

Gandhi's Reaction to the Partition of India: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract:

The dawn of Indian independence was the evening of Gandhi's life; his triumph against British imperialism was overshadowed by the tragedy of partition. The "hymn of hate" (vol. 89, 330) prevailed and resulted in communal frenzy, which engulfed India's non-violent political struggle. Gandhi pitted himself against the rising tide of communalism, which resulted in the killing of one million and dislocation of about 12 million people. Gandhi and his ideas were "buried alive," but he resisted as a true soldier of non-violence and opted death for the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity and India of his dreams. Gandhi's reaction to partition of India was one of most interesting episode in the history of India with its long term implications. This article is aimed at filling this gap in the history of freedom struggle. Indian independence and Hindu Muslim unity were the two most cherished ideals of Gandhi's life; he achieved one at the cost of other. He was not ideologically convinced but tactically reconciled and accepted partition as a people's aspiration and struggled unsuccessfully to control rising flood of communalism. He emerged as a voice of love, tolerance, coexistence and accommodation in the environment of hate, violence and extremism. These were the finest hours of his life when he rose above political considerations but still he protected Indian national interest in

many spheres. He was conscious to preserve his status in Indian history as Mahatma. His healing presence pacified the communal hatred in Bengal but his absence from volatile Punjab raised many questions too. These questions are also highlighted and deliberated upon in this paper.

Key words: Gandhi and partition, Gandhi's politics, Partition of India, Independence of India, Gandhi and idea of Pakistan, Two-nation theory, Hindu-Muslim unity, Communal violence, Communal harmony

Introduction:

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) was one of the most outstanding political figures of the twentieth century. As a political leader, he adopted a novel technique of passive resistance, non-violence and launched

Satyagraha (force of truth). He did shake the very foundations of skillfully crafted British colonial structure and emerged as an architect of Indian independence. He struggled hard to achieve his two objectives: independence from British imperialism and attainment of Hindu-Muslim unity. He achieved the independence for India but at the cost of the partition of it. Communal strife during 1946-47 had already threatened Gandhi about the possibility of partition of India. However, he struggled hard to pacify this communal hatred at the level of masses and pleaded with Congress leaders for League's accommodation. But nobody was ready to listen to him. He believed in the unity of Hindus and Muslims of India and rejected the two-nation theory. He claimed that 'The Hindus and Muslims of India are not two nations. Those whom God has made one, man will never be able to divide.'¹ At another occasion he emphasized that 'the Allah of Islam is the same as the God of Christians and the *Ishwara* of Hindus.'²

He also challenged the League's two nation theory on the grounds that 'The two nation theory is untruth. The vast majority of Muslims of India are converts to Islam or descendants of converts. They did not become a separate nation as soon as they become converts.' He challenged the credentials of the claims of a body of converts into a separate nationality. Gandhi was advocate of geographical unity of India and opposed the division of his motherland into India and Pakistan. His strong opposition is reflected from his statement that 'to divide it into two is worse than anarchy. It is vivisection which cannot be tolerated.... Vivisect me before you vivisect India?'³ The Muslim League demand for Pakistan gradually got popular support from Muslim masses. He still believed and hoped that the League does not want to vivisect India, 'I do not believe that Muslims, when it comes to a matter of actual decision, will ever want vivisection. Their good sense will prevent them. Their self-interest will deter them. Their religion will forbid the obvious suicide which the partition would mean.'⁴ His opposition was emotional and rhetorical in nature under religious idioms. He failed to eliminate the fear of domination of majority community from the hearts of Muslim leaders and masses. Gandhi failed to offer an alternative constitutional formula with effective safeguards and constitutional guarantees for minority communities; his appeal was moral, not practical, in nature. Resultantly the Muslims of India, as other minority communities, could not be satisfied about their future either by the British Government or Indian National Congress.

