

Idea and Practice of Fearlessness: Gandhi's Noakhali Experiment

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Abstract: *M.K. Gandhi's (1869-1948) use of "ahimsa", i.e. nonviolence as a "political weapon" as to the question of "Hindu-Muslim relation" in particular in pre-independence India faced one of its hardest challenges in Noakhali of the undivided Bengal (now in Bangladesh) in 1946-1947. The organised violence unleashed by the majority Muslims on the minority Hindus created the point of no return - a "Do or Die" condition for Gandhi which made him set up an experiment upon nonviolence heavily armed with the idea and practice of "fearlessness", another primal observance in Gandhi's thought. This paper attempts to spell out the categories relating to the understanding of the idea of 'fearlessness' which he propelled with an eye to restore the communal trust along with nonviolence to the people of both communities and how the idea, in its varied forms, had been put into effect by the satyagrahi exemplars, including Gandhi himself, in Noakhali. The practice of fearlessness in Noakhali adds further importance to it for its being 'political' by nature as specific for Muslim League's anti-national politics of disintegration (of Indian nation) against the larger context at that juncture of historical time.*

Keywords: Fearlessness, Nonviolence, Hindu-Muslim relation, Satyagrahi, Violence of the strong, Violence of the weak.

Introduction: "Nonviolence", the supremely enabling virtue, as a "means" tends to serve an ineffable master as its "end" - the "truth" - in the M. K. Gandhi's political thought sometimes seems dormant if put into effect insular. Gandhi's notion of nonviolence, being a "pure means", was to invigorate its end, i.e. "satya", was conducive to solving moral and practical problems "supplied Gandhism with a theory of politics, enabling it to become the ideology of a national political movement" (Chatterjee, 1999:107) in colonial India. Yet, to walk down along the path of ahimsa was like, to Gandhi, "balancing oneself on the edge of a sword" for it requires "ceaseless striving", for an act of ahimsa is "not a mechanical performance". The use of the analogy, though unusual, if not contradictory, may dumbfound a heedful student or an ardent reader of Gandhian philosophy of non-violence at first, seems to tease out, inter alia, a certain lineament having been indwelt in the concept itself that to be willing to walk on the sharp edge of a sword of politics in any form demands as much mental strength and high-spiritedness as bodily niftiness in maintaining balance for an accident may cause the walker, the "satyagrahi" or a common person believing in ahimsa, so to say, to bleed or, even worst, to risk of having more fatal consequences at any point of the edge of this deadly political weapon. Thus, the Gandhian gnome that to be a nonviolent satyagrahi or a true believer of ahimsa is to be of a courageous mind comes to reveal one of the most fundamental correlate of the principle of ahimsa: "fearlessness". This article attempts to understand the nature and practice of this idea of fearlessness carried out by Gandhi himself, his fellow "satyagrahis" (who practises the ideal of "satyagraha", i.e. literally "holding on to truth") and the laypersons in a specific context – a historical juncture where a colonial nation was about to be cut off, and communal hatred went to its highest peak as a result on the eve of "transfer of power" in the Indian sub-continent and, from a certain perspective - a "hostile environment" of post-carnage Noakhali in between the late 1946 and early 1947, programmed to be in retaliation of the "Great Calcutta Killing" occurred in the month of August, 1946. Moreover, if it is taken to be true that politics is by no means an "apodictic science" and it "proceeds by experimenting, groping in the dark" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:461), then Gandhi's experiment in Noakhali with his idea of fearlessness as complementary to nonviolence is well worth considering.

