Communalism, the Noakhali riot and Gandhi

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The distinctively Indian (or South Asian) connotation of the term communalism has been due to the variance in conceptualising certain social realities in different societies at particular historical junctures. This is in contrast to its definition in the West, particularly in Germany, where the recent historical writings have used communalism as a term to 'designate attempts to achieve autonomous self-government in town and country during the reformation period'.[1] It, therefore, connoted a positive phenomenon which strove for the common good, and as such, justified communal functions like the administration of justice, common economic functions like the distribution of common land, the administration of church finances, etc., while simultaneously legitimising the subordination of 'all individual self interest *(eigen nutz)'* to the ideal of 'common good *(gemein nutz)'*.[2]

In the Indian context, communalism has been conceptualised as an ideology reflecting an entire gamut of beliefs and sets of ideas. As a politics based on those beliefs, communalism identifies the socio-economic and political interests of an individual or a group on the basis of its association with a particular community, which is defined by, and constructed around, a particular religion. The satisfaction of those interests calls for a politics based on such a community identity. It is a product of that period of Indian history which witnessed colonialism as a political reality. Nationalism, which emerged as a reaction to the colonial domination, is also a product of the same period. Communalism grew as a reaction to the politics and the ideology of nationalism, and soon became an important ideology capturing the imagination of a sufficiently large number of people in the subcontinent, finally resulting in the partition. However, it never exhausted itself with the partition. As an ideology, it continued to exist in the form of a potentially live force, to resurrect itself time and again in the politico-social life of the subcontinent.

As an ideology, the elements of communalism are always internalised by the individual and social actors, to provide them with a coherent perspective and a world view. However, communalism at the same time retains the initiative and force of improvising itself into new forms and phases. The improvisations need not take place in the minds of the individual human actor; the structure and the operation of its inner logic are powerful enough to activate this transformation or improvisation. That is why communalism, like any other social phenomenon, defies psychoanalytical explanations. Communalism, and particularly communal conflicts, attract the psychoanalysts to explore those inner realms which work behind these conflicts. But the failure to accept communalism as an ideology forces analysts such as Sudhir Kakar, to consider only *communal conflict* and *violence* as units of study. Introducing the subject, Kakar says: 'This book is a psychoanalyst's exploration of *what is commonly known as religious conflict.*'[3] It does not need much intellectual force to suggest that '*it*' is not commonly known as religious conflict, but as 'communal conflict'. Here, there is a methodological compulsion, too, because only by reducing communal conflict to a religious one can Kakar apply his analytical category which operates on the basis of religion. For example, he writes: 'Together with religious selfhood, the "I-ness" of religious identity, we have a second track of "We-ness" which is the experience of being part of a community of believers.'[4]

Ideology requires politics as its mode of articulation and implementation. It is in the process of political contestation that articulation is shaped. The political structure and processes at a particular historical juncture, therefore, are significant in shaping the articulation of communalism, as well as its own transformation into new forms and new phases. This makes the understanding of the primacy of politics a corollary to that of communalism as an ideology. It is the political configuration at a particular historical juncture which is the most significant factor in explaining communalism and its different manifestations at that juncture. The relevance of studying and treating communalism as an ideology becomes obvious here.

Religion and attributes of culture such as language play an instrumental role in this context. It is important to locate the role of religion in the entire phenomenon of communalism, because on this role depends the distinction between funda-

mentalism and communalism, between religious conflict and communal conflict. Religion plays its role ranging from defining the identity of a particular community to shaping its non-religious interests, depending upon the religious identities.

However, when communalism enters its extreme phase these play a greater role, rather than simply playing an instrumentalist part. At this juncture, the points of difference between fundamentalism and communalism become less sharp and, at times, they converge. Fundamentalism indicates a phenomenon which asks and attempts to make the religious community fall in line with the fundamental tenets (or the *rules of the Book*) of that religion, while discarding all experiments and further developments pertaining to that religion. Communalism, on the other hand, does not ask the community to be anti-modern.[5]

This is not to suggest that religion or other cultural attributes play a secondary role. What I am proposing is that though at times their role seems the most significant and of primary import, what really happens is that these factors play a legitimising role in an atmosphere determined by communal ideology. This, however, does not mean that it is communalism which determines—what is suggested here is that *communalism at a particular juncture becomes the determining factor.*

As an ideology, communalism can hardly be divorced from 'factual knowledge'.[6] It cannot be studied in isolation, divorced from societal realities which constitute its 'context'. The structures of politics and economics are the essential prerequisites of this context, and determine the structures of knowledge and ideas. Therefore, attempts to represent and understand communalism by means of selected quotes from some intellectual works have remained unsuccessful, if not invalid.[7] This becomes more significant in the case of communalism in colonial India, when a colonial power was there to supervise communal politics and, at times, play a role as its interests in those contexts demanded.[8] Similarly, communalism as an ideology cannot escape examination on standards of reason, as it is a reflection of the interaction of structures and processes which are founded on *rational* structures, i.e., economy and polity. And, on the standard of reason, therefore, it cannot escape a critique of its moral foundations and prescriptions. An attempt to read and understand communalism by examining the meaning of the term or the knowledge which gave meaning to it must, therefore, stand up to the rational and

moral critique of communalism, before attacking that of the the historiography of communalism.[9]

Violence in the form of the communal riot itself is not the cause of communalism, rather it is the product. However, violence is certainly a reflective index of the communalisation of a society. Therefore, escalated violence and its aggressive insensitivity indicates the intensity and depth of ideological penetration that has taken place. This violence is, therefore, part of the ideological whole called communalism. Any sanction or legitimisation of violence has to be rooted in the politics and the ideology that ratifies its use. A discourse on violence without taking cognisance of the ideological apparatus, is to naively ignore the entire process that went into making that violence.[10] Communalism, given its ideological apparatus, legitimises, sanctions and creates occasions for violence. The Noakhali riot is a prime example of this argument, and at that juncture Gandhi's ideological contestation of communalism, a prime example of prioritisation of the ideological fight which alone can fight such attempts at sanitisation or justification.

I

The Noakhali riot which began on 10 October 1946 is generally studied as a reaction to the Calcutta killings of 16 August 1946. But it had certain characterstics which make it imperative to study it differently. What made the Noakhali riot so distinct was the recourse taken to Islam, and its location in the entire episode —an aspect yet to be carefully studied. A close perusal of the acts of violence shows how efforts to legitimise these acts were attempted by taking recourse to Islam. This differentiates it from all other stages and forms of communal violence, where the point of contention stemmed from religious difference but religion was never the instrument to legitimise acts of violence. In Noakhali, religion not only constituted the identity of a particular community which was attacked violently, but religion itself was attacked. And this was effected through the process of forcible conversion.

H.S. Suhrawardy, the Chief Minister, while answering the question of Dhirendra Nath Dutt on the floor of the Bengal Legislative Assembly, provided the figure of 9,895 cases of forcible conversion in Tippera, while that for Noakhali was not known 'but (which) ran into thousands'.[11] This submission came from

the Ministry which had uptil now constantly maintained that the situation was not as grave as it was made out to be by the Hindu press and Hindu propaganda. The *Star of India* clearly expressed the Government stand:

> The reports appearing in the Hindu Press about mass conversion of Hindus have hardly any foundation. There have been cases, however, of Hindus going to Muslims out of sheer panic and offering to become Muslims. In almost all cases, the Muslims assured them they would be protected whether they remained Hindus or not.[12]

This was made more explicit by a Muslim League legislator from Noakhali, Mujibur Rahman, who, responding to the Chief Ministerial statement, asked the latter whether he was aware of the fact that 'the majority of the Hindu population gave up their religion out of fear'.[13] In all these cases, though deliberate attempts at conversion were denied by giving agency to the Hindus themselves, the argument brought out the fact that it was a state of fear or panic which would have forced the Hindus to give up their religion and accept Islam voluntarily. While Suhrawardy gave the figure of 9,895 converts in Tippera, he was already in possession of Simpson's report which had estimated the number of conversions in the three police stations of Faridganj, Chandpur and Hajiganj to be around 22,550 or 22,560, and the entire Hindu population of three villages, i.e., Gupti, Bachtali and Gobindpur of Faridganj Police Station.[14] As regards Hindus volunteering to become Muslims, the term 'voluntary act' when qualified by the community's fear of destruction of their possessions and lives, meant something altogether different. Men with property were threatened; men without property were also intimidated. Fear stalked these villages. S.C. Ghosh, S. Ghosh and Bhatta of Karpara wrote, 'On the 12th these miscreants planned to attack our house, one of the biggest houses with population of about 250... In order to save our lives and properties... agreed to their proposal of conversion to Islam which they advanced as a condition precedent to our protection.'[15] The *zamindar* of Panchgaon Lakshmi Mazumdar stated:

> On 12th morning I called in some leading Muslim gentlemen for help and advice, notably Gholam Kibria (Latu Mia of Bhaor, our Union Board President (U. No. 12), Nure Rahman (dismissed sub inspector of Police) and other people. They

promised to save our life and property on conversion to Islam. Surrendering our guns and our agreeing to abide by their decision. I was told by a known Muslim to go to the nearby mosque with some other leading Hindu gentlemen like Chandra Kumar Mazumdar and others whom he named and told us that if we decided to save our life and property we must not make delay in making up our mind but must go to the mosque to be converted. We went to the mosque as we had no alternative where we found several Muslims armed with weapons.[16]

These were definitely not voluntary acts, but were forced upon the population under threat of death. The Governor, in his report, accepted the fact that forcible conversion had taken place on a large scale.[17]

The modus operandi of the phenomenon of forcible conversion indicates certain factors which went into making the Noakhali riot qualitatively different from other communal riots.[18] A victim's account states:

The same night local Muslims in batches of 5 to 7 came to our house and asked us to get converted into Islam. We, out of fear, did not meet them. On the Saturday morning of 12 October around 200 Muslims came to our house and *threatened that if we do not convert ourselves they would kills us.* We, to save our lives, agreed to their proposal. Thus, the Maulavi Saheb of Shahapur High School converted me, and other members of my family into Islam. Then from amongst the crowd, the particular Maulavi Badu Mian and Mahmud Mian Patari forced us to destroy the images and photographs of all Gods and Goddesses. (Emphasis mine)

On 13 October they constructed a mosque in front of my house and later on Kudur Mian, Mujibul Huq Kerani and Khaliq Mian demanded one thousand rupees from me as contribution to the League.[19]

Refusal to get converted was often met with violent reactions, as this particular experience details:

... these leaders assisted by the Mohammedans of the locality and neighbourhood localities joined the mob and looted everything they can (sic). When this was finished they attacked my sons late Jasoda Kumar Roy, Prossanna Kumar