Gandhi and the Unfolding of Indian Freedom:

During Gandhi-Jinnah talks in September, 1944, Gandhi's real concern was 'to prove from Jinnah's own mouth that the whole of the Pakistan proposition is absurd.' He maintained that India was one nation and saw in the Pakistan Resolution 'nothing but ruin for the whole of India.' He was reluctantly ready to concede the idea of Pakistan through a bilateral agreement between Congress and League. The demarcation of Muslim majority areas by a mutually approved commission and to ascertain wishes of people through a referendum on universal

adulthood franchise basis was an option for Gandhi. He proposed,

If the vote is in favor of separation, these areas shall form a separate state as soon as possible after India is free from foreign domination There shall be a treaty of separation which should also provide for the efficient and satisfactory administration of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Internal Communications, Customs, Commerce and the like, which must necessarily continue to be the matters of common interest between the contracting parties.⁵

The crux of his statement was that power over the whole of India should first be transferred to the Congress, which thereafter would allow Muslim majority areas to vote for separation, not as an independent sovereign state, but as part of an Indian federation. In the process, the Punjab and Bengal provinces with Muslim majorities would be partitioned. Gandhi claimed that his offer gave 'the substance of the Lahore resolution.'⁶ Jinnah did not agree to Gandhi's proposal and the talks broke down.

After the failure of talks, he again insisted on joint struggle for Independence of India from British imperialism and stressed on resolution of all outstanding claims through mutual agreement of Indians. He pointed out that 'But today there is neither Pakistan nor Hindustan. It is *Englistan*.' So he insisted to Indians, 'Let us first convert it into the original Hindustan and then adjust all rival claims.' The central government would be created after the creation of nation state through its representatives. The people's representatives would decide about unity or partition of India.⁷ He also stressed that the Congress and League had common goal and insisted upon joint struggle to free India which is home of Hindus and Muslims both, from foreign bondage first and then decision of its partition through mutual agreement of Indians would be taken.⁸ Personally, he had always rejected, whether the communal division of India is inevitable and whether such division will

solve the communal problem, but in the final phase he failed to find supporters in the higher ranks of even Congress.⁹ The pragmatic leaders of Congress with collaboration of the British accepted the partition as a popular opinion and a pragmatic solution to the political question of India.¹⁰

After the elections of 1945-46, situation had drastically changed in the favor of Muslim League as true Muslim representative political party due to its electoral victory. Gandhi and Congress were reluctant to adapt in changing circumstances though the realization of Pakistan scheme was now a matter of time only. They remained in constant state of denial and maintained hard line against Jinnah but circumstances forced them to accept compromise consequently. Through taking hard-line and rejection of idea of Pakistan, they strengthened their bargaining position and conceded as least as possible; they applied pressure on British as well. It is worth mentioning that in the last phase of transfer of power Gandhi took principled position while Congress adopted pragmatic approach. On the other hand, in post-partition phase Gandhi adopted conciliatory approach towards Pakistan while Congress adopted hard line against new state of Pakistan. Gandhi and Congress insisted upon bilateral negotiations to resolve the issue, while Jinnah and Muslim League strived for trilateral arrangements in which British could mediate among rival groups.¹¹ When Muslim masses had given their democratic verdict in the favor of League's proposed separate state of Pakistan in 1945-46 elections, Gandhi also toned down his opposition and declared that,

As a man of non-violence, I cannot forcibly resist the proposed partition if the Muslims of India really insist upon it. But I can never be a willing party to the vivisection. I would employ every non-violent means to prevent it....Hindus and Muslims to live together as one nation. Partition means a patent untruth. My whole soul rebels against the idea the Hinduism and Islam represent two antagonistic cultures and doctrines.... I believe with my whole soul that

the God of the Koran is also the God of Gita and that we are all, no matter by what name designated, children of the same God....I cannot thrust it down the throats of the Muslims who think that they are a different nation.¹²

The democratic Gandhi was upholding his principles against the democratic aspirations of Muslims of India. But he was not prepared to abandon his most beloved notion of Indian unity and still not ready to believe that the Muslims really wanted to dismember India. 'I would have no hesitation in conceding the demand of Pakistan if I could be convinced of its righteousness or that it is good for Islam. But I am firmly convinced that the Pakistan demand as put forth by the Muslim League is un-Islamic and I have not hesitated to call it sinful.'¹³ He treated a political problem with religious rhetoric and failed to produce a viable alternative which could satisfy or effectively safeguard Muslims' interests. On another occasion he said, 'If I felt convinced of the rightness of the demand, I should certainly work for it side by side with the League. But I do not. I would like to be convinced.'¹⁴ It seems as if he had more trust on his individual wisdom against the collective wisdom of Muslim electorate which was reflected from their electoral choices in 1945-46 elections.