Background: the darkest ditch: "Gandhi was an odd kind of pacifist", wrote Jawaharlal Nehru, "for he was an activist full of dynamic energy. ... he was full of resistance, though this was peaceful and courteous." (Nehru, 1989:361) The peaceful yet resistant character of Gandhi seems to represent ahimsa and fearlessness – two complementary means at once. It goes on to carry Gandhi's very own kind of language of politics and actions in a colonized sub-continent where fear after his homecoming in 1915:

"the dominant impulse under British rule was that of fear – pervasive, oppressing, strangling fear; fear of the army, the police, the widespread secret service; fear of the official class; fear of laws meant to suppress and of prison; fear of the landlord's agent; fear of the moneylender; fear of unemployment and starvation, which were always on the threshold. It was against this all-pervading fear that Gandhi's quiet and determined voice was raised. Be not afraid." (Nehru, 1989: 358-9)

The darkness reappeared with much deeper shade in the horizon attempting "vivisection" of India for the second time in history in 1946. Influenced deeply by "two conflicting stereotypes" (Sarkar, 2010:244), i.e. one that the "belief in a kind of golden age of Hindu-Muslim amity, deliberately destroyed by the British" and the "two nation-theory", the polar opposite of the first which was constructed on the outlook that "Hindus and Muslims have always been entities fundamentally distinct in ethnic origin, language and culture as well as in religion", politics in late colonial era in India had little scope to fortify itself against these vices for both of the impressions eventually inclined to direct themselves most forcefully towards negative ends. Thus it seemed as if a crossroad where, as one observer puts it, a triangle of Congress, Muslim League and the British Power – "representing the forces of Nationalism, Communalism and Imperialism, engaged in the final struggle for survival". (Pyarelal, 1956:70) Two nations were about to be born – "India" and "Pakistan" - as a final outcome of two-hundred-year long British imperial project and the principle of "Divide et Impera", the well adopted and executed old Roman motto by the Britishers. India was going to achieve independence at the cost of her Communal unity marked in the "Two Nation Theory".

Gandhi, on 25th October admitted that "India is going through a most difficult time" with reference to the communal riot in Noakhali. And in this critical context his nonviolence was called in question more grimly than ever before. Coming a long way to be succeeded in achieving independence the people of India were able to overcome fear of its colonial oppressor under leadership of Gandhi, but the complex interplay of political interest within the social relationships, especially those based on religious views, sub served to develop a rigid sense of difference beneath the plane of National movement by degrees. United India fought against the Colonialism, but became disintegrated by succumbing to narrow clashes of interest working internally within its social body in the long run. One of the reasons why India succeeded in attaining its goal of freedom against the foreign power was that it did not hesitate to accept the way of seeing the world around it casting away the darkness of fear to fight back collectively with the formidable enemy directly; but at the journey's end the radical mindset was almost lost amidst of communal parochialism. A people-for-itself was

eager to split itself into two resting upon communal identities, i.e. Hindu-Muslim, by way of dismissing the solidarity which bounded the nation against one sovereign foe and by refusing to be one any longer. Like Calcutta and Bihar, Noakhali had to suffer the consequences in an utterly deleterious way.

Gandhi, being a practical idealist, as he preferred to see himself, took the challenge. In spite of being aware of the 'second stereotype' about Hindu-Muslim relations Gandhi recognized that failing to re-establish the mutual trust between the people of two communities, i.e. the Hindus and the Muslims, in Noakhali would leave a dangerous grave scar to their relationship and to his beloved country, for communal feelings was no less powerful than any other 'in-group feeling', even that of the nationalist one. He so asserted that: "I do not propose to leave East Bengal till I am satisfied that mutual trust has been established and the two are resumed the even tenor of their life in their villages. Without this there is neither Pakistan nor Hindustan – only slavery awaits India, torn asunder by mutual strife and engrossed in barbarity." (Bose, 1953:54) Here arise a few pertinent questions: "What made Gandhi take such a decision?" Or, "Why he chose to move to Noakhali rather than to Bihar, Bombay, Ahmadabad or Chhapra?" The latter one has a relatively simple answer: he wanted to rejuvenate and nursed the plant of Hindu-Muslim unity for the interest of future India. The former one has a more complex answer: as Gandhi's political philosophy focused hard realities of politics overlapping ideal of Ashram life, so he wanted to know the real root cause behind the carnage – why there were less causality and more conversion to Islam? To miss to look into this politics in such a historical context is to readily slip into a fatal pitfall: it "would really mean accepting Leagues mischievous two-nation theory." (Bose, 1953:97)