Roy at Kergah and Chitta Ranjan Roy and my son-in-law Binode Behari Roy Marmundar of Babupur and asked them to get converted into Islam and to take beef. When they expressed unwillingness Mendi Meah of Abirpara cut the throat of my eldest son Jasoda Kumar Roy in the nature of Jabai and killed my two other two sons like wild beasts.[20](sic)

Though no circumcision is reported,[21] the Hindu population was generally forced to perform certain practices as part of their allegiance to the new faith.[22] The formula, as Simpson calls it, was the same almost everywhere. It included compulsion to wear a cap upon which was inscribed Pakistan, a lungi as worn by Muslims, to eat beef, recite the Kalma and offer prayers. Acharya Kripalani, the Congress President, on touring the affected villages wrote in his report:

> Even after looting and arson and murder, the Hindus in the locality were not safe unless they embraced Islam. The Hindu population further to save themselves had to embrace en mass. As a sign of their conversion they were supplied with white caps used by the Muslims of the locality. Very often these caps were new and were stamped with the map of Pakistan with the words Pakistan *Zindabad* and *Larke Lenge* Pakistan.[23]

Thus, after conversion people were supplied with caps and copies of the Quran. The President of the Congress party noted that in one particular village, Khilpara, 'all the Hindus had been compelled to embraced Islam. Some Korans had been distributed and people were compelled to wear the Muslim dress. New caps with the league flag, a map of Pakistan and carrying the slogan '*Pakistan Zindabad*' had been distributed in thousands.'[24] The fact clearly proves that all the arrangements were made by some very resourceful organisation in advance, accounting for the enormous quantity of cloth made available in days of strict cloth control. Simpson, Samar Guha and his associates, etc., also found the operation of a similar pattern in the method of conversion.[25]

Conversion, however, was at the same time attempted to be made permanent by forcing the victims to show adherence to their new faith. A victim's account denotes this clearly:

> All the images of Gods and Goddesses have been broken and thrown away from the temples and dwelling houses. In brief,

we are prevented from offering prayers and uttering *mantras* and cannot lead the Hindu mode of life. We are treated like slaves.... The Maulvie (sic) appointed by the Muslims, come every now and then and teach the Namaj. On Fridays, the Hindus are compelled to accompany them to the Mosque for Jumma. Wearing of Muslim caps and growing of beards have become the order of the day.... Muslims are asking the Hindus to purchase cattle and slaughter them with their own hands in Hindu houses on the coming Id day.[26]

It is clear, therefore, that irrespective of the fact whether the riot was organised or not, the attack on religion was complete.

While the acts of forced conversion attacked the religious sentiments of the Hindus and brought communal violence to a high psychological pitch, it was the acts of violence against / on women, i.e., abduction and forced marriages that transported the Noakhali riot to a totally new arena of communal discourse. It gave credence to the Hindu communal discourse which had been depicting Hindu women as victims of the violent Muslim male. The instances of forcible marriages and abductions during the riot provided a retrospective justification for the Hindu communal argument which saw Muslim male violence on Hindu women as one of the primary reasons for the rapidly increasing Muslim population.[27]

J. M. Datta, a statistician who authored a series of articles on various aspect of census figures and during the 1941 census headed the campaign for 'impartial enumeration' that had been started in a big way by the Hindu Mahasabha, wrote: 'The surest way to destroy a nation or a community is to confiscate its women'.[28] He calculated the average number of abductions of Hindu women as 700 per year and concluded by saying, '... in any view, abduction of Hindu Women by the Mohammedans and their continued loss to the Hindu Community, so far as it affects the growth of the Hindus is a matter which cannot be neglected any longer without serious consequences.'[29] The large number of abductions of women and forcible marriages during the Noakhali riot may easily be placed within the ambit of this discourse. What was more significant was that it gave credence to, and validated, the hitherto debated and contested discourse.

The news of violence on women shook the Bengali society. This is reflected in the appeals made by the provincial leaders. Labanya Prova Dutt issued an 'appeal to the public and dealers for

contributions of vermilion and Conchshell bangles for the riot affected women of Noakhali'.[30] The Muslim League ministry also understood the importance of this fact. But it preferred to deal with it by minimising the gravity of the occurrences to the lowest possible degree. Answering the question on facts of abduction and forcible marriages, the Chief Minister delivered the figures of two (2) in Noakhali and five (5) in Tippera.[31] His assertion came at a time when one of his own officers Simpson had announced 716 cases of rapes and 157 cases of restraints from three police stations of Tippera i.e., Faridganj, Chandpur and Hajiganj.[32]

Though the press, especially the non-Muslim League one, had exaggerated the numbers, often crossing the figure of thousands, Mrs. Sucheta Kripalani and Miss Muriel Lester's efforts at rescuing these hapless women, and the description of their condition in the press and through the 'tales of the refugees' certainly created a different psychological world. The efforts of the Chief Minister to minimise their importance was counter productive and embittered the Hindu community.[33] However, without a detailed or confirmed report, the numbers, figures and condition of the women remained a subject of widespread speculation and exaggeration which further aggravated the Hindus.[34]

Violence on women provided the necessary credibility for the Hindu communal portrayal of the 'Muslim men's virility and potential aggression'. This again brought alive fears, expressed in the debate on the increasing Muslim population during the two census operations of 1931 and 1941. This clearly shows the operation of the logic of communal ideology.

What was important in Noakhali was not only the aggression on women but also the consideration of women as repositories of the honour of the community and its traditions. Conversion and forcible marriages together meant that the entire religious complex of a population was sought to be forcibly changed. They were not just being forced to convert into Islam, but also abducted and forced into marriages with Muslim youth.[35]

The local Muslim population either actively or tacitly participated in these acts.[36] Muslim women in the affected areas, at times displayed their covert support. When some Hindu women sometimes rushed into neighbouring Muslim homes in a state of panic, it was the women of the households who removed the vermilion mark and broke the conch shell bangles.[37] This was,

however, not out of any altruistic motive of hiding their identity
from the attackers. N. K. Bose narrated the experience of a girl
who told Gandhiji about how the ladies in a Muslim household
asked her to become like one of them.[38] A similar experience
was detailed by Miss Muriel Lester who stayed in Noakhali
during, the period doing relief and refuge works. She wrote:

> Worst of all was the plight of the women several of them had
> to watch their husbands being murdered and then be forcibly
> converted and married to some of those responsible for their
> death. These women had a dead look. It was not despair,
> nothing so active was there. It was blankness.... the eating of
> beef and declaration of allegiance to Islam has been forced
> upon many women as a price for their lives."[39]

The nature of violence in these attacks forces one to look
beyond the descriptions and seek a causal explanation. The
Noakhali riot, as mentioned earlier, was generally seen as just a
reaction of and retaliation to the Calcutta riot which had taken
place seven weeks earlier.[40] The Muslims returning from
Calcutta brought with them exaggerated stories of brethren
suffering in Calcutta which vitiated the already tense situation
created by rumours.[41] Ghulam Sarwar in particular, and the
Muslim League in general, gave this reaction an organised
form. Thus, the 'theory of reaction' and that of 'organised'
violence', actually constituted one logical whole. The organised
crowd, similar patterns of the act of conversion everywhere, the
large number of caps with Pakistan written on them, and
availability of cloth, petrol, etc., prove this argument.[42]

A close perusal of the events and acts of the riot, however,
reveal one pertinent point. An insistence on 'the fact that the
riot was organised' minimised the extent of communalisation of
Noakhali society. Communalisation was, in fact, complete and
hence, the event needs to be studied from a different angle—the
significant ideological make-up of the society which had made
the riot one of penetrative violence. In fact, the 'organised core'
of the rioting crowd was more like an executive wing of the
completely communalised Noakhali society.

It was also not just a reaction to the Calcutta riot on account of
the fact that Bengal had witnessed other riots, in the near past
the Dacca riot of 1941. Noakhali never 'reacted' to these riots.
Second, there were other places which were communally as

tense, such as Dacca, Faridpur and Chittagong. But they did not erupt like this. This also suggests that the roots of this particular violence have to be studied more carefully than has so far been done.

The completeness of communalisation could be seen in the nature and composition of the people involved in the communal violence in those villages. From the very beginning, i.e., 28 September, on the day of Id, Muslims were exhorted to avenge the Calcutta killings. At this time, the 'organised core' was given lead by the erstwhile peasant leader Ghulam Sarwar. This core was composed of about 1000 to 1200 men which included some demobilised soldiers.[43] The presence of this group gave it the appearance of organised violence.

However, what was more significant was the fact that there existed, with some noble exceptions, a total collaboration and co-operation of insiders, i.e., neighbours of the same village and people whom the victims knew.[44] Attackers were most often known to the victims. In cases where the victims sought help from people they knew, some facet of communal ideology was ever present in the way help was rendered conditional. Lakshmi Majumdar of Panchgaon stated that when he asked for help, his Muslim friends advised him to get converted first.[45] In most cases, the victims were asked to convert to Islam by the persons whose help they had sought.[46] This third group of people were the tacit supporters and included even police officials.[47] This was evident from the way the latter acted (took no action) even when they were present at moments of violence. In fact, when the house of the *zamindar* of Panchgaon, Lakshmi Majumdar, was looted and he was asked to convert, the Superintendent of Police was present.[48] Hindu policemen's houses were burnt too, and people in the vicinity of police stations were not spared.[49]

This shows that communal ideology had a complete hegemonic presence.[50] The physical reality of this was manifested in a total societal rupture. How this hegemony was established, therefore, becomes the crucial question facing historians.

II

The demography of Noakhali district had a distinct Muslim composition.[51] A substantial part, in fact, the majority of the local Muslim population had 'descended from the aboriginal races of the district'.[52] In the second half of the nineteenth century, the

Wahabi movement made inroads into the religious psyche of the
practitioners of Islam in this region. The area which was under
the influence of the Wahabis during the early decades of the
century were the districts of Barasat and Nadia.[53] Maulana
Imaduddin of Sadullapur, Noakhali, who was an associate of Syed
Ahmed of Rai Bareily (who preached Wahabism and led the
Wahabi army against the British) came to Noakhali after the
defeat of the Wahabis in the battle of Balakot (1850), and propa-
gated their doctrines among the Muslims of Noakhali and
Tippera.[54] Maulana Keramat Ali, who was married in Chunua
village of Noakhali and 'wielded great influence in Faridpur
and Backerganj', also propagated the message of Islam with
renewed fervour.[55] His influence on the society is described, as
late as 1961, in these words:

> The influence of Maulana Keramat Ali in the reorientation
> and rejuvenation of religious thoughts and beliefs and perfor-
> mances of Noakhali Muslims have been profound and lasting.
> Maulana Keramat Ali taught the essence of Islam and the
> countryside was swept with an urge for practising in everyday
> life what Islam stood for. People found in his teaching the true
> values of Islam and rallied round his banner for self-less
> service to humanity. Each household became a stronghold of
> Islamic culture and prayers, fasting, zakat and haj were the
> main pillars of their activities.[56]

At the same time, Farazi doctrines also took deep root in Noa-
khali and the surrounding areas of Tippera.[57] Hazi Shariatullah
was the person who strengthened the Farazi tradition in the
area.[58] Thus, as Kaviraj points out, 'the Wahabi and the Farazis
were two separate streams in the Muslim revivalist movement in
Bengal, side by side'.[59] The streams of Wahabi and Farazi
movements constituted what we know as the reform movement
that swept across these parts of Bengal in the second half of the
nineteenth century. Rafiuddin Ahmed opines that the clue to the
'ties of understanding between the Ashraf and the Atrap and the
emergence in rural Muslim society of a sense of identity, which
included the distant patricians, were developments of the late
19th century'.[60] 'The reform movements', he argues, 'however
limited in their direct impact, acted as a catalyst in all these and
helped bring Muslim masses with Ashraf aspirations, although

the elitist competition for loaves and fishes of office or jobs had nothing to do with their immediate problems'.[61]

These reform movements also saw their propagation by the Anjuman societies, which vehemently attacked the syncretic elements in the socio-cultural life of rural Bengal and tried to 'rid Islam' as Rafiuddin Ahmed says, 'of all that they considered spurious accretion, including much that was revered by the orthodox'.[62] This added to Wahabi puritanism in the society.