Gandhi and the Decision Making in Congress of Mid-1940s: Gandhi, for the last time, became President of Congress in 1924, and after 1934 he held no office in Congress, but his magnetic personality won great veneration and adherence by his fellow Congressmen. However, by 1946 Gandhi was hardly a decisive force in the Congress and he perhaps realized and sensed his diminishing authority when he declared that 'I do not like the shape that things are taking and, I cannot speak out.' He further expressed his helplessness unambiguously in his prayer meeting by saying that 'whatever the Congress decides will be done; nothing will be according to what I say. My writ runs no more.... No one listen to me any more.... I am a cry in wilderness.'¹⁵ Gandhi became insignificant in the decision making process involving the transfer of power. The nucleus of the Congress Working Committee seemed to have

shifted to 'a coterie' dominated by Nehru and Patel. The Congress, according to Gandhi, lost its momentum because 'a rot has set in the Congress' that virtually became an organization of white-clad *goondas* who appear respectable, but *goondas* at heart.' He was anguished but seemed helpless and opted for tactical retreat.¹⁶

He had removed himself from the scene of negotiations for the transfer of power; he was as yet an immense political force due to his magnetic mass appeal. He provided necessary political space to pragmatic leaders of Congress to negotiate with British and League. But he deliberately avoided taking the responsibility of inevitable partition of his beloved India. Nehru and Patel told Gandhi that his reading of the situation was wrong and peace was sure to return if partition was agreed upon. But they failed to convince each other and Gandhi avoided himself from the embarrassment of deviating from his principled stand with the remarks that 'Let not the coming generations curse Gandhi, for being a party to India's vivisection.'¹⁷ But he tactically provided approval for partition of India by not opposing it publically or launching any mass mobilization campaign against it.

He considered that British policy of 'divide and rule' had nourished the already existing animosity between Hindu and Muslim. He praised Mountbatten for his stance on Indian unity but blamed his predecessors for facilitating divisions in Indian society. He also held Congress and League responsible for the partition of India, 'I cannot blame the Viceroy for what has happened. It is the act of the Congress and the League. The Viceroy has openly said that he wants a United India.'¹⁸ The Mahatma's advice to Viceroy was 'to have the courage to see the truth and act by it,' even though the answer might mean loss of life on an unprecedented scale on the departure of the British.¹⁹ But on the other hand he assigned the responsibility of law and order to British during the phase of transfer of power. He believed that the British power was functioning in India, it should therefore be held principally responsible for the preservation of peace in the country and orderly transfer of power and settling of disputes.

Gandhi and the Partition of India:

Before the announcement of 3rd June Plan, Gandhi insisted British authorities and Mountbatten to transfer power on the basis of Cabinet Mission Plan and leave the question of Pakistan on government of free India and its sovereign Constituent Assembly.²⁰ When all human efforts yielded no result and all three major parties British, Congress and League agreed to the partition of India and the British parliament adopted the partition scheme along with Gandhi's long standing demand of Indian independence, he, despite his success, was a dejected and depressed person and lost his hope from the people and looking for divine intervention like "earthquake, foreign invasion" to avoid this partition during his prayer meeting on 20th July 1947.²¹

According to him the partition proposal had altered the face of the Hindu-Muslim problem. He called it an untruth and there could be no compromise with Partition plan. At the same time he said that, "if the eight crores of Muslims desired it, no power on earth could prevent..."²² Gandhi said 'It should be enough to state the proposition that nothing can prevent the Muslim League from having it if the Muslims really want it. They will take it by the vote or the sword, unless they will submit to arbitration.'²³ Gandhi recognized the League mandate and advised Congress to face this fact and accommodate herself accordingly. Even he advised nationalist Muslims to join the League and 'oppose it from within.'²⁴ He also paid tribute to Jinnah that "the Quaid-i-Azam was an able President, whom neither riches nor titles could buy."²⁵

In his first meeting with Mountbatten, Gandhi surprised him with his advice to dismiss the interim Government of Nehru and invite Jinnah to form a central government of his own choice. He pledged the support of Congress and in case of Jinnah's refusal the same offer was to be extended to Congress. The surprised Viceroy and his adviser realized the implications of this offer and avoided to be trapped by Mahatma's advice. Later when Viceroy discussed this proposal with Nehru, he also rejected it. Gandhi's idea failed to receive assured support of