But, there was a more elementary reason besides the former two. Gandhi's ultimate aim to be in Noakhali was come out in an 'Interview' to the Press on 2 December, 1946: "I find that my ahimsa does not seem to answer in the matter of Hindu- Muslim relations. This struck me forcibly when I came to learn of the events in Noakhali...Was it the weapon of the weak as it was often held by my critics or was it truly the weapon of the strong?...And so setting aside all my activities, I hastened to Noakhali to find out where I stand."

He was hopeful of seeing the sky in a drop of water, i.e., setting amity and peace between the two communities at war to rights in India via Noakhali. "If Noakhali is lost", he so finally avowed, "India is lost." Gandhi thus saw the riot-torn Noakhali as a "nodal point", and chose it as a "living laboratory" (Sengupta, 2016:72) for his experiment with ahimsa. "Be not afraid" – his voice was repeated in Noakhali because first requisite to confront the crisis, as he claimed, was nothing but 'fearlessness':

"Without fearlessness all our virtues turned into dust." (Pyarelal, 1956:305)

The Twitter and the Eagle: The violence started in Noakhali (1,658 sq. Miles) situated in south-western part of the Chittagong Division of East Bengal having two towns and 1,738 villages, about 300 sq. miles areas under the thanas (Police Station Areas) of Raipur, Ramganj, Laxmipur, Begumganj and Senbagh in Noakhali district on 10 October, 1946, on the holy day of Laxmi puja, i.e. the worship of the Hindu Goddess of Prosperity. It continued up to 14 October and readily emanated to the neighbouring district of Tippera.

The first news however (of Noakhali) leaked through to the Press on the 17th of October' because the Muslim League government in Bengal "succeeded in blocking out all news." (Bose, 1953:34) A "telegram" released by "Bengal Press Advisory Committee" on 16 October, 1946 read that: "Riotous mobs with deadly weapons are raiding villages, and looting, murder and arson are continuing since...October 10 in a very large scale." Quoting Mr. Taylor, the Inspector General of Police, "The Statesman" reported on 20th October that the mob "cut telegraph wires, demolished bridges, dammed canals and damaged and barricaded roads, making ingress and egress to and from the invaded localities impossible (or difficult)."

There, perhaps, no crime against humanity was left to be committed. Evidently, incidents of looting, arson, damaging of properties, destruction of the Hindu places of worship and idols, abductions, rapes, forced marriages, brutal murders and forced conversion were ample. "The worst of all", wrote Miss Muriel Lester, the English pacifist and renowned social worker upon her visit to Noakhali, in a note that, "was the plight of the women." One of the chief reasons why Gandhi urged to come here was same one: "the cry of outraged womanhood".

First, it implied that "avenging Calcutta" had been "an occasion" or, even "a pretext": to be able to oust "Hindu landowners and money lenders" would certainly mean to overturn "a lopsided agrarian order" (Lelyveld, 2011:297) for oppressed Muslim mass in the impending Promised Land. The carnage was "neither sudden nor spontaneous" rather "determined and organized". The goondas – gangs of hooligans – was brought mostly from the outside of the localities and worked under the auspices of "superior brains" like Ghulam Sarwar. The masses had been instigated. Even, "Muslims employees in the Post and Telegraph offices held up Hindu telegrams asking for urgent help." (Das, 1991:199)

Second, the corollary that follows from the former one is that, as Gandhi's stern sense of doubt about its nature did not fail to trace it, the devastation was more political than religious. The carnage was an intentional end-product of "institutional politics".