All these factors contributed to the religiosity of the people which became quite visible to the occasional visitor in the early years of the twentieth century.[63] This was also emphasised by writers in the 1960s, and even the 1980s. The census authorities reported in 1961:

> Traditionally, therefore, religion plays a very important part in the conduct and behaviour of the Muslims of Noakhali and is a very real thing to them. Prayers are punctually offered by them at the appointed time. Every village has its own mosque and it is rarely that one can find a grown up adult not responding to the call of prayers.... Maulavis and Hafizes form a very large section of the community and they run a number of private madarasas. Noakhali Maulavis proudly claim to have kept the banner of Islam flying in all corners of the province for generations.[64]

Writing on the popular culture and life in Noakhali, a writer recently said that the most striking fact about Noakhali's society is Islam and the ways in which it influences the life of the people in this district.[65] Historians have linked the lower incidence of violence in that society to the predominance of religion.[66] It was true that the crime rate in this district was relatively lower than that in other districts.[67] In fact, the contemporary sources reveal that the predominance of the Wahabi and Farazi movement in the district did not create situations of communal violence.[68]

This brings us to a new problem. If, even in the days of Wahabi and Farazi ascendance, Noakhali did not witness conditions for violence against a particular community, then how do we explain the extent and nature of violence during the winter of 1946. If one accepts that the 'folk Islam', or what is termed the rural or little tradition of Islam by sociologists and social anthropologists, of rural Bengal with its syncretism, (which had been

targeted by the Wahabis and other organised efforts to prune its un-Islamic practices), gradually followed the puritan or orthodox model of what Ernest Gellner calls 'high Islam', then one can suggest that the reform movements acted as catalysts in accelarating this societal movement.[69] The Wahabi as well as the Farazi movements had a strong kernel of revivalism and fundamentalism. Despite claims by some authors that movements like the Farazi had a strong component of class consciousness, the movements themselves clearly showed that sectarianism and revivalism were such strong components in their philosophy that they represented neither the whole community nor a class. If the history of Noakhali were to be studied from the point of view of Hindu/Muslim history (for that matter like the history of Pakistan is studied by some, or the land wars of the 18th and 19th century by Christopher Bayly), then the 1946 riot could be explained as the culmination of the struggle that the suppressed class and community had been waging since earlier times. This will vindicate the position of historians like Azizur Rahman Mallick,[70] Muinuddin Ahmad Khan,[71] and a host of other historians from Pakistan[72] who see the movements of the Farazis and Wahabis as representative of the pre-history of Pakistan,[73] because they represented the struggle of the Muslims for their liberation from Hindu domination. In the same vein and with the same logic, therefore, the genesis of the Noakhali Riot could be seen as the logical culmination of the 'march of history', or an inherent 'cultural clash' if one accepts the contention of historians like Hossainur Rahman, who says,

> ...Hindu Muslim conflict was not merely a religious one in the western sense of the word; it was cultural as well, the protest of an alien civilisation which could only be reconciled by new synthesis. But the reverse happened: all their antagonistic characteristic dormant for generations were quickened to new life by Hindu and Muslim leaders.[74]

However, Noakhali society did not display the kind of intercommunal conflict and violence in the twentieth century which the other parts of the province had demonstrated. This suggests that the penetration of the Wahabi and Farazi traditions, which manifested itself in the religiosity of the people, was not conducive to communal violence. Wherein, then, lies the explana-

tion for the exceptional nature of communal violence that took place in 1946?

The roots of this lay not in the backwardness of the region, revivalist movements or aggravation of the economic conditions themselves. These only provided the material and ideological background. It may be suggested that the clue to the violence be found in the ideology of communalism, and the politics based on it.

III

The Noakhali riot, and its countrywide repercussion, soon vitiated the communal situation in the country.[75] At this juncture, Gandhi decided to come to Bengal and visit the riot affected areas of Noakhali and Tippera.[76] Gandhi's presence introduced a new dynamic into the entire discourse on the question of communal ideology/riots.[77] This dynamic was transported to the realm of politics, especially that which contained a steady undertone of violence as manifested by the communal riots. His presence provides the backdrop to the study of the situation that prevailed in Bengal during those fateful days and how this situation reshaped men and their minds. 'Men create violence, but violence recreates them.'

Gandhi had already seen in the Calcutta riots the potential for greater, escalated violence—probably on the scale of a civil war. 'We are not yet in the midst of a civil war', he said, 'but we are nearing it. At present we are playing at it.'[78] In fact, it appears that Gandhi took a close personal interest in the affairs of Bengal, especially the violence there.[79] It was the news of violence in Noakhali and Tippera that prompted him to come to Bengal. 'Why and why only Noakhali whereas rioting had been taking place in Ahmedabad, Bombay or for that matter in the neighboring Bihar', was the question repeatedly asked of him. This question was important as it not only suggests the significance that Gandhi attached to the Noakhali riot but also provokes us to probe deeper into the ramifications of Gandhi's visit to the riot affected areas.[80]

As we have outlined, Noakhali riot was qualitatively different from the earlier communal riots including the Calcutta killings of August 1946 which immediately preceded it.[81] The difference lay in its transformation of a communal discourse as a politics based on religion, to one in which violence was sanctified by

religion. Gandhi had realized this more than any one else. It was evident from the pattern of violence that there had occurred a total rupture of an essentially peasant society, and the entrench-ment of communal ideology in that social milieu. Gandhi, an astute reader of the peasant psyche, appeared to perceive the effects such a rupture could engender. Noakhali, therefore, became important not just because it demonstrated an intensity of violence, but also the power of ideology, i.e., communalism. Gandhi, in fact, was practical enough to see the writing on the wall. In September 1944 itself, he sensed the increased hold of Jinnah on the Muslim masses, and therefore, while writing to Jinnah he acknowledged the latter's hold over them. His meeting with Jinnah was basically an acceptance of this fact. Aware of the significance of 'symbols', he wanted to attack the idea of 'two nations' and thereby, attack the ideological basis of Pakistan, i.e., communalism. He was prepared to accept any kind of Partition as long as it was not based on this theory. He wrote to Jinnah that he could already see its operation.[82] Noakhali presented for Gandhi the first field demonstration of this theory in its intense and most frightening form. Gandhi's visit to Noakhali, therefore, had a combating element to it as he tried to counter the ideological underpinnings of the riot. 'In any war', he said, 'brutalities were bound to take place; war is a brutal thing'.[83] Once this was accepted by Gandhi, he started looking beyond the violence and the violations taking place there. He was, as suggested by a close aide in Noakhali, not very concerned about the casualties or the extent of material damage. Instead he concentrated on 'discovering the political intentions working behind the move and the way of combating them successfully'.[84]

The spread and the intensity of the violations convinced him that the war was to be a long drawn one and that he would have a personal stake in it. While it was 'the cry of outraged woman-hood' which brought him to Bengal,[85] he was equally aghast at the religious intolerance shown by the local populace. This further convinced him that his place was in Noakhali. He took it upon himself to combat the operation of the 'two nation-theory' while also delegitimising violence of its apparent religious sanctions. Therefore, Noakhali was made the battle-field on which he sought to uphold his political as well as personal credo.

This attitude of combating the war brought out a novel form of experience in its train—significantly entitled 'Gandhi's Noa-khali experiment'. In this experiment, Gandhi's principles

were at stake. 'My own doctrine', Gandhi said to N.C. Chatterjee, 'was failing. I don't want to die a failure'.[86]

Did he possess any coherent strategy when he landed in Noakhali? From the very beginning, he was quite apprehensive of his plan of action in Noakhali. Even enroute, he did not know what he was going to do there. He invoked God as the only one who knew what he could do.[87] The only thing he was certain of was that his presence in Noakhali was necessary.[88] He grappled in the darkness and told N.K. Bose, his secretary during those days, that he might have to stay on there for several years.[89]

While he was fighting this uncertainty vis-à-vis the Noakhali situation, there erupted in Bihar ghastly communal riots. Hindu crowds began slaughtering Muslims in order to avenge the rumored massacre of people of their community by the latter in Noakhali.[90]

Gandhi's position became very delicate as the Bihar riot boomeranged on his peace- mission in Noakhali. The number of casualties in the Bihar riots was much more than those in Noakhali. Therefore, the Muslim League Ministry in Bengal, which from the very beginning had been trying to minimize its own responsibility in the entire episode, now asked him to shift his attention to Bihar. The details of the Bihar riot were exaggerated and made the center of projection.[91] Thus, communal discourse whether Hindu or Muslim, justified, and thereby, validated itself and the other.