Congress and only Abul Kalam Azad extended him support while Nehru and Patel opposed this idea. Gandhi still insisted upon his idea and offered Jinnah to become the Prime Minister but he was not ready to accept this offer and become hostage of majority party or just become a figurehead. In parliamentary form of government no party or individual can rule without the support of majority party in parliament, so this offer was a political trap without constitutional or legal standing. Ultimately he withdrew his offer and informed the Viceroy on 11th April that he failed to persuade responsible members of the Congress.²⁶

In May 1947 Gandhi, in his meeting, extended this invitation again to Jinnah who rejected this absurd idea of becoming Prime Minister without majority in parliament. But Gandhi was still convinced that his offer was last hope against all hopes to control the rising tide of communal violence and to preserve Indian unity.²⁷ Gandhi narrated the results of his meeting with his 'Brother Jinnah' in the following statement that "the conversations were carried on in a friendly spirit even though there could never be agreement between us [Jinnah and me] on the question of the division of India. I cannot bear the thought of it and so long as I am convinced that it is wrong, I cannot possibly put my signature to the scheme. I hold that it is not only bad for the Hindus, but equally so for the Muslims."²⁸ He offered Jinnah for direct talks to resolve all other issues without the mediation of Viceroy.²⁹ Gandhi and Jinnah also issued joint statement to pacify communal hatred and they agreed that "no political objective may be attained by violence."³⁰

In late May 1947, he was asked by his followers in Delhi that "how Congress was ready to accept partition?" in response to which he replied it would be the worst possible thing and 'who listens to me today?' Further, he passionately argued 'I am being told to retire to the Himalayas. Everybody is eager to garland my photos and statues. Nobody really wants to follow my advice. Partition would destroy India. The prospect of power has demoralized us.'³¹ Gandhi's colleagues in Congress were ready to accept partition and they were not agreed with Gandhi's reading of situation. He complained "Today I find

myself all alone. Even the Sardar and Jawaharlal think that my reading of the situation is wrong and peace is sure to return if partition is agreed upon.”³² He was dejected by the political behavior of Congress leadership because they were not paying heed to his advice in this critical juncture of Indian history.

Gandhi accepted partition as an “accomplished fact” after the reluctant adoption by Congress and resorted not to agitate against Congress’ acceptance of partition.³³ He opposed the partition of the Punjab and Bengal and considered it a needless irritant for the League. He said ‘If Pakistan is wrong, partition of Bengal and Punjab will not make it right. Two wrongs will not make one right.’³⁴ But there was no clear statement whether he was in favor of united Bengal, or either joining of these two provinces to Pakistan or India. During Gandhi-Jinnah talks, he had already proposed the partition of Punjab and Bengal. Despite Kripalani’s invitation, Gandhi avoided to participate in Congress Working Committee meeting in early March 1947. In this meeting Congress approved the demand of partition of provinces. Later he criticized the decision but without consistent or strong criticism; he, actually, avoided to share the burden of decision of partition of provinces.³⁵

After consultation with Indian leaders, Mountbatten announced the plan on June 3rd, 1947. Gandhi’s struggle had entered into a new arena to prevent communalization of India; he was now more interested to convince Jinnah or his Congress disciples to deter them from lust for power. Gandhi’s immediate reaction on 3rd June plan was emotional, and he was unhappy because the lifelong dream of united India was shattered. Mountbatten had learnt that Gandhi in the evening prayer meeting of June 4 would comment on Mountbatten plan and that he might protest against it. On Krishna Menon’s advice, Mountbatten reacted promptly and invited Gandhi for meeting before his evening prayer.³⁶ Viceroy informed him that British Government had granted full independence to India and his lifelong mission succeeded but the independence was at the cost of partition of India; since independence and Hindu-Muslim unity were two most cherished objectives of Gandhi’s life, painfully he was to achieve one at the cost of other.

