

Was Mahatma Gandhi a failed “Bania”?

Dr. Vivek Arya

Recently Amit Shah talked about the Bania title of Mahatma Gandhi. This created lot of furor and upheaval. My aim here is to draw attention of readers about the right connotation of the term 'Bania' - which means a wise man. In this sense did Mahatma Gandhi qualify the aforesaid term or not is left to the judgement of readers.

It was Kolkata congress special session in **1920** presided over by Lala Lajpat Rai. Swami Shraddhananda visited this session. Those were Khilafat movement days. Mahatma Gandhi unnecessarily tagged Indian freedom struggle with the Khilafat Movement of Turkey. The delegates of Congress especially the Muslims were interested more in discussing about Khilafat rather than Indian freedom struggle. Swami Shraddhananda witnessed in the above session, a group meeting being held by Maulana Shaukat Ali, one among famous Ali brothers. In the presence of more than **50** persons (all Muslims), while the merits of non-violence were being discussed, Shaukat Ali said "Mahatma Gandhi is shrewd Bania. You do not understand his real object. By putting you under discipline, he is preparing you for guerilla warfare. He is not such an out-and-out non-violent as you all suppose".

Swami Shraddhananda was shocked to listen to the views of Shaukat Ali and he wanted such views should draw the attention of Mahatma Gandhi. However, he was unable to communicate to him directly due to his illness. He sent his message through Mahadeva Desai that Gandhiji's objectives were being misrepresented by his trusted colleagues. In between there was another episode. In Khilafat Conference at Nagpur, the Ayats (verses) of Quran were recited by Maulanas. These verses referred to Jihad and suggested the killing of infidels or non-Muslims. Swami Shraddhananda drew the attention of Mahatma Gandhi to study and analyse such verses of Quran. Gandhiji smiled and said, "They are alluding to the British bureaucracy". On this, Swamiji replied that it was all about propagation of non-violence and when an opportunate movement comes, Mohammedan Maulanas would not desist from using these verses against the Hindus.

Swami Shraddhananda also observed that Ali brothers had no scholastic achievements in the study of Quran. They were also not able to communicate either in Arabic or Persian language. They were given Honorary Maulana title by Firangi Mahal Lucknow for their extraordinary duties of Tabligh (Conversion of Non-Muslims to Islam). On the question of untouchability, Ali brothers' ill advice in Cocanada(Kakinada) session of congress regarding division of Dalits into two parts, one for Hindus and another parts for Muslims speaks volumes about the evil intention of Maulanas. However, this move of Maulanas had no impact on Mahatma Gandhi who as usual remained sympathetic towards them. Once he only smiled when same Maulana said

“However pure Mr. Gandhi’s character may be, he must appear to me from the point of view of my religion inferior to any Musalman, even though he be without character... Yes, according to my religion and creed, I do hold an adulterous and a fallen Musalman to be better than Mahatma Gandhi.”

Mahatma Gandhi was simply living in a fools paradise as he dreamt of Swarajya with the support of such radical preachers of Islam. Swami Shraddhananda alarmed him that he must not have blind faith

in the fundamentalists. At long last Hindus had to pay a heavy price for the silly mistake of Gandhi. Khilafat movement raised the aspirations of Muslim leaders. They started dreaming of Muslim Rule over India and started considering the country under British rule as Darul-Harb. Dozens of riots broke out all over the country. During the Moplah rebellion in Kerala in **1921**, thousands of Hindu men, women and children were killed by the Muslims. Hundreds of women were raped. And yet Gandhi supported the Moplahs and not the Hindu victims of the riots. On the other hand Mahatma Gandhi wrote in his "Young India", "It's wrong to say that Islam has employed force. No religion in this world has spread through the use of force. No Musalman, to my knowledge, has ever approved of compulsion."

Does this not show that Gandhi practiced political deception? According to Gandhi, the Moplah Muslims were guilty of no crime. Post Moplah, Multan, Kohat, Saharanpur, Kanpur, Delhi burned with Hindu-Muslim riots. It will not be wrong to say that this massacre of helpless Hindus led to the **1947** partition of the country. Had Mahatma Gandhi listened to sane advice of Swami Shradhdanda, the situation would not have gone out of his control. Further, had Mahatma Gandhi not tagged Khilafat Movement with the poles apart Indian freedom struggle, the Islamic fundamentalists would not have talked about Darul-Aman (the land of Islam). Had Mahatma Gandhi visited Moplah and witnessed the inhuman acts done in the name of Islam and criticized them, the ugly approach of the radical preachers could have been easily neutralized. Had Mahatma Gandhi learned from his mistakes, Hindus would not have faced such a humiliation in their own motherland.

The term 'Bania' stands for a wise person. In the light of above, I once again leave it to the judgement of readers to decide whether Mahatma Gandhi is fit to be called a "Bania"?