The Muslim League Government did not like Gandhi's visit to Noakhali as it felt that world attention would get focused on the active collaboration of the League workers with the rioters. It, therefore, exerted pressure through propaganda and personal insinuation against Gandhi.[92] Even people holding responsible positions attacked Gandhi, asking him to leave Noakhali, and attend to the Bihar situation. Hamiduddin Chaudhury, a Parliamentary Secretary of the Muslim League Ministry, who had visited Noakhali with Gandhi and initially condemned the atrocities there, issued a statement to the Press that Gandhi was in Noakhali 'only to focus attention of the world on the happenings there and to magnify the issue'.[93]

Synchronizing with statements of this sort was the behaviour of the local Muslim League workers. They began to harass Gandhi as well as the relief workers in order that they perforce leave the place. Members of the Feni sub-division of the Muslim

League sent Gandhi a post card containing a copy of the reso-
lution passed by that body which read:

It is appreciated that Mr. Gandhi's presence in Bihar is much
more useful than at Noakhali where the situation is normal.
He is therefore requested to leave for Bihar.[94]

Gandhi remained undeterred by these attacks. His reply to the
Feni sub-division Muslim League request was direct and curt. He
wrote that he was unable to follow their advice as it was based on
ignorance of the facts. 'In the first place, I know that the situa-
tion is not normal here and that so far as I can contribute to the
Bihar problem, I have to inform you that such influence as I have
on Bihar can be and is being efficiently exercised from Sri-
rampur.'[95] It is not that he was not aware of the magnitude of the
Bihar riots. Gandhi, with his keen understanding of communal
logic, perceived the dynamic involved in the relationship
between the Noakhali and Bihar riots. He perceived that
Noakhali was the disease, while Bihar was just an outgrowth or
casualty of the former.[96]

The sound judgement displayed by Gandhi at this juncture was
apparent. He was aware of his ability to influence the Ministers
and people of Bihar even from a distance. His presence in Noa-
khali, on the other hand, was a deterrent against any further
retaliatory action anywhere else. At another level, he neither
had a hold on the Ministers in Bengal nor did he have any
strong influence, as he had witnessed, on the Muslim populace of
Noakhali, many of whom had even condemned him as an arch
enemy of Islam.[97]

Gandhi, on his part, faced all these charges with the simple
statement that he was as much a friend of the Muslims as he was
of the Hindus. However, this was increasingly disbelieved by the
villagers, and towards the end of his sojourn they not only
boycotted his prayer meetings,[98] but also dirtied the roads which
he used everyday from village to village.[99] He accepted this as the
misdemeanours of those who had failed to understand him and
his work. But he, Bose says, resolved not to 'surrender his own
love for men even if they were erring'.[100]

Though outwardly unfazed, the situation in Noakhali, the
Bihar riots and its reaction, the strong and entrenched oppo-
sition from the Muslim League quarters in Bengal and his own
search for a way out, created some intense moments of self-doubt,

and consequently, Gandhi was not at peace with his inner self. This forced him to put his 'will' to the test. He not only reduced his food intake and retained but two of his aides, he also experimented with his personal purity. Though it created a stir even among his close aides, this shows the desperation with which Gandhi was fighting the last battle of his life—a battle against communal ideology.

A psycho-analytical study reveals that a period of desperation like this had the potential to disturb the 'integration of his (Gandhi's) sexuality and spirituality'.[101] This was because 'for Gandhi, celibacy was not only the sine qua non for *moksha*, but also the mainspring of his political activities' (sic).[102]

On the other hand, Bhikhu Parikh tries to understand this traumatic episode through an analysis of Gandhi's political discourse. For Gandhi, says Parikh, personal purity and political success hung together. Parikh suggests that personal purity generated the energy and power he desperately needed to succeed in his momentous political struggle. On the basis of this argument he tries to explain Gandhi's Noakhali experiment. He maintains that,

the more intense his political problems became, the greater was the moral struggle in his personal life. It was hardly surprising that his finest political experiment of successfully controlling violence in Noakhali should have been conducted alongside his heroic sexual experiment.[103]

Kakar and Parikh both agree on one central point, i.e., the integration of the spiritual and the sexual (Parikh calls it the moral) in Gandhi's political life. In the context of Noakhali, however, his experiment needs to be analysed in a much more dynamic manner; to shift emphasis from reading Gandhi, the person to the political context in which he was situated in the winter of 1946.[104]

A post-1942 reading of events shows a strangely quiet Gandhi. That fire of the Quit India movement appeared to be missing. However, he continued his fight against the ideological basis of Pakistan, i.e., the 'two nation' theory. Chakravarthy Rajagopalachari (popularly known as CR) approached him with the plan that Gandhi should make Congress and the League agree to a proposal for the future partition of the country with the help of a popular mandate, but only after the British had left the country.

In the meantime the Muslim League should endorse Congress's
fight against the colonial authorities. Gandhi endorsed the plan,
known as *CR formula* and, despite strong opposition from several
quarters, he subsequently met Jinnah. During his meetings with
Jinnah, he demonstrated his determination to fight the ideolo-
gical basis of Pakistan. The increasing hold of Jinnah over the
Muslim masses, which Gandhi himself acknowledged,[105] made
him aware of the 'shrinking space' to combat communalism/
Pakistan. His acceptance of the envisaged partition in the CR
formula was the the limit to which he was prepared to
compromise with Jinnah.[106] With this compromising stroke,
however, he lost his advantage to fight 'Pakistan'. By 1946, he
had no political weapons left to arm himself against the Muslim
League and the rapid communalisation of the society, which in a
sense culminated in the Noakhali riot. The religious sanction
behind the Noakhali riot disturbed him most because it robbed
him of one of his most significant political weapons—a politics
based on ethics and morality. He, therefore, had no plans nor
any weapons, and helplessly asked *'Kya Karoon, Kya Karoon?'*
(What should I do, What should I do ?).

At this historical conjuncture, a rupture between his personal
life and political struggle seemed imminent. The situational
adversity, his feeling of loneliness and the intensity of commu-
nal hatred, together forced Gandhi to engage in an intense
battle with his own self. This explains to some extent his
moments of agony. At this point, he tested himself to garner
moral strength, and equip himself to dispel the darkness
around.[107]

Gandhi was in Noakhali from 6 November 1946 to the end of
February 1947. In May 1947, he visited Calcutta when the ques-
tion of a united and sovereign Bengal vis-à-vis the partition of
the province was agitating the minds of the leaders and people of
the province. His last visit to the province was in August 1947.
The news of the Punjab killings had already poisoned the air
in Calcutta, and there were all the indications of the city
erupting again in a communal conflagration. It was on the verge
of this situation that he undertook the now famous 'fast' to
intervene in the continuing civil strife.

He was supposed to leave for Noakhali on 1 November but the
departure was postponed to 6 November.[108] Beginning his tour
with the villages of Gopdirbag, he reached Srirampur on 20

November where he decided to spend the next one and half months.[109]

His visits to these villages on the one hand stirred the entire area with new life, and on the other strengthened his own determination to contest communal politics with Noakhali as his battle-ground.[110] In combating communal ideology and the forces that represented it, he sought to heal the societal rupture which had sustained the communal breach. The battle was a difficult one because the communalisation of the population was complete. This made him more determined to fight it with all his strength.

After a long sojourn in Srirampur, which had soon become the nerve centre of his mission in Noakhali, Gandhi embarked on his journey into the interior of Noakhali and Tippera from January 1947. He repeatedly expressed his desire to be left alone on this journey, and in fact, desired that the military protection provided to him be withdrawn. He felt it prevented him from showing the people that his concern was genuine and that they could approach him without any fear. He wrote to Suhrawardy on 8 January,

> All my attempts at bringing about real friendship between the two communities must fail so long as I go about fully protected by armed police or military....The fright of the military keeps them from coming to me and asking all sorts of questions for the resolution of their doubts....[111]

In almost all the villages he visited and the congregational prayer meetings he addressed, he admonished the Hindus for being cowards and exhorted them to be fearless. He was aware of the fear that prevailed, and of the fact that the Hindus were really in great danger, without adequate protection. The total social rupture that was demonstrated by the brutality of the communal attacks was soon compounded by the Muslim League workers instituting false cases against Hindu villagers,[112] at times with the active connivance of the local authorities.[113] Even the army found it difficult to tackle the situation.

Therefore, talk of fearlessness in such an atmosphere of all-pervasive tyranny of fear was seen by many as unwise. Leaders of political parties, especially the Mahasabha leaders, demanded military protection for the Hindus of Noakhali.[114] Contesting this line of argument, Gandhi refuted the claims that he was not

practical in advocating against military protection for the Hindus. 'I am an idealist",[115] he said to the Hindu Mahasabha delegation, 'but I claim to be a practical idealist'.[116] And as a 'practical idealist', he realised that any talk of army protection would make the Muslim villagers more belligerent against the Hindus, as well as hamper the return of a normal social existence in these villages. In the same vein, he contested the idea of the 'segre-gation of Hindu population in protected pockets'.[117] For him, this 'would be interpreted as preparation of war'[118] by the Muslim League. Therefore, the path he chose was different.

The talk of migration was in the air but in his opinion if it had to take place, 'it must be complete'.[119] After all, this was what Pakistan meant. He did not want to be 'a willing party to Pakistan'.[120] Pakistan was a political agenda and not a social solution, just as migration was not the solution to the problem.

'No police or military would protect those', he said, 'who are cowards'.[121] He emphasised the need for Hindus to be courageous and shun their inferiority complex. From the beginning, he asked them to be fearless. In Dattapara, 'He had seen the terror-stricken faces of the sufferers. They had been forcibly converted once and they were afraid the same thing would be repeated. He wanted them to shed that fear.'[122] In fact, he tried to attack the tyrannical hegemony of fear that the communal violence had created in the minds of the people. It was here that he reflected on his idea of an imminent civil war that communalism posed at this stage, and with which the League was trying to get Pakistan. Therefore, Gandhi in his talk with Nalini Mitra and Rasomoy Sur of Noakhali, at Srirampur, concluded that 'the present problem was not the question of Noakhali alone; it was a problem for the whole of Bengal and the whole of India'.[123] This was why Gandhi was so perturbed about Noakhali. In fact, his determination to go back to Noakhali even after the Partition reflects his idea of attacking communal ideology and the 'two nation theory' from Noakhali. Thus, unlike his 'search for light' as regards his actions, he was determined that Noakhali was going to be his testing ground. In Dattapara he said,

The question of East Bengal is not one of Bengal alone. The battle for India is today being decided in East Bengal. Today Mussalmans are being taught by some that Hindu religion is

an abomination and therefore forcible conversion of Hindus to Islam is a merit.[124]

Noakhali in his mind was like Champaran or Bardoli - the 'model site' for launching his movement. Therefore, his speech at Nabagram reflected what was going on his mind. He said, 'Noakhali offered an almost ideal situation for testing whether ahimsa could effectively be used by a small number of people against an almost sullen if not hostile majority all round.'[125] He was conscious that 'the problem here was also complicated by the fact of the existence of a popular Government controlling the destines of the people'.[126] About the contrasting psyche of the two communities in Noakhali, he stated that he had been 'moving amidst a sullen population on the one hand and a frightened one on the other'.[127] A conciliation, he resolved, was to be through the one's openness and the other's fearlessness. Gandhi's presence and his attempts at meeting people in 'their home' were themselves a symbolic attack on the prevailing atmosphere marked by fear.