Viceroy pacified Gandhi with his magic tricks and told him that actually he was going to implement Gandhi's plan with all his recommendations and suggestions as a solution acceptable to all. British would withdraw before the end of the year and dominion status would be granted to India. He convinced Gandhi that 3rd June plan was according to his advice and ideals achieved through non-violence and without coercion; it was also according to wishes of people of India and people's representatives at provinces were empowered to decide about their future meaning thereby that the agreement was achieved through mutual consensus. Mountbatten flattered Gandhi that 'he had taken a far greater part in shaping the future of India.'³⁷

As a result of this meeting Gandhi mildly criticized that plan, but accepted it and asked the Muslim League for peace and friendship since it had achieved its aim too.³⁸ Gandhi declared "we would not accept Pakistan under the threat of violence" and offered to concede idea of Pakistan through peaceful argument. He highlighted that Working Committee had to adopt this idea of vivisection under prevailing situation.³⁹ Gandhi and Congress accepted partition as a people's aspiration and people's choice, "the demand has been granted because you asked for it. The Congress never asked for it but Congress can feel the pulse of the people."⁴⁰ Gandhi failed to reverse the tidal wave of events and surrendered himself before the popular will but that submission was a tactical retreat rather an ideological shift. He still insisted upon his utopian ideas but leadership was busy in pragmatic political decisions and dealings.

The disgusted and distressed Gandhi was advised by some friends to launch another Satyagraha against "Nehru's raj," but he was not ready to launch any mass struggle against Congress which was once led and resurrected by him and stated, "I would not carry on any agitation against that institution."⁴¹ The British and Congress leadership was well aware of potential of charismatic Gandhi and cataclysmic implications of his opposition to proposed plan. So, they appeased Gandhi without yielding to his ideas for smooth transition. Later he agreed to attend the All Indian Congress Committee meeting and

reiterated his acceptance but warned that if the rest of India was considered as Hindu-India than it will be approval of Jinnah's 'two nation' theory.⁴² Muslims should be welcomed to stay in India.⁴³ The all India Congress Committee voted with the absolute majority of 157 in favor of partition and only 15 opposed it; Nehru and Patel were instrumental in this decision with the argument that they had opted for partition instead of anarchy.⁴⁴

Gandhi was furious when British parliament referred to two nations and he admonished the Viceroy during his meeting; Gandhi raised objection on the use of word two nations by Mountbatten and insisted on the use of term two states or countries. Later he himself referred to India and Pakistan as separate nations and insisted "our hearts may not be divided." He insisted on leadership of both nations to ensure the protection of minorities.⁴⁵ He was shocked after the news of division of armed forces between Pakistan and India and feared that it will be used against each other instead of being available for common defense against foreign powers.⁴⁶ He was against the division of Indian Army and still looked for some joint mechanism to preserve the Indian unity.

The 3rd June plan proposed a two states solution; two states were created in Hindu and Muslim majority areas respectively which deeply perturbed the *Khudai Khidmatgars* of NWFP, the long standing allies of Congress. On 17 June a meeting was held between Mountbatten, Gandhi and Jinnah on the issue of referendum in NWFP. Gandhi insisted Jinnah to extend written invitation to Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan but Jinnah refused in the pretext that his repeated verbal invitations were not entertained. Finally it was agreed that a joint meeting will be held between Jinnah, Gandhi and Ghaffar Khan under the Chairmanship of Lord Ismay on next day at Viceroy House.⁴⁷ Gandhi pleaded the case of Ghaffar Khan and tried to protect the interest of his political ally and a true practitioner of nonviolence after him.⁴⁸

Gandhi insisted Lord Ismay and Mountbatten to convince Jinnah to adopt conciliatory approach towards *Khudai*

Khidmatgars and warned about negative consequences of Referendum in NWFP but all these efforts yielded no results.⁴⁹ Congress leadership was not ready to extend support to Bacha Khan for his proposed *Pushtoonistan* due to its negative implications on complex and diverse state of India. Gandhi initially extended support but his ideas failed to command the support of Nehru.⁵⁰ Later Gandhi extended support to the idea of boycott of referendum by Red Shirts. On 5 July 1947, he wrote a letter to Ghaffar Khan and advised “boycott would certainly result in a legal victory for Pakistan, but it would be a moral defeat if without the slightest fear of violence from your side the bulk of pathans refrained in a dignified manner from participating in the referendum.”⁵¹ He also assured Mountbatten on the same day that “there will be no disturbance on the part of Badshah Khan and his followers.”⁵² It reflected the close relationship between Gandhi and Ghaffar Khan and nature of his influence. However, the decision of NWFP was dictated by its geographical location which could not have been altered by Gandhi or Ghaffar Khan.