Wearing the Pakistan caps, carrying the Muslim League's party flag or shouting Pakistan zindabad (victory to Pakistan) by the rioters, and compelling the Hindu converts in doing the same apart from the other religious manifestations were the prominent signs of its being an essential disparate category - the political one. Terrorization at gunpoint as short-cut political means: if it was successful in Bengal, the Muslim League would certainly claim it for the rest parts of the nation.

The test of miracle: Noakhali, the one of the most daunting sarcophagus of Hindu-Muslim mutual trust of undivided Bengal, had been divided against itself. How could, then, the dead body of trust inside the dark, cold chest be reincarnated? It was a barbed problem like the hours of repentance and self-reflection after a post-alcoholic accident: how to return to and re-organize the everyday life while clearly recognizing the difference? It, perhaps, needed a "miracle". It was so expected that "Gandhi Likely To Work Miracle" when his "Epic Tour Begins" in Noakhali, a "Historical March Through Paddy Fields And Green Grooves" as the headlines of Amrita Bazar Patrika, a Calcutta based English-language daily acclaimed. (Lelyveld, 2011:311) The Viceroy informed London that, "I see no prospect of securing a return of confidence in Eastern Bengal for a very long time." It seemed to hold true, Gandhi soon found himself "groping" amidst of darkness, i.e. had difficulty to make the people to see his point of view as to the ordeal. Despite, the aim of Gandhi's sojourn in Noakhali from 7 November, 1946 to 4 February, 1947 was certainly to enter into the chest in search of the lost faith, to bring the dead back to life; and to destroy the sarcophagus forever.

Gandhi, "the master of art of compromise" (Lelyveld, 2011:291) was uncompromising to his mission in East Bengal this time. "I don't want to retire from Bengal as a defeated coward", he affirmed. That was, however, possible only if the two communities – the aggressors' and the victims' – torn by hatred came to cohabit as they used to do before the catastrophe. It took moving a mountain: (i) he wanted that the "Hindus never to run away from their homes even if they happened to be in microscopic minority", to ensure return of the evacuees; moreover, to persuade the "Hindu families to take back wives and daughters who'd been snatched from them rather than reject them as dishonored." (ii) he appealed to the good Muslims to respect and protect their Hindu neighbours. In the Muslim League territory of Noakhali Gandhi and his ahimsa were, thus, put to an acid test: he had to marshal these fragments of hope and reconcile the broken spirits of both of the communities scattered around him in the dark to be able to make his pilgrimage worthy. A "stupendous yajna" (sacrifice), *sin qua non*, had to be performed in order to attain this immense goal without failing to upkeep his ideal of ahimsa.

Gandhi looked up a core value that had already been there in his gospel of satyagraha itself in undertaking the mammoth task of restoration of peace and trust which he regarded to be indispensable and now judged to exalt: "fearlessness", the first requisite for disposing of darkness and basing ahimsa on its bedrock. Gandhi was well aware of the facts as to the successful execution of the idea of fearlessness in Noakhali: one, that individuals who had undergone such ordeal would be hesitant to step forward in going upon the precept of fearlessness, or even worse, to accept the ideal inasmuch as they were not in a position, physically and mentally, to recognize its strength at all; and two, he also had premonition that the idea of fearlessness had to contend with long-standing ground level difficulties in Noakhali in order to prove itself for it was subject to gradual realization. He, keeping them in mind, wanted satyagrahis to act as "exemplars" (Sengupta, 2016:79). The intent was clearly expressed in a drafted statement he wrote to a votary: "workers, whom I have brought with me will each distribute themselves in other villages of Noakhali to do the work of peace, if it is at all possible, between the two communities". (Bose, 1953:53) What is more was that he himself wished to become a "prime exemplar" by allowing himself to be a (Hindu) hostage in the cause he came to serve in Noakhali. He, thus anticipating the drawback, tried to amend his ahimsa, the golden technique, with reference to Hindu-Muslim relation in the backdrop of unprecedented horror by pushing the value of fearlessness to its extreme.