Gandhi was very upset by the targeting of violence against women who were the worst victims. The male population in most of the villages had to run for their lives and the women lived in great fear and danger. Gandhi asked them to be courageous, though not on a patronising note—he shared their grief. Manubehan Gandhi, his grand daughter, who was there with him wrote:

'...many of them had been forcibly converted to Islam. As the husbands and sons of some of them had been murdered, they were plunged in grief. With sobs and tears they poured out their stricken hearts to Bapuji. "The only difference between you and me," he consoled them, "is that you cry and I don't. But my heart sorrows for you. Your grief is my grief; that's why I have come here. There is no remedy for our pain except faith in God. Is the one, most efficacious panacea dead. If one imbibe this truth, there will be no cause for such outbursts of grief." '[128]

Later, Gandhi in a sad tone told Manubehan, "the meeting with those sisters is still vivid, who knows how many more tragic sights like this I am fated to see".[129]

Speaking at Jagatpur on 10 January, he advised his audience 'about courage and the need of never surrendering one's honour

even on pain of death'.[130] Gandhi's presence, his prayer meetings which encouraged women to come out openly after a long time— and with confidence, and his constant evocation of courage, fear-lessness, honour and death, had a significant impact. Women began to come out and share their tales of woe with him. In Bansa, they put before him their dilemma, 'what is a woman to do when attacked by miscreants—run away or resist with violence'?[131] Gandhi shared their concern and advised them to come out of the trap of violence. He said,

My answer to this question is very simple. For me there can be no preparation for violence. All preparation must be for non-violence if courage of the highest type is to be developed. Violence can only be tolerated as being preferable always to cowardice....For a non-violent person there is no emergency but quiet dignified preparation for death.[132]

He asked them to be like Sita and Savitri who by their deeds refuted the fact that women were 'weak'. While speaking at Bhatialpur he noted, 'it was often said that women were naturally weak—they were *abalas*'. His advice to women was that they should not believe such things.[133] They could be, he opined, as hard as men.[134]

While advising Hindu women to become courageous and fearless, he at the same time asked them to help the neighbour-ing Muslim women shed their ignorance and illiteracy, and also in other aspects where they lagged behind the former.[135]

As Gandhi's journey progressed, a sense of confidence built up in the Noakhali villages. Women started coming out more often and they even displayed the courage that Gandhi was exhorting them to live with. Bose wrote that after one prayer meeting a girl came up to tell her story without the slightest fear, and on being asked whether she would be able to go back and stay once more in the midst of scenes she could never forget, the girl answered in the affirmative.[136]

Bose recorded that she answered in this manner because now she knew that she could save herself by dying.[137] This forced Bose to think about the transformation Gandhi had caused. Though equivocal in his judgement, he could not negate the influence of Gandhi's speeches on that girl.[138]

When told that the Muslims were willing to receive the refugees back in their villages provided they withdrew the

criminal cases arising out of the disturbances, Gandhi provided
the guilty with two alternatives:

> They could admit the crimes and justify their conduct on the
> ground that whatever they had done was under advice, solely
> for the establishment of Pakistan without any personal motive
> and face the consequences. Or, they should report and submit to
> penalty of law by way of expiation.[139]

But he negated any compromise such as dropping the cases.
Hence, personal responsibility was to be accepted, as also the root
of those acts which forced people to create such a situation.

He rejected the idea of the Hindu Mahasabha that the entire
Hindu population should be segregated in pockets. N.C. Chatter-
jee, the President of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha,
personally came to Gandhi to argue on these lines. Gandhi's
counter argument contained his idea of responsibility. For him,
the former was an unworkable proposition. He said to N.C.
Chatterjee: 'Put yourself in Mr. Suhrawardy's shoes; do you think
he would favour it, or even the Muslim residents of Noakhali?
For it would be interpreted as a preparation for war.'[140] He could
see that by putting forth that demand they would practically be
conceding the logic of the Muslim League's demand for Pakis-
tan. He opined, and quite forcefully, that if migration had to take
place, it must be systematic and complete and it was not, there-
fore, to be thought of so long as there was any hope of
co-operation.

Gandhi, therefore, insisted that for a permanent solution
responsibility as well as proximity were absolutely necessary. He
advised people not to leave their homes and go elsewhere.[141] In
conversation with Nalini Mitra and Rasomoy Sur at Srirampur,
he said,

> The Bengalees were always in the forefront of civilised life in
> bravery and sacrifice and it was really shocking to find that
> people would run away in fear giving up their hearths and
> homes. He wanted to see every Hindu family settle down in its
> own village and face the situation fearlessly and with
> courage.[142]

While he asked them to seek protection through their inner
strength, he also tried through the Peace Committees to create
bridges between the communities. This would enable the

communities to come into physical proximity with one another, which again would bring moral responsibility into life.[143]

The enactment of this idea of the sense of responsibility lay in his idea of Peace Committees. Initially, the idea of Peace Committees was mooted by the Bengal Muslim League Government while Gandhi was in Srirampur. The plan was to have equal number of Hindu and Muslim members in these Peace Committees with a government official as chairman. Gandhi was favourably disposed to the idea because it fulfilled his *idea of responsibility*. This is why he asked the Hindu members to give it a chance to succeed when the latter insisted on first bringing the miscreants to book. Gandhi advised them not to summarily reject the proposal by placing any conditions. Thus, the Hindus had to trust and honour the work of these Committees. The functions of the Peace Committees were defined as:

(a) to do intensive propaganda work to restore confidence;
(b) to help in constructing shelters for the returning refugees, and in processing and distributing relief, e.g., food, clothing etc.;
(c) to draw up lists of disturbers of peace, who should be rounded up. These lists would be checked up with the first infor-mation report already lodged with the police, and arrests to be made on verification. If an innocent person was found to have been arrested, the Peace Committee would recommend to the Magistrate his release on bail or unconditionally as the case might be;
(d) to prepare a list of houses destroyed or damaged during the disturbances.

Similarly Gandhi asked the people to trust representatives of the Government. In Srirampur, he said:

Here were elected Muslims who were running the government of the Province, who gave them their word of honour. They would not be silent witnesses to the repetition of shameful deeds. His advice to the Hindus was to believe their word and give them a trial. This did not mean there would not be a single bad Mussulman left in East Bengal. There were good and bad men amongst all communities. Dishonourable conduct would break any ministry or organisation in the end.[144]

When the Government's efforts proved wanting, Gandhi even went to the extent of advocating that 'one brave man' in a village could achieve the desired peace if he was ready to lay down his life when the occasion arose rather than shun responsibility. He was of the firm conviction that a single man could change the entire complexion of societal thought by his acts. He was glad to meet a maulvi at Muraim who 'helped in sustaining his theory that one individual can transform the entire society'. There was no riot in Muraim where, according to Pyarelal, the maulvi was like an oasis amidst the desert; he saw to it that the Hindus did not even panic and made himself responsible for their well being.[145]

The third ingredient of Gandhi's battle in Noakhali-Tippera was an attack on communal ideology from a high moral and ethical plane. First, he emphasised the right of every individual to profess or follow any religion as long as it did not negatively affect the others' religious creeds. He was appalled to witness the religious intolerance shown during the riot and which conti-nued during his visits. In the village of Masimpur, which he visited on 7 January 1947, the Muslim audience left the place once he began his prayer meeting. At which Gandhi remarked: 'I am sorry because some of my friends had not been able to bear any name of God except Khuda but I am glad because they have had the courage of expressing their dissent openly and plainly.'[146] This small incident provides an inkling of the men-tality which prevailed during the fateful October disturbances in the district.

He then appealed to the 'Muslim brethren' to assure him 'of that freedom which is true to the noblest tradition of Islam. Even from the Muslim League platforms, it has been repeatedly said that in Pakistan there will be full tolerance of the practice of their faiths by the minorities and that they will enjoy freedom of worship equally with the majority'.[147] There was no sense of appeasement. His stout defence of his *Ramdhun* and the prayer meetings testified to his fight for religious freedom. Here again, it will not be out of place to suggest that for him his prayer broke all religious and communal boundaries and in addition it even gave voice to the protesting soul. The prayer meetings of Gandhi brought people out into the open for the first time after 10 October 1946, and thereby, broke the tyranny of fear.

In a place where all symbols of a particular religion had been made the target of attack, the Gandhian defense came as an

attack on that particular undercurrent of communal ideology which legitimised religious intolerance.

Another aspect of this was that by bringing up ethical-moral questions, Gandhi was trying to delegitimise the forces of communal ideology which in fact claimed religious sanction for their agenda of violence. In retrospect, it seems quite significant because clerics of religion, and religion itself, had become the main prop and legitimising factor in the Noakhali riot. Apart from the physical manifestation of it, Gandhi perceived the prevailing psyche from a discussion with Maulvi Khalilur Rahman of Devipur, when he visited it on 17 February 1947. The Maulvi was reportedly responsible for the conversion of a large number of Hindus during the disturbances.[148]

On being asked about the truth of the matter, the Maulvi said that 'the conversion should not be taken seriously, it was a dodge adopted to save the life of the Hindus'.[149] Gandhi was aghast at this casual attitude that the religious preceptor displayed towards religion. Bose noted, '(he) asked him if it was any good saving one's life (*jan*) by sacrificing one's faith (*iman*)? It would have been much better if, as a religious preceptor, he had taught the Hindus to lay down their lives for their faith, rather than give it up through fear.'[150] The divine stuck to his position that such false conversions for saving one's life had the sanction of religion. This angered Gandhi considerably and he lamented that if 'ever he met God, he would ask Him why a man with such views had ever been made a religious preceptor'.[151]

This and other encounters made him realise that the acts of communal violence and attacks on religion during the riot had the strong sanction of the clerics and religious teachers. The large scale conversions were a living testimony of that. Therefore, he tried to invoke Islam itself to counter the ideology which sought to premise itself on Islam. Requesting the Muslims to join the Peace Committees, he said:

> It was only in order to serve the cause of Islam that the Muslims are being called to join the committees. The most important task is to restore the confidence among the Hindus that they would be able to pursue their religious practice in freedom.[152]

In another place when he was describing his meeting with the Hindu women 'who put on vermilion mark indoors but wipe

it off when they stir out in public', Gandhi invoked the name of the Prophet and Islam:

> I will ask my Mussulman friends to treat this as their sacred duty. The Prophet once advised Mussulmans to consider the Jewish places of worship to be as pure as their own, and offer it the same protection. It is the duty of the Mussulmans of today to assure the same freedom to their Hindu neighbours.[153]

He himself referred to Jinnah so that the local Muslim Leaguers did not commit misdeeds by using the latter's name. He said, 'Qaid-i-Azam Jinnah has said that every Muslim must show by his conduct that not a single non-Muslim need be afraid of him, the latter would be guaranteed safety and protection. For, thus alone can the Mussulmans command honour and respect'.[154] He knew quite well that Jinnah had a sway over the masses. So, his was a very practical realisation that he could not fight the battle by attacking Jinnah but rather by taking his name. His constant references to the Quran were also supportive of his argument that 'if people had known the true meaning of their scriptures, happenings like those of Noakhali could never have taken place'.[155] In a talk with the villagers of Fatehpur, he appealed to their reason by saying:

> It is the easiest thing to harass the Hindus here, as you Muslims are in the majority. But is it just as honourable? Show me, please, if such a mean action is suggested anywhere in your Koran. I am a student of the Koran.... So in all humility I appeal to you to dissuade your people from committing such crimes, so that your own future may be bright.[156]

The major part of Gandhi's experiment in Noakhali was to attack communal ideology with three ingredients, viz., advocacy of fearlessness, invoking the sense of responsibility and taking the discourse to an ethical-moral plane. He struck at the core of the crisis by posing a counterpoint to the prevalent mental blocks. He understood that the hegemony of communal ideology was partially a reflection of the socio-economic structure of that society. He endeavoured to understand the problem in its totality and this made him realise that his task would be a long one. However, he remained faithful to his prioritizing of the ideological fight as he recognised its necessity at this particular historical juncture.