Gandhi and Accession of Princely State of Kashmir: Although Gandhi was against the partition of India but after 3rd June plan he struggled to protect the national interest of India by retaining maximum area to Indian union. That’s why he did not strongly oppose the partition of Punjab and Bengal and played a very influential role in the annexation of state of Kashmir. Gandhi, with the consultation of Nehru, decided to visit state of Kashmir and requested Mountbatten for the facilitation of his visit. Although Mountbatten refused Jinnah to visit of Kashmir but he allowed Gandhi to proceed as a private visitor.⁵³

The Prime Minister of Kashmir, Pandit Kak requested Gandhi and Nehru not to visit state of Kashmir. So this visit was postponed but later Nehru insisted again due to his emotional stress and commitment with Shaikh Abdullah. Later, on a meeting held on 29 July between Mountbatten, Gandhi, Nehru and Sardar Patel the visit of Gandhi to Kashmir was ultimately decided instead of Nehru although Mountbatten reported that Sardar Patel remarked blatantly that “it is choice between two

evils and I consider that Gandhiji's visit would be the lesser evil."⁵⁴ This visit had very serious implications for the decision of Maharaja of Kashmir for the succession of princely state, and ultimately Kashmir emerged as a major bone of contention between two newly established countries. Mountbatten's facilitation of this visit also reflected his partial attitude but he took this decision under pressure from the Congress leadership.

Gandhi reached Srinagar on August 1, 1947; he held meetings with *Maharaja* and *Maharani*. Despite of all differences and dissatisfaction Gandhi went to Kashmir and tried to convince Maharaja of Kashmir to accede to India and also advocated the release of Sheikh Abdullah from prison. Maharaja was not ready to concede these demands at that time. On his departure, Gandhi announced that sovereignty belongs to people, 'The people of Kashmir should be asked whether they want to join Pakistan or India. Let them do as they want. The ruler is nothing, the people are everything.'⁵⁵ So he extended support to right of self determination for people of Kashmir. Gandhi reported Patel that "the situation in Kashmir can be saved."⁵⁶ Later he rejected Nehru's policy of military intervention in Kashmir and criticized the heavy armament and militarization of Indian State against his ideal of non-violence.

Gandhi and Communal Violence:

On his return journey, Gandhi left Kashmir by train for Calcutta via Lahore and Patna. At the Lahore Station he was greeted by Congress workers who asked when he would come to stay there. He promised, 'The rest of my life is going to be spent in Pakistan may be in East Bengal or West Punjab, or perhaps, the North-West Frontier Province.' He could not reconcile himself 'to the idea of partition.... He wanted to live both in Hindustan and Pakistan....[B]oth were his homelands.'⁵⁷ Even before that, on May 31, 1947, he talked to Ghaffar Khan pacified him and showed his intention to settle in Pakistan, or in Frontier province.⁵⁸

Gandhi, instead of staying at Delhi for independence celebrations, opted to proceed to Calcutta and Noakhali to pacify the communal hatred in the volatile Bengal and Bihar.

He reached Calcutta and Suhrawardy visited Gandhi on August 11, 1947, along with Muslim League leaders and requested him for prolonged stay; Gandhi offered him joint residence at Hydari Mansion and joint efforts to control horrors of communal strife and to restore peace.⁵⁹ Gandhi refused to celebrate 15th August and remarked “I can’t afford to take part in this rejoicing, which is a sorry affair.”⁶⁰ Muslims of Calcutta decided to observe 15th August as a day of mourning. Gandhi instead advised them to participate in prayer meetings, observe fasting, and he also advised Hindus of Pakistan to salute the Pakistani flag. Gandhi also advised, after the establishment of two states with sizeable Hindu and Muslim minorities, that both states should ensure “freedom and equality of all in every respect, irrespective of caste, color or creed” and that “it meant an end of two nation theory.”⁶¹ Gandhi admitted that, “this India was not the India of his dreams”, in which minorities were not to receive equal treatments, Muslims were not feeling secured, and he wanted a secular state with protection of minorities.⁶²

