forget what the East India Company did to the country. It becomes much easier to understand the basic mistrust between black and white Americans and why Muslims feel that religious unity is possibly the only way to prevent their annihilation at the hands of the all powerful white Christians.

4. Experiments with Reconciliation

In most situations of confrontation, reconciliation is a public posture assumed only for political correctness.

Adversaries have been known to be ready to reconcile only on acceptance of their demands and reconciliatory gestures have been part of the verbal and physical sparring intrinsic to such situations. Cessation of confrontation, when it happens, is due not to reconciliation but to external pressure; or when the parties, on rare occasions, see that confrontation is not getting them anywhere and decide to reserve their ire for another more opportune moment.

A study of the last fifty years will provide huge numbers of confrontationist and adversarial situations but very few, practically none that have ended in real reconciliation. As far as religion is concerned it is used more as a fire bomb, an incendiary and combustible resource to aggravate situations; never as a tool for reconciliation.

True reconciliation with the help of religion in today's world has become extremely anachronistic and its' use is not even contemplated by the decision makers of the world, the leaders who throng the corridors of the United Nations building in New York.

The only exception to this global norm, the only concrete and sustained effort at reconciliation with the use of religion as a focal point came from Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian saint like leader who led his country to freedom from the British Empire. In fact it is possibly the single real life case study on the subject.

Gandhi is known today as the proponent of non-violence, a political tool he used with remarkable effect to rally his countrymen against their British rulers, and with which he led them to freedom and independence.

When he came back to India in 1910 after leading a gloriously successful emancipatory struggle in apartheid driven South Africa, Gandhi found a country in despair.

Apart from colonial rule he saw the country deeply divided by religion and caste. The Hindus and Muslims, the inhabitants of the country when the British came in had become grim enemies, driven to hate by the carefully implemented “divide and rule” policy of the British. Rioting and violence was common, especially in areas where the two communities stayed side by side. The communal cauldron was always on the boil.

Apart from the Hindu-Muslim problem the Hindu community was itself deeply divided over the caste issue with upper caste Hindus keeping the lower caste population out of the pale of society, denying them both education and emancipation and employing them only for the worst jobs, They were allowed to take up occupations which involved filth and dirt, the jobs of sweepers, scavengers, cobblers, cleaners of toilets and burners of dead bodies. An upper caste Hindu would need to have a purificatory bath if the shadow of a lower caste person crossed his path. Marriages, common schools or sharing of meals with these unfortunates was beyond contemplation, outside the realm of thought.

Indian society was deeply divided between the Hindus, Muslims and the lower caste Hindus. The mistrust and enmity of centuries had crystallised into hatred, a situation that the British rulers found delightful and used to their fullest advantage.

Gandhi was dismayed at this state of affairs and determined that freedom and independence would be hollow achievements in the absence of true equality and brotherhood between the people of India. He knew he had a fearful battle ahead of him, possibly far more difficult than the one he was going to wage against the British.

He knew that the country would be on his side in his effort for freedom and that they would unite against the outsider. The dissension within, the divide between Hindu and Muslim, upper and lower castes, bridging that divide, reconciling these huge differences, arisen from centuries of enmity, that would be the real challenge.

Gandhi was a deeply religious man and in times of difficulty or contemplation often turned to the Sermon on the Mount or the Bhagavad Gita for guidance and inspiration.

When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the Bhagavad Gita. I find a verse here and a verse there, and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies – and my life has been full of external tragedies – and if they have left no visible or indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teaching of Bhagavad Gita. (Gandhi, 2006)

Gandhi set about reconciling the differences between the Hindus and Muslims and between the upper caste and lower caste Hindus. In the first quarter of the twentieth century things were not quite the same as they are now. Dogma and superstition were much more strongly entrenched, fundamentalism in religion was a way of life and not a sign of the retrograde behaviour it is thought of today. At every step he fell back upon the Gita for strength and clarification. The Gita is considered to be one of the greatest religious scriptures of the world. Apparently heterogeneous in nature it however reconciles many facets of Hindu philosophy and, in terms religious depth and exquisiteness of composition is the most convincing religious texts available to mankind. “ Upon witnessing the world’s first atomic blast in 1945, J. Robert Oppenheimer, American physicist and director of the Manhattan Project, is reported to have quoted “ I am become Death, the shatterer of worlds” (Bhagavad Gita, 1972)

The Gita messages time and again that all problems of the world, all the conflicts of the world arise only from attachment and that too attachment to worthless and silly articles, issues and items that are basically transient and will not be around tomorrow.

When a man dwells in his mind on the object of sense,
attachment to them is produced.

From attachment springs desire

and from desire comes anger

From anger arises bewilderment,

from bewilderment loss of memory;

and from loss of memory,

the destruction of intelligence

and from the destruction of intelligence he perishes (Bhagavad Gita, 1972)

If only India could be given the message of the Gita and if its people had basic sense to absorb the content of the scripture, irrational conflict would be the first thing to go out of the window. Gandhi took it upon himself to reconcile the seemingly vast divisions existing between the peoples of his country.

In his approach to the issue he worked out a dual strategy, that of personal example and scriptural authority.

In person he started giving a series of talks at every possible venue, at his simple riverside retreats, during political rallies and in meetings with students explaining how the whole concept of untouchability was against the Vedas and the Gita, but a result of the corruption of religion by the priests.