Where the mind is without fear: Gandhi's idea of fearlessness is a difficult one to comprehend on account of its contingency. Fearlessness, to begin with, is viewed as one of the cardinal "observances" that a satyagrahi ought to assimilate and apply to his "inner soul". It is a state of mind - Chitta - that exists within. As to the genocide of Noakhali fearlessness referred only to specific internal forms among many, i.e., fear of losing the nearest and dearest ones, bodily injuries and death rather than to less relevant ones such as external freedom from fear of possessions, prestige, losing reputation or office, and government and so on. Fear implies negation of love so as fearlessness is the rejection of hatred: the will to kill, therefore, stands opposite to readiness to die. "Fearlessness", thus, "implies absolute indifference to the physical body and all that goes with it and readiness to face loss or destruction of the same." (Pyarelal, 1956:328) The binary oppositions of hatred/love, "will to kill"/ "readiness to die" corresponds to the basic difference between brute force and soul force, that is, violence and nonviolence themselves.

But what makes Gandhi's idea of fearlessness more complex is his understanding of the same in terms of equally intricate differences of other pairs of oppositions: cowardice/

violence and "nonviolence of the weak"/ "nonviolence of the strong". Both of the pairs operate, at least, in two different levels. First, there is a collective level of fearlessness as regard to violence. A letter written to Maganlal Gandhi dated on 25 July, 1918 may be adduced as its example where Gandhi wrote "I have come to see, what I did not so clearly before, that there is non-violence in violence." In the East, the Oriental society, violence is seen as a last resort and "with a view to lokasangraha", i.e. that which promotes conservation of society."

The other level is individual. When there is the only choice between cowardice and violence, a fearless person certainly opts for the latter fighting fire with fire. When he was almost fatally assaulted in 1908 and asked by his eldest son what he should have done Gandhi advised him not to run away, not to see him killed but to defend him by use of physical force. The method of violence is always better than acting in a cowardly manner – to resort to arms in order to protect one's honour is more praiseworthy than to remain a helpless victim to overwhelming violence. He accepted the 'doctrine of sword' rather than to surrender one's rice bag for fear of being physically harmed, because to kill or to go for vengeance are superior to effeminate submission. Even further, he advocated training in arms for the believers of method of violence. Thus, only a few truly valorous men like Chitta Ray who fought against the hooligans to the last and finally killed his mother and himself too, the two Baisnabas (the believers of a Hindu sect) who preferred to sacrifice their lives rather than to be converted, or, Kali Prassanna Raut who kept the rioters at bay with his muzzle-loader when the house of Rajendra Lal Roy Chowdhury was first attacked on 11 October, 1946 could have drawn Gandhi's sheer respect for their acts of violence in Noakhali carnage.

Second, Gandhi's idea of fearlessness has a further division in keeping with the distinction that Gandhi often argued: "nonviolence of the weak"/ "nonviolence of the strong". A person who ceases to fear has a forked way ahead: he can take the path of violence by striking or, nonviolence by refraining. What is common to both – functioning of body force and awakening of the soul – is, again, fearlessness. Resorting to violence without fear in both collective and individual levels needs "an ability to strike". A coward who lacks courage to strike, in Gandhi's opinion, is unfit for undertaking both violence and nonviolence, for non- violence demands a greater deal of fearlessness. Violence can thus be transformed into nonviolence: to be a follower of nonviolence one must first be a follower of violence. Just as "to kill" is superior to "to be killed" meekly so that "to die without killing" is superior to "to kill"; and "submission" is inferior to "vengeance" as "vengeance" to "forgiveness": nonviolence, i.e. readiness to die, forgiveness, and love calls for extreme valour in comparison to violence, i.e. will to kill, vengeance and hatred. Raymond Cartier, a French journalist, received an