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5. For a brilliant treatment of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism, see, Al-Azm, Sadik J., 'Islamic Fundamentalism Reconsidered: A critical outline of Problems, Ideas and Approaches', Part-I, *South Asia Bulletin*, XIII, 1&2, 1993, pp. 93-121; Part-II, *ibid.*, XIV, 1, 1994, pp. 73-98.

6. "... ideology can as little be divorced from factual knowledge as from rational justification and moral and other prescription." Seligar, Martin, *Ideology and Politics*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1976, p. 16.

7. For a forceful criticism of this method of explaining a phenomenon like fascism, see, Allardyce, Gilbert, 'What Fascism is not: Thoughts on a Deflection of a Concept', *American History Review*, 84, 2, 1979, pp. 367-98.

8. For the role of British Policy in the entire process of the emergence and growth of communalism in Modern India, see, Chandra, Bipan, *Communalism in Modern India*, Vikas, Delhi, 1984, pp. 237-89. He says:

... one way of demolishing the critique of British policy regarding communalism and of 'covering up' the British role has been to present the critique in such an *extreme* or simplistic form that it appears...absurd...to suggest...that the British created the entire involvement of religion in politics...or that the entire communal antagonism or politics can be attributed to British policy... is to create a paper tiger...easily blown away with one puff.

...no responsible writer or leader has ever maintained that British rule was solely responsible for communalism....What the anti-imperialist writers have maintained is that the colonial authorities followed a policy of divide and rule, encouraged and promoted communalism, accentuated communal conflicts and used communalism to perpetuate their rule; and that, consequently, the removal of colonialism was one of the necessary conditions...for the 'solution' of the communal problem.... *to bring out British responsibility in this respect is to be accused of being a nationalist bigot* (emphasis mine). *Ibid.*, pp. 238-239.

9. Emphasising the need to study ideology in the context of National Socialism, Lucy Davidowicz makes a significant point regarding American Historiography. See, Davidowicz, Lucy, *The Holocaust and the Historian*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 29-30.

10. Discussing the role of ideology in shaping the Nazi violence in Germany, Lucy Davidovicz says: "In slighting the relationship between Nazi ideas and the bloody events that proceeded from them, the historian reduces his own capacity to explain Nazi Germany's past." Davidowicz, Lucy S., *Ibid.*, p. 31.

11. Suhrawardy, H. S., 6 Feb. 1947, *Proceedings of the Bengal Legislative Assembly*, hereafter, *PBLA*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 3, p. 323.

12. *Star of India*, Cal., 17 October 1946, p. 3.

13. Rahman, Mujibur, 6 Feb. 1947, *PBLA*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 3, 1947, p. 324.

14. E.S. Simpson to Additional Secretary, 'Versions of Eyewitness about Noakhali' *S.P.Mukherjee Papers*, Instalment II-IV, Subject File No. 149/1946, pp. 52-53.

15. S. Ghosh, S. C. Ghosh and Aswini Kr. Bhatta of Karpara, P. S. Ramganj to the District Magistrate, Noakhali, 31 October 1946, *All India Congress Committee Papers*, (hereafter called *AICC Papers*), File No. G-53, p. 37.

16. Lakshmi Babu's Statement, 'Versions of Eye Witness about Noakhali', *op. cit.*, p. 65. See, R. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

17. Burrows to Pethick-Lawrence, 18 Nov. 1946, Mansergh, N. (ed.), *Transfer of Power*, Vol. IX, p. 100.

18. E. S. Simpson to Additional Secretary, *op. cit.*, p. 44 .

19. Jnanda Mohan Guha Roy, s/o late Kali Mohan Guha Raya, Village Shahpur, P.S Ramgunj, *AICC Papers*, File No. CL-8, 1946, pp. 353-55.

20. Annanda Sundari Roy of Baragobindapur, P. S. Begumganj, Noakhali, to the Officer-in-Charge, Begumganj Police Station, Noakhali, *ibid.*, p. 365.

21. E. S. Simpson to the Additional Secretary, *op. cit.*, p. 44. See also, Burrows to Pethick-Lawrence, 18 Nov. 1946, Mansergh, N., (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, p. 99.

22. The Reports of E. S. Simpson, R. Gupta and J. B. Kriplani discuss these acts in detail.

23. 'Acharya J. B. Kripalani, Congress President's Report', *AICC Papers* , File No. CL-8-1946, p. 371.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

25. Professor Samar Guha and Ardhendu Bhattacharya, 'Eyewitness Versions about Noakhali', *op. cit.*, p. 26.

26. S. Ghosh, S. C. Ghosh and Aswani Kumar Bhatta to the District Magistrate, Noakhali, 31st October 1946, *AICC Papers*, File No. G-53, p. 39.

27. The debate on the comparative growth rate of Hindu and Muslim population in Bengal while taking a communal turn invariably brought to the forefront the fact that the Muslim men had abducted and forcibly married Hindu girls. See Dutta, J.M., 'Continued abduction of Hindu women—its effect on the Bengali Hindus', *Modern Review*, Calcutta, Oct. 1941, pp. 358-59. See also, 'Will the Hindus Regain their Majority in Bengal? Yes', *ibid.*, Dec. 1940, pp. 676-80; 'Are the Bengali Hindus Decadent? No', *ibid.*, Jan 1940, pp. 36-41; 'Estimated Population of the Muhammedans in Bengal at the next Census', *ibid.*, Aug. 1940, pp. 156-17; 'No. of Hindus not properly recorded at the last Census of 1931', *ibid.*, Sept. 1940, p. 294.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.* The demographic factor had been a very significant aspect of the communal discourse in Bengal. In shaping of the Hindu and Muslim communal perceptions, the debate revolving around the comparative increase in the population of Hindus and Muslims in the Province had an important bearing. Publication of Col. U.N. Mukherjee's book entitled *A Dying Race* in 1909 triggered off much debate and apprehensions among a section of the Hindu middle class intellectuals. Comparing Census data, Col. Mukherjee had concluded that there was a possibility, as predicted by O'Donnel in the 1891 Census Report, of Hindu extinction.

The demographic factor became politically more significant after the communal award (1932) and the operation of the provincial autonomy clause which saw election and formation of Minstries in 1937. A sense of loss of political

power of the community was a point repeatedly stressed by the Hindu communal discourse while on the other hand the colonial attempts of classifying tribes and other groups separately from the Hindus also added to the already circulating apprehensions that the colonial authorities were out to crush the Hindus politically by reducing them to an extreme minority. This factor became further complicated with the demand of Pakistan as a separate homeland for the Muslim majority. The demand was, to a great extent, based on the demographic argument. This made the 1941 Census a bitterly contested operation. (See 'Hindus and the Census', *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, 18 Jan. 1941, p. 9; 'Coming Census', *ibid.*, 3 Feb. 1941, p. 6). To the Hindu Mahasabha demand for an 'impartial Census enumeration' the Muslim League and even the Chief Minister, Huq, made statements which had a communal tinge. They added to the communal propaganda which made the 'census' of 1941 a symbol and an arena of political contestation.

On the other hand, the Muslim communal perception was also significantly influenced by the question of population. The argument in the forties in favour of Pakistan was quite often an argument based on the demographic consideration. For example, Casey reported his conversation with Nazimuddin in these terms: "I asked him about Pakistan. He said he was just on the point of writing to Jinnah telling...they want Bengal (less Burdwan Division), Assam, a subdivision of Bihar....This would give them 58% Muslim in place of 51%....*He says that Muslims are more virile than the Hindus and breed faster.*" Entry on 5th September 1944, Personal Diary, *Richard G. Casey Papers*, Reel No. 1, p. 58.

Forcible conversion, forcible marriages and mass exodus from the place brought these issues to the debate on comparative population growth.

30. *Hindustan Standard*, Cal., 7 November 1946, p. 4.

31. *PBLA*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 3, 1947, First Session, p. 323.

32. E. S. Simpson to Additional Secretary, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

33. See Miss Muriel Lester's Report on Noakhali, *Hindustan Standard*, Cal., 8 Nov. 1946, pp. 1-2.

'Calcutta observes Noakhali Women's Day, Dec 1', *ibid.*, 29 Nov. 1946, p. 1.

34. A reaction of a follower of Gandhi provides a clue to the kind of emotion and frustration that was generated by the aspects of the Noakhali riot:

Most urgent need now is to receive the numberless abducted women who were entomed in Burkha and who for obvious reasons, could not be approached by the Ministry.... It is intolerable that helpless women victims of a cold blooded planned assault should suffer hourly distress and that we should be alive and still be unable to save them.

Hindustan Standard, Calcutta, 7 Nov. 1946, p. 3.

35. One eyewitness thought forced marriages were 'the shortest possible way to make conversion a reality'. See Samar Guha and Ardhendu Bhattacharya, 'Versions of Eyewitness about Noakhali', *op. cit.*, p. 28.

36. A substantial section of the Muslim population actively and tacitly supported the conversions that were carried out. H. S. E. Stevens, Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal to the Secretary, Government of India, *Home Political*, File No. 18/10/46.

Most assailants were known to the victims. For example, the residents of Sonaimuri village, P. O. Begumganj, provided the name and address of about 60 hooligans who were not arrested by authorities but who had been threatening

the villagers. The Inhabitants of Sonaimuri Village to the President, Indian National Congress, *AICC Papers*, File No. CL-8/1946, pp. 381-83.

37. S. C. Ghosh, et al of Karpara, P. S. Ramganj, to the District Magistrate, Noakhali, 31st October 1946, *AICC Papers*, File No. G-53, pp. 37-41.

38. Bose, N. K., *My Days with Gandhi*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1974, p. 97

39. *Modern Review*, Nov. 1946.

40. Noakhali riot is generally considered chronologically as well as thematically a 'reaction' to, or an extension of the Calcutta killings. What I have tried to argue in this study is that one should not premise itself on this 'reaction' aspect as it dilutes a number of other issues.

41. Emphasis on this aspect will dilute the fact that a substantial proportion of the Muslim population, barring some noble exceptions, was under the spell of communal ideology. By pinning the blame on the party or a person, we, in fact, tend to overlook the hegemonic presence of *communal ideology*.