He observed fast and offered prayer on 15 August 1947 and instead of celebrations, thousands of Hindus and Muslim of Calcutta joined him in his prayer for communal harmony. These were the finest hours of Gandhi’s life. Later on till the end of his life he struggled hard to achieve communal peace and coexistence and extensively labored to achieve this goal in Bengal and Bihar. On 15th August a joint meeting of Hindus and Muslims were held “in perfect friendliness.” Both shouted the slogans of ‘*Jai Hind*’ and ‘*Pakistan Zindabad*’ with same voice, “A miracle happened with his presence, Hindus were admitted to mosques and Muslims were admitted to the *mandirs*.”⁶³ It reminded him the days of *Khilafat* Movement. A perfect harmony was achieved in Calcutta but it was not the whole picture, the situations at Lahore and Amritsar were entirely opposite.

Gandhi’s healing presence transformed the communal Calcutta. On August 18, 1947, a prayer meeting was held at Muhammadan Sports Club, which was attended by 4 to 5 hundred thousand people and guarded by Congress volunteers

and Muslim League National Guards; Hindu and Muslims embraced each other and congratulated.⁶⁴ Gandhi addressed a prayer meeting at Calcutta on August 21, where two flags of India and Pakistan were hoisted, the slogans of “*Hindu-Muslim ki Jai*” were raised and Iqbal’s song “*sare Jahan se achcha, Hindustan hamara*” was sung. Gandhi appreciated the phrase “that religion never taught mutual hatred.”⁶⁵ Mountbatten also wrote a letter to Gandhi and appreciated his magical performance in following words “In the Punjab we have 55 thousand soldiers and large scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man and there was no rioting...to pay my tribute to the one-man Boundary Force, not forgetting his second in command Mr. Suhrawardy.”⁶⁶ Gandhi will always be remembered for his role that he played in Calcutta to save human beings from communal frenzy.

While his stay at Calcutta, Gandhi received disturbing news from Lahore and even Punjabis in Calcutta pleaded him to visit Punjab. Gandhi wrote a letter to Nehru on August 24, and asked for his advice. Mountbatten also urged Nehru to request Gandhi for visit of Punjab and repeat his Calcutta miracle. Nehru after the visit of Punjab replied to Gandhi and showed his reluctance “I feel you should go but not just yet.”⁶⁷ So, Gandhi acted upon Nehru’s advice and postponed his visit, despite of that fact that he was strongly pressed by requests and letters. He himself hesitated and wrote Patel on 26th August from Calcutta that “I can see that my place is in this part of the country I may include the Punjab also, though I doubt whether anyone would want my presence there.”⁶⁸ Gandhi again wrote a letter to Nehru and asked “will it be any use my going after life and property are destroyed to the saturation point?”⁶⁹ Nehru replied the letter same day and insisted Gandhi that “time has not come” and asked for his presence in Delhi.⁷⁰

Mountbatten again requested Gandhi to repeat this performance in Punjab as well, but Gandhi was not ready to move without the approval of Nehru and Patel and wrote again to Nehru on 30th August. Nehru replied his letter on August 31, with following request “I feel sure now that you should come to Punjab as early as possible.”⁷¹ The situation at Calcutta had

changed and violence erupted again with several deaths, an angry mob also attacked Gandhi's residence on 1st September. Gandhi went on fast to pacify Calcutta again and now visit of Punjab was postponed and responsibility lies with the people "if the people of Calcutta wish me to proceed to the Punjab and help the people there, they have to enable me to break the fast as early as may be."⁷² The violence at Calcutta facilitated the confused and reluctant Gandhi to avoid the highly volatile situation at Punjab. Instead of taking a risk of failure at Punjab, he preferred to consolidate his gains at Calcutta. After his fast, Gandhi held meetings with Hindus and Muslims and especially people of *Mahasabha* were requested to restrain from violence. Government of Bengal also assured him complete support and peace was restored and Gandhi had broken his fast on September 4, after the promise of leaders to maintain communal harmony.⁷³

Gandhi left for Delhi on September 7 and reached there at September 9 and was advised to stay at *Birla House* instead of *Harijan Colony*.⁷⁴ He reached Delhi on September 09, 1947 and witnessed the tragedies in the capital of India. He resolved that 'I must not leave Delhi for the Punjab until it had regained its former self.'⁷⁵ He stayed at Delhi for the rest of his life in his efforts to establish peace and to restore old Delhi. But Punjab faced the worst kind of communal violence in