explanation as to the point: "Unless you can beat Hitler by superior violence, you cannot obtain victory. But then Hitlerism wins." He so drew attention to the ancient hermits of India – the rishis (the Indian hermits of ancient age) – who, being greater warriors than Wellington, were greater geniuses than Newton in discovering the principle of ahimsa amidst of violence: "Having themselves known the use of arms, they realized their uselessness, and taught a weary world that its salvation lay not through violence but through non-violence."¹ This signifies the power of fearlessness that only a brave satyagrahi can cultivate. "Thus the votary", Gandhi wrote in Harijan dated 17 November, 1946, "of (nonviolence) must refuse to be cowed down by his superior without being angry... Assume that a fellow passenger threatens my son with assault and I reason with would-be assailant who then turns upon me. If then I take his blow with grace and dignity, without harbouring any ill will against him, I exhibit the ahimsa of the brave." One who fails to control his chitta (mind) gives his sadhana (striving) of nonviolence of the brave away.

To practice ahimsa of the strong one has to be superior in every possible way to his opponent. It would otherwise be counter-productive leading towards "nonviolence of the weak". This is true to the collective level too. Gandhi himself was well aware of the fact from his experience: most of the people take refuge to nonviolence in the fight against the British power in India for they were too weak to undertake the methods of violence. They failed to realize the fact that the "development of body-force is a sine qua non of full appropriation and assimilation of ahimsa." Gandhi rebuked the villagers for their cowardice near Bettiah in North Bihar when they fled leaving their wives, children and belongings behind at the mercy of the looters after having been attacked by them at the height of the non-cooperation movement in similar manner. In both of the cases the people followed Gandhi's way out of helplessness: "If we had atom bomb, we would have used it against the British."² He reminded them that his nonviolence was the supreme virtue of the brave, not a veil for cowardice; and the practice of ahimsa required far greater bravery than that of swordsmanship.

*"I seek entirely to blunt the edge of the tyrant's sword, not by putting up against it a sharper-edged weapon, but by disappointing his expectation that I should be offering physical resistance. The resistance of the soul that I should offer instead would elude him. It would at first dazzle him, and at last compel recognition from him, which recognition would not humiliate him but would uplift him."*³

To attain the necessary goals Gandhi set during his nine week stay in Noakhali and two chief tasks, namely, (a) to build up morale by communicating Gandhi's teaching by personal contact, and, (b) to do constructive activities among the victims after he left for Bihar as "exemplars", the satyagrahis had to observe the norms of "nonviolence

of the brave" - fearlessness as "bhayashunyata" - a term designated by Nirmal Kumar Bose, a renowned anthropologist and Gandhi's Bengali interpreter in Noakhali in his Bengali book on Gandhi⁴ at individual level. Gandhi's order to "retrace their steps and find" a "piece of pumice he used to scrape his feet before soaking them" to Manu (Gandhi) which was suspected to be missing without taking any volunteers with her in Narayanpur village and upon finding it her bursting into "tears only to be met by Gandhi's cackle" (Lelyveld, 2011:316) might be considered a breath-taking instance of the same. What Gandhi remarked on it pinpointed the determination of a Satyagrahi practiced ahimsa bravely in herself: "If some ruffian had carried you off and you had met your death courageously, my heart would have been danced with joy. But I would have felt humiliated and unhappy if you have returned back or run away from dander."