42. 'Chittagong residents passed a restless day' on the Direct Action Day, A letter from Chittagong to Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, *S. P. Mookerjee Papers*, Subject File No. 151, p. 111. Chittagong, according to Lt. Gen. Tuker, was equally tense. See Tuker, F.,*While Memory Serves*, Cassell and Company, London, 1950, pp. 170-71, 607.

43. Tuker wrote:
Ghulam Sarwar's gang was estimated to be about one thousand, a certain number of ex-army personal were reported to be adherents. The main gang had split into smaller gangs of one hundred and fifty to two hundred and these had been working in conformity with an obviously worked out plan.

Tuker, F., *op. cit.*, p. 174.

44. In most cases people were attacked by inhabitants of their village. The maulvi who converted people was often a local, and the hooligans who were also of the same village were supported by crowds coming to attack from outside. Thus, we need to correct the understanding of this riot put forth by the authorities, that it was "activity apparently organised of a body of hooligans who have exploited existing communal situations". Burrows to Wavell, Mansergh, N., (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, p. 98. See also Government of India, *Home Political*, File No. 5/55/46.

"Some held, as so often they do hold that the rioters were men", wrote the adjutant of the 1/3rd Gurkha regiment, "who had come in from outside. That is not so they were local inhabitants who worked up to a pitch of frenzy by such agitators as Ghulam Sarwar...." See Tuker, F., *op. cit.*, p. 618.

45. See Lakshmi Babu's statement, 'Versions of Eyewitness about Noakhali', *op. cit.*, pp. 64-68.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Police officials as well as the local Government Officials acted in a highly communal manner. The house of Lakshmi Majumdar, Zamindar of Panchgaon, was looted in the presence of the Superintendent of Police. See R. Gupta to P. D. Martyn, *ibid..*, p. 55.

The Secretary, Noakhali District Congress Committee, gave an account of the situation prevailing there prior to the rioting:
In some cases the officers have been poisoned with communalism. The Hindu officers are apathetic and studious, cautious not to incur the displeasure of the other community and for the matter of that the Muslims.... Govern-

ment and almost all Muhammendan officers are inclined towards the Muslim League and do not hesitate to condone the aggressive acts of the Muslim hooligans by helping suppression of evidence against them submitting false reports.   'Noakhali Situation', *op. cit.*, pp. 97-99.

Lt. Gen Tuker wrote:

... Lists of these men took an inordinate time for the local police to prepare.... Informers were very loath to come forward with evidence. Until such time as the goondas were rounded up it was certain that if the soldiers left the area trouble would at once break out again.

Tuker, F., *op. cit.*, p. 178.

48. Lakshmi Majumdar's statement, 'Versions of Eyewitness about Noakhali', *op. cit.*, pp. 64-68.

49. R. Gupta stated, "These people residing so close to the thana are in such a state of terror still that they are reluctant to talk about what they have suffered as a result of looting.... The Quarters of the Hindu Constables (yards from the thana) were gutted." R. Gupta to P. D. Martyn, 'Versions of Eyewitness about Noakhali', *op. cit.*, p. 54. These instances show not only communalisation but also the confidence of communal elements by the time they actually resorted to violence.

50. Therefore, the total communalisation of Noakhali Muslims shows that at any particular juncture even a factor like communalism could become an overdetermined one. When the peasants of Noakhali attacked the Hindus, it was not as peasants that they attacked the latter but as Muslims. Communalism is a significant explanatory category in this context.

51. Hunter, W. W., *Statistical Account of Bengal,* Vol. VI, p. 24.

52. *Ibid.* Also see, Webster, *East Bengal and Assam District Gazeteers, Noakhali,* Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1911, p. 39. "Vast majority of the Shekh (Muslim cultivators) and lower sections of the community are descended from the aboriginal races of the district." *Ibid.*

53. Kaviraj, Narahari, *Wahabi and Farazi Rebels of Bengal,* People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982, p. 62. See, *District Census Report, Noakhali,* 1961, Government of Pakistan Press, Karachi, 1962, (hereafter, District Census Report, Noakhali), pp. I-25.

54. Rasul, Khaled Masuke, *Noakhalir Loksahitye Lok Jiboner Parichay* (Reflection of Folk life in the Folk   literature of Noakhali), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1992, p. 27.

55. *Ibid.,* pp. 27-28.

56. *District Census Report, Noakhali,* 1961, pp. I-2I. Keramat Ali, it appears from all sources, was representing the Wahabi opinion in the region. See also Kaviraj, Narahari, *op. cit.,* pp. 101-102.

57. Rasul, Khaled Masuke, *op. cit.,* p. 26.

58. *Ibid.*; also see, Kaviraj, Narahari, *op. cit.,* pp. 63-66, 100.

59. Kaviraj, Narahari, *op. cit.,* p. 99.

60. Ahmed, Rafiuddin, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity,* OUP, Delhi, 1981, pp. 37-38.

61. *Ibid.,* pp. 37-38.

62. *Ibid.,* pp. 58-59.

63. Apart from the normal religious symbols, visitors often came across some novel experiences in Noakhali. An Assistant Settlement Officer, himself a

Muslim, experienced a new facet of Noakhali life. "Not once but several times", writes W. H. Thomspon, "he had instances in which two venerable Muhammedans in their own village before all their acquaintances had sworn the exact opposite on the Koran". W. H. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

64. *District Census Report, Noakhali*, 1961, p. I-2I.

65. Rasul, Khaled Masuke, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-28.

66. Hashmi, Taz ul-Islam, *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia: The Communalisation of Class Politics in East Bengal 1920-1947*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992, pp. 192-3; 252-53.

67. A comparative study of the crime rate of different districts of pre-partition Bengal will also be a valuable aid to analyse the agrarian structure, levels of violence, etc. Such a study for an earlier period brings out the fact that Noakhali, indeed, had a lower rate of crime and even political violence, in comparison with most of the other districts in the Province. See Khan, Bazlur Rahman, *Politics in Bengal, 1927-36*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1987, Appendices.

68. For a treatment of Wahabi and Farazi movements in Bengal, see, Kaviraj, Narahari, *op.cit.*

69. See, Gellner, Ernest, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1992, for an interesting discussion along this line.

70. Mallick, Azizur Rahman, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal(1757-1856)*, Rajshahi University, Dacca, 1961.

71. Khan, Muinuddin Ahmad, *History of the Faraidi Movement in Bengal (1818-1906)*, University of Karachi, Karachi, 1965.

72. *A History of the Freedom Movement (1707-1947)*, 4 Vols., Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi, 1960.

73. The Noakhali riot, according to this line of enquiry, would represent the conjuncture of the Muslim attack on Hindus because the latter had prevented the Unity of Islam in the shape of Pakistan. The fallacy of this treatment becomes apparent in the context of the Noakhali riot of 1946, because, in the month of October 1946, it was not the 'religious agenda' of Ghulam Sarwar which was the determining factor but the overdetermination of communalism.

Ghulam Sarwar, who had been fighting the League, at this point, accepted the agenda of the Muslim League, i.e., Communalism. What gave the riot its character was definitely the fact that it was the surrender of the religious leaders and their fundamentalist and revivalist positions to the communal agenda of the League. Thus, the Noakhali riot is a pointer to the situation when religious fundamentalism surrenders before communalism or gets mixed with it and provides justificaton for the latter's violence. Simultaneously, the riot cannot be studied through the framework of 'religious History' or 'History of Islam', as it would do injustice to the historical context and at the same time would uncritically accept the idea of the *inevitability of cultural conflict* expressed most unhistorically by the conservatives like Samuel Huntington. In 'The Clash of Civilisation?' he writes, "The fault line between civilisations will be the battle line of the future.... The most important conflict of the future will occur along the cultural fault line separating these civilisations from one another." Huntington, Samuel P., "The Clash of Civilisation?" *Foreign Affairs*, 72: 3, 1993, pp. 22-49.

74. Rahman, Hossainur, *Hindu Muslim Relations in Bengal, 1905-1947. Study in Cultural Confrontation*, Nachiketa Publication, Bombay, 1974, p. 97. It is, therefore,

not very difficult to understand why it is ultimately the 'civilisational difference' which is forwarded as the determining factor for the establishment of Pakistan. Khalid B. Sayeed, for example, says, "perhaps a dominant or decisive cause of Pakistan is that there has never been taken place a confluence of the two civilisation in India—the Hindus and the Muslims. They may have meandered towards each other, but on the whole the two have flowed their separate ways". Sayeed, Khalid B., *Pakistan, The Formative Phase*, OUP, London, 1968, p. 9.

75. Noakhali riot demonstrated the completeness of communalisation, and this was reflected in the extreme forms of violence. Mass conversion, forcible marriages and the methods of killings show the brutality that went into the making of this riot. One can argue that all communal riots show, at a particular point of time, the total communalisation of that society. But the Noakhali riot, with its violent forms and intensity, demonstrated the complete psychological rupture which alone can cause such an intense reaction.

76. Gandhi's Noakhali experiment has been the theme of quite a few works which include Alexander, H., 'On March with Gandhi', *The Manchester Guardian*, 3 March 1947; Alexander, H., *Gandhi Through the Western Eyes*, New Society Pubs., Philadelphia, 1986; Bose, N. K., *My Days with Gandhi*, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1974; Gandhi, Manu Behan, *Lonely Pilgrim*, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1959; Ray, Sukumar, *Noakhalite Mahatma*, (Mahatma in Noakhali), Orient Book Co., Calcutta, 1970; Basu, Kanai (ed.), *Noakhalir Patabhumikaye Gandhiji*, (Gandhiji in the backdrop of Noakhali), S. K. Palit, Calcutta, 1946.

77. The Noakhali riot demonstrated the confusion and helplessness of all organised forces in the face of such an intense and violent manifestation of communal ideology. The Muslim League, on the one hand, tried to distance itself from the violence, but constantly supported and gave legitimacy to the perpetrators of communal violence in the area. Thus, Gandhi's intervention was the only unorganised human intervention—there was a constant interaction and dialogue between organised politics and individual efforts.

78. *Harijan*, 15 Sept. 1946, p. 312.

79. After the violence that followed the Rashid Ali Day demonstrations on 11-12 February 1946, Gandhi had asked the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) to send him a report on the incidents. The Secretary's letter dated 16 February 1946, said :

Revered Mahatmaji,

I beg to confirm the telegram to you on 15.2.1946 in reply to your query regarding Calcutta Disturbances. The Telegram was as follows: REACTION AGAINST POLICE FIRING AND PEACEFUL PROCESSIONIST EXCITED.... CITY UNDER MILITARY CONTROL (sic).

AICC Papers, File No. P-5 (Part I) 1945-46, p. 123.