In his speech at Karaikal, Gandhi told the crowds that untouchability was completely inimical to the message of the *Rig Veda*. Its Mantras, he said, gave the lesson that there was one God and that He was supreme. All beings were born out of the Supreme Spirit. Untouchability as practiced is contrary to this Divine Truth. (Hoyos, (1998)

At his ashram retreat he took upon himself to clean the toilets and do other work associated with untouchables, encountering resistance from everybody including his biggest supporter, his wife Kasturba. It took him time to convince her about the correctness of his position, but once reconciled she became his biggest supporter in this battle as well.

Then, on Nov. 7, 1933, Gandhi began the “ harijan tour”” Over the course of the next nine months, Gandhi and his wife Kasturba traveled 12, 504 miles, beginning from his headquarters in Wardha, and ending at the holiest of Hindu cities, Varanasi, on the Ganges River. The purpose of the tour was to awaken the Hindu spirit for the eradication of untouchability, to lead the harijans into the temples wherever possible, and to raise funds for the harijan cause, each day addressing thousands of people. (Hoyos, 1988)

Gandhi used the scriptures, personal example and a hardnosed use of his own charisma and authority to shame, win and convince the Hindus about the need for ending centuries of divide, pointing out the pernicious, self-serving and anti scriptural methods adopted by the priests to divide the people. He was able to build his case that the priestly class had through centuries of malpractice been able to create this enormous divide across India and that it was necessary to go back to the original Vedas and use their teachings to reconcile differences and unite. A fragmented society, he warned repeatedly would never be able to take on the might of the British Empire and if freedom was to be won the basic dissensions in society would need reconciliation. There was no brutality in his methods to bring over people to his side, no political party or secret police or friendly lawmakers to

help him in his mission. It was he against the whole world and all he had was his own goodness, simplicity and his belief in god and religion.

It took him time and never did he falter. By the time of his death, Hindu society had made huge progress in this reconciliation process, temples had opened their doors, untouchables had started coming into the mainstream and started generating their own leaders. The initial reconciliation process had achieved most of its objectives.

Reconciling the Hindu-Muslim divide peacefully, through the voice of god and religion was a major objective in his life. In the sharply polarized world we live in today, where politically correct statements on multi cultural and multi religious societies abound in the background of terrorist strikes, Jihad, racial profiling and religious conflicts, Gandhi's thoughts of reconciliation are possibly anachronistic. Ironically, in a screen crowded by Bush, Blair and Osama, he could never have been more relevant.

The British, because of their political compulsions in keeping the country sharply divided and thus making it easier to rule, had fanned Hindu Muslim discord vigorously for years. Gandhi saw very starkly, as in the untouchability issue that unity between the two religions was essential for the growth and development of the Indian state and for the ultimate objective of freedom.

His solution was similar. He went back to religion and personal contact with the masses reiterating repeatedly that religion had never advocated the use of force and that God was one, even if worshipped in different ways. “ In

trying to explore the hidden treasures of ancient culture, I have come upon this inestimable boon that all that is permanent in ancient Hindu culture is also to be found in the teaching of Jesus, the Buddha, Mohamed and Zoroaster” (Gandhi as Journalist, 2005)

Gandhi’s belief in god sprung from a study of different religions and he used his knowledge continuously to drive home the fact that Hindus and Muslims worshipped the same god and that it was the height of illogicality to enter into situations of confrontationism because of religion. He focused on the role of the British and likened it to that played by the priests in the creation of the untouchability divide emphasizing that the divides had been made to occur not because of inherent religion issues but because it was in the interest of groups who hoped to get material advantage out of it.

Gandhi kept on pushing the idea of reconciliation between the two warring factions and went on fasts to force people to look at the issue a number of times. His daily prayer meetings would contain passages from Hinduism and other scriptures about the oneness of God, and he would ensure that the multi cultural and multi religious congregation sang the scriptures with one voice.

At one point of time, when violent religious rioting had broken out in the eastern India he took two young female disciples and this unlikely trio walked unarmed and unattended from morning to night, from one village to another preaching the oneness of god, for weeks on end. In the end his was the only voice that could bring peace, sanity and reconciliation to the

national landscape, with shamefaced Hindu and Muslim leaders, much like chastened schoolboys, promising to reconcile and mend differences.

In 1948, a young Hindu fanatic who thought Gandhi he was being too kind to the Muslims came to his prayer meeting and shot him thrice in the chest. Gandhi slumped to his death with the name of god upon his lips.

5. Conclusion

Gandhi died in 1948 and India slipped back into the morass of a divided society.

The caste wars have much more ferocity with the untouchables having secured a strong political base for themselves.

The Hindus and Muslims have becoming increasingly fundamental in their approach and Indian society is deeply divided.

All communities regularly praise the ideals of Gandhi but his methodology and actions are followed, more in the breach than otherwise.

The state of the country today is far from what he would have wished it to be.

However, the fact remains that, in his brief stay on this earth, he showed humanity that things need not necessarily be the way they are today, that reconciliation and understanding are the only solutions to the madness that keeps on engulfing our consciousness, and that the correct interpretation and usage of religion is the only answer for establishing peace on the planet.

Somebody, however, has to make a sacrifice.

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