Viswaranjan Sen and Bhupal Chandra Kamar's, two workers (exemplar) coming to Shahpur bazaar, "the storm centre" with two other local workers without police escort on 30 October, 1946, to survey actual state of affairs in Noakhali surrounded by about 400-500 agitated Muslims, the mob whom "the Sub-Divisional Officer" was himself confessed to be "afraid of" at that point of time, and continued to stay there (they lived in the Muslim house until Gandhi's arrival), or Pyarelal's, the Satyagrahi (exemplar), reply on the face of one of the most notorious culprits of Noakhali carnage, Quasim Ali, that: "Some people try to appear fiercer than they actually are....You will have to kill me first. For unless you withdraw your threat, I shall myself go and stay there. Besides it is not true that has gathered round him twenty men. There are not more than three men in his camp. I shall be the fourth", responding upon the claim that if Viswaranjan Sen did not remove his camp Quasim himself would go and kill him based on a false allegation about that Biswaranjan Sen, who run the Gopairbag camp, was inciting Hindus and gathered 20 men to murder Quasim Ali, were the examples of such kind of fearlessness Gandhi had preached to work on in Noakhali. He advised workers in Noakhali "not many man were needed in a village for the protection of the few (Hindus) against many (Musalmans). One or two would be enough. If they laid down their lives in the performance of their duty without flinching and without anger in their hearts, their example would probably inspire others to exhibit non-violent courage likewise, so that they either be able to melt the hearts of the oppressors or die in the act of defending their self-respect and honour in a non-violent way."

Gandhi's general idea of "nonviolence of the strong" – the negative idea of fearlessness in the sense that it limits itself within a certain ambit of an insular satyagrahi – inclined to assume a different form in the 1946-Noakhali at the same time. It contrived to break its negative shell and cast itself beyond the individualist borderline. The 'nonviolence of the strong' as fearlessness as bhayashunyata now turned into a more open category

of the same with a positive character: fearlessness as “abhaya”, in the sense that it meant to provide the victims with valour to act in the similar fashion as the exemplars did by transmitting the teaching and strength from the “leaders” into the “led”. Gandhi, being himself a sanatani (traditional) Hindu and an Indian was well-acquainted with the notion of abhaya (fearlessness) - as found in the ancient scriptures of Indian culture, in the writings of Janaka and Yajnavalka, two sagacious philosophers of ancient India, “at the dawn of our history”. But there was a fundamental distinction in terms of nature of fearlessness. The arm-bearing warriors whose root of power is fearlessness, i.e. ‘abhaya’, conceived of their immeasurability and finitude in terms of sovereign power: “warriors are masters of themselves” (Skaria, 2016:21) and a “residual fear ... makes him take up arms”. Satyagrahis - the ‘sevaks’ (the service-providers) of the people - by contrast, the true warriors free to choose his task in the service of the people in fear:

“so fearless as to never take up arms, as to sacrifice themselves rather than kill their opponents. They work for an absolute and unconditional equality,...Through self-sacrifice, satyagrahis offer fearlessness to their opponents and experience it themselves. Their fearlessness differs from that of warriors; while the latter requires a mastery of fear, the former requires a welling of love and compassion (prem, daya).” (Skaria, 2016:22)

A satyagrahi then, armed with the moral “soul force”, was to bring light before the darkness of fear impregnated with the feeling of injustice. A satyagrahi must have a quality of a warrior - fearlessness as abhaya – with the ability to dispel fear in others in the form of a “gift” (dana), for, so to say, “It is the most soldierly of the soldier’s virtue”, still to see the opponent “as a fellow human being whose temporarily eclipsed sense of humanity it was his duty to restore” (Parekh, 2001:69). Only true balance of negative and positive ideal of fearlessness rooted into the agency of a satyagrahi or a believer of nonviolence could enable him to confront impulses of fear unhesitatingly both within himself and for his fellow-human beings suffering from its shuddering effects in the outside social world in accordance with the principles of ahimsa (of the strong) alike. The responsibility of a satyagrahi, thus, is to act without the traces of fear, both inwardly and outwardly, in a given circumstance to meet the quality of the “leader of a people to make them fearless” (Nehru, 1989:358). “Be not afraid” is the mantra he has to believe for himself and for others and act accordingly. It might be an effect of abhaya that echoed in the firm voice of an old Hindu woman in a Noakhali village catching fish from her pond: “As long as I live”, when she was asked by her Muslim neighbour with an apparent tone of sympathy that how long did she expect to do the same household task. Thus, a “sufferer” seems to become an “exemplar” in the very moment of the act of replying caught in the infinite possibilities of turning negative fearlessness into positive one (and vice versa in the cases of those who came

to hear the story and found it motivational to act with courage) - the true significance of the idea Gandhi might have aspired to see in Noakhali.

Conclusion : Like most of the concepts "fearlessness" appears elusive in point of Gandhi's long political career because as a perfect satyagrahi he himself and the ideas he propagated were governed by the "living laws" which are "subject to the principle of growth, evolution, adaptation and change". Nevertheless, Gandhi's idea of fearlessness was found to be varying according to the positions of the slabs of nonviolence of the strong, violence, nonviolence of the weak or cowardice respectively fixed in a horizontal pole of hierarchical relevance on conceptual level. All acts of violence and nonviolence including "nonviolence of the strong" have "fearlessness" in common to them except "nonviolence of the weak" that lacks it. As Gandhi's preaching of nonviolence did not uphold notion of "universal non-violence" before the people of India, it was rather treated with specific intention: as a political weapon for the "solution of political problems". The observance of fearlessness together with nonviolence was applied to confront two such fundamental problems, as it was seen earlier, against the colonial power to achieve freedom and 'Hindu-Muslim relations'. The first instance was essentially a political problem to which nonviolence worked as a solution because of people's solidarity and high moral spirit against the colonial power. But in the second instance, particularly in those days closing to transfer of power, nonviolence failed to offer solution to the problem for it became a much complicated one by the time: it was as much a deep social problem as a political one mixed with communal purposes. Hence, Noakhali presented itself a much more sensitive issue to Gandhi to take care of – a "Do or Die" situation in testing ahimsa – "'To do' means to restore amity between Hindus and Muslims; or I should perish in the attempt." To choose between them was inevitably to choose to be valorous. Gandhi's Fearlessness was, thus, likely to be resembled to the opening line of Erich von Däniken's controversial book 'Chariots of the Gods?' [1968 (1970)] in a certain respect that anyone who advocated the principle as its author (like Gandhi himself to the co-workers or a co-worker to a common person) and anyone who observed it (be it Gandhi himself, a co-workers or a common person) in reality as its reader were both to be fearless, for "It took courage to write this book, and it will take courage to read it."

And in the process role reversal might ensue: a led might turn into a leader, a leaner into exemplar or negative "fearlessness as bhayshunyata" into positive "fearlessness of abaya". Ahimsa, he so believed would act miraculously if it was possible to walk "balancing on the edge of a sword" of the problem of "Hindu-Muslim relationship" in Noakhali by dint of its co-discipline of fearlessness (of the brave). It was difficult to judge whether Gandhi's experiment in Noakhali was successful or not for despite of its

carrying out by his co-workers after he left for Bihar it was unable to meet full goal. But what is important about the Noakhali experiment of nonviolence is, indeed, beyond its merit and demerit, success and failure, the teaching and practice of fearless striving to the grave problems of life in a Gandhian way. Moreover, the spirit of fearlessness is, one can infer in this way, inherent in Gandhi's two cardinal objectives "swajaj" ("home rule") and "sarvodaya" (literally, "uplift of all") that are "loosely described the ideal society towards which he worked" (Bondurant 1988: 6). And fearlessness so remains one of the major sources of political strategy in the socio-political history of South Asia contributed by Gandhi.

Notes

1. Quoted from 'Selected Works of MAHATMA GANGHI', compiled by Ronald Duncan, 24, Russell Square, London: Faber & Faber, p-48.
2. Gandhi said it in a prayer speech in 16th June, 1947.
3. Quoted from 'Selected Works of MAHATMA GANGHI, Selected by Ronald Duncan, 24, Russell Square, London: Faber & Faber, pp.53.
4. The notion of fearlessness as 'bhayashunyata' is found in the second Volume of the Bengali book entitled 'Mahatma Gandhi' written by Nirmal Kumar Bose.

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