80. Gandhi's answer to this question was that "he would certainly have gone to any of the places mentioned (not Bihar) by the friend if anything approaching what had happened at Noakhali had happened there and if he had felt that he could do nothing without being on the spot". Gandhi to 'Friend', 1 Nov. 1946, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (hereafter *CWMG*), Vol. LXXXVI, p. 65.

81. As we have seen in Chapter III, the violence in Noakhali was the product and manifestation of a complete communalisation of the society. The constitutive

elements of the riot, viz., conversion, forcible marriage and the kind of legitimacy and sanction that these acts gained, made it qualitatively different from the Calcutta riot of August.

82. He wrote:

Dear Qaid-i-Azam,

... For the moment I have shunted the Rajaji formula and, with your assistance, am applying my mind very seriously to the famous Lahore resolution of the Muslim League.... As I write this letter and imagine the working of the resolution in practice, I see nothing but ruin for the whole of India.... Gandhi to M. A. Jinnah, 15 Sept. 1944, Mitra, N.N., (ed.), *Indian Annual Register*, 1944, Vol. II, pp. 140-141.

83. Bose, N.K., *op. cit.*, p. 43.

84. *Ibid.*

85. *Harijan*, 10 Nov. 1946, p. 396.

86. Gandhi with Mahasabha leaders, 5 Dec. 1946, *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 200. See also Bose, N. K., *op. cit.*, p. 85.

87. Bose, *ibid.*, p. 40.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 62. His numerous letters written during this time indicate this uncertainty. See *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, pp. 47-63.

89. Bose, N. K., *op. cit.*, p. 85. See also *CWMG* , Vol. LXXXVI, p. 200.

90. The communal situation in Bihar had become quite tense after the "direct action" resolution of the Muslim League at the end of July 1946. There was violence in Muzaffarpur on 27 September. On October 25, meetings were held throughout the Province to observe Noakhali Day. This was the beginning of the Bihar riot. The Governor's report stated:

... On October 25th meetings were held all over the Province to commiserate with Hindu victims of Noakhali and it was meetings in Chapra (Saran District) and in Patna which started the present widespread riots in South Bihar.... H. Dow (Bihar) to Wavell, Telegram, L/P & J/8/575:f220, 9 Nov. 1946, Mansergh, N. (ed.), *Transfer of Power*, Vol. IX., p. 38.

91. The Bihar riots were presented as another stage of the anti-Muslim campaign led by the Congress Ministers which, according to the Muslim League, wanted to annihilate the Muslims and their culture and religion.

The Star of India, a prominent Muslim League daily of Calcutta, dedicated its issue of 11 November "to the dead of Bihar". "It is only now that the full staggering enormity of their terrible ordeal has begun to escape through the conspiracy of silence that sounded the orgy in a thick veil." *Star of India*, Cal., 14 Nov. 1946, p. 1.

As regards the number of people killed, it began with the initial statistics of 13,000. See *Star of India*, Cal., 6 Nov. 1946; Fazlul Huq quoted a figure of *one lakh* in *Azad*, cited in *Star of India*, Cal., 13 Nov. 1946. After being criticised for exaggeration Huq brought it down to 30,000. See *Ibid.*

The irresponsible behaviour of the Press, which became manifest during the Noakhali riot reached its climax during the Bihar riots which forced the Viceroy to ask the Ministers of the Interim Government to control the Press. See Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 13 November 1946, Mansergh, N., (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, pp. 56-57.

92. Even a person of Fazlul Huq's stature urged his audience to make it impossible for Gandhi to remain in Bengal. *Modern Review*, March-Oct. 1947, p.

174, as quoted in Das, Suranjan, *Communal Riot in Bengal, 1906-1947*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, p. 202.

93. The full Statement read:

Mr. Gandhi does not intend to go to Bihar.... will it be wrong if one feels that Mr. Gandhi is in Noakhali only to focus attention of the world on the happenings there and to magnify the same for keeping the Bihar happenings in the background?

Does Mr. Gandhi want to complete his organisation through the number of volunteers he has got from outside?... Mr. Gandhi may conveniently ask all the outside volunteers both male and female to quit while advising the refugees to return to their homes.... Mr. Gandhi is holding prayer meetings everyday in the evening and after the prayer he sometimes delivers lectures.... the Hindus will realise that the mischievous propaganda of their so called friends has been the cause of (bringing upon them) more misery and discomfort, they will begin to think rightly. Free from outside propaganda, they will begin to repose confidence in their Muslim neighbours with whom they have been living peacefully for centuries. *Azad*, Cal., 14 Dec. 1946, p. 1.

94. Gandhi to Feni M. L., 25 Dec. 1946, *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 265, f.n. 4.

95. *Ibid.,* pp. 265-266. See also Bose, N. K., *op. cit.,* p. 106.

96. Gandhi's reply to the statement of Hamiduddin Choudhury bears out this understanding. He wrote:

It will not serve the cause of peace if I went to Bihar and found the Bihar Muslims League's report to be largely imaginary and the Bihar Govt.'s conduct substantially honourable, humane and just. I am not anxious to give them a certificate of good conduct as I am to give you, much though you may not want it. My spare diet and contemplated fast, you know well, were against the Bihar misdoings. I could not take such a step in the matter of Noakhali misdoings. It pains me to think that you a seasoned lawyer should not see the obvious. Bose, N.K., *op. cit.*, p. 109.

97. Gandhi at Srirampur, 27 Dec. 1946, *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 280.

98. Bose, N. K., *op. cit*, p. 132.

99. *Ibid.*

100. *Ibid.*

101. Kakar, Sudhir, *Intimate Relations Exploring Indian Sexuality*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1990, p. 102.

102. *Ibid.,* p. 96. Kakar further argues that "it is from the repudiation, the ashes of sexual desire, that the weapon of nonviolence which he used so effectively in his political struggle against the racial oppression of the South African white rulers and later against the British empire, was phoenix-like born". *Ibid.*

103. Parikh, Bhikhu, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse,* Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1989, p. 195.

104. Erikson, one of the pioneers of psychohistory, tried to study Gandhi of 1918 "in his middle ages, just before he became Mahatma", through primarily the latter's autobiography, and interviews with the participants of the textile mill strike in Ahmedabad. See Erikson, Erik H. *Gandhi's Truth, On the Origins of Militant Non-Violence,* W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1969. The Noakhali experience provided an excellent opportunity to study Gandhi in his 'old age',

in the sense of Erikson's 'life cycle theory', according to which there is a distinctive characteristic or 'goal' in each stage of life, for exmple, youth is marked by an identitity crisis. However, given the problems that psycho-analytical studies suffer from, any such study will be more of a biographical exercise than a serious discussion on why, say, the population of Noakhali reacted the way they did in the winter of 1946. This shows that, despite attacks by the literary theorists and the external critics of history, historical discourse is most appropriate to understand social realities, and to a great extent social psychology, too.

105. Dear Qaid-i-Azam,

... I know that you have acquired a unique hold on the Muslim masses. I want you to use your influence for their total welfare.... Gandhi to Jinnah, 15 Sept. 1944, Mitra, N;N., *Indian Annual Register*, 1944, Vol. II, p. 141.

106. Mitra, N.N. (ed.), IAR, 1944, Vol. II, for the Gandhi-Jinnah correspondence issued to the press after their meeting.

107. Bose, N. K. , *op. cit.*, p. 101.

108. *Hindustan Standard*, Calcutta, 1 Nov. 1946, p. 1.

109. He visited 48 villages during his stay in Noakhali. He covered those Noakhali-Tippera villages most affected by the riot, including Karpara and Devipur.

110. *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 62.

111. Letter to Suhrawardy, 8 Jan. 1947, *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 330. He wanted the Muslim population to give vent to their anger openly which would clear avenues for dialogue rather than the present scenario of sullennness. He wanted both the communities to be brave but as he wrote, "Unfortunately both lack this very necessary human quality". *Ibid.*

112. Tuker, F., *op. cit.*, pp. 609-612. Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, The Last Phase*, Book One, I, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1959, p. 15. The colonial attitude can be contrasted here:

He (Burrows) was relieved that G. (Gandhi) had left Bengal, it had taken 20 of his best police to protect him; and he was sarcastic over an american correspondent's article headed 'Gandhi walks alone'!

Moon, Penderal, *Wavell The Viceroy's Journal*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1973, p. 428.

113. *Ibid.*

114. Gandhi's discussion with Mahasabha leaders, 5 December 1946, *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 199.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

116. *Ibid.*

117. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

118. *Ibid.*

119. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

120. *Ibid.*

121. *Ibid.*

122. Prayer Meeting, Dattapara, 12 Nov. 1946, *ibid.*,Vol. LXXXVI, p. 113.

123. Srirampur, 22 Nov. 1946, *ibid.*, p. 145.

124. Dattapara, 12 Nov. 1946, *ibid.*, p. 115.

125. Gandhi's interview at Nabagram, 1 Feb. 1947, *ibid.*, p. 416.

126. *Ibid.*

127. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
128. Gandhi, Manu Behan, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
129. *Ibid.*
130. Bose, N. K., *op. cit.*, p. 126.
131. Palla, 27 Jan. 1947, *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 397.
132. *Ibid., pp.* 397-98.
133. Bhatialpur, 14 Jan. 1947, *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 353.
134. *Ibid.*
135. *Ibid.*, p. 359.
136. Bose, N.K., *op. cit.*, p. 146.
137. *Ibid.*
138. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
139. Pyarelal, *op. cit.*, p. 416.
140. Bose, N.K., *op. cit.*, p. 84. He countered similar arguments from the
Muslim quarter during his visit to the Bihar riot affected areas.
141. Srirampur, 22 Nov. 1946, *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 1451-42
142. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
143. Writing on the role of social and moral responsibility, and the
relationship between the two, Zygmunt Bauman in his study on the Holocaust
makes this observation:

Responsibility, this building block of all moral behaviour arises out of the
proximity of the other. Proximity means responsibility and responsibility is
proximity....The alternative to proximity is social distance. The moral attribute
of social distance is lack of moral relationship, or heterophobia. Responsibility
is silenced once proximity is eroded; it may eventually be replaced with
resentment once the fellow human subject is transformed into another. The
process of social transformation is one of social separation. It was such a
separation which made it possible for thousands to kill, and millions to watch
the murder without protesting... Bauman, Zygmunt, *Modernity and the Holocaust*,
Polity Press, London, 1989, p. 184.

144. Bose, N. K., *op. cit.*, p. 58.
145. Pyarelal, *op. cit.*, p. 399.
146. Prayer meeting at Masimpur, 7 Jan. 1947, *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 323.
147. *Ibid.*, pp. 323-324.
148. Bose, N. K., *op. cit.*, p. 130.
149. *Ibid.*
150. *Ibid.*
151. *Ibid.*
152. Bose, N. K., *op. cit.*, p. 64.
153. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.
154. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
155. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
156.   Gandhi's talk at Fatehpur, 8 Jan. 1947, *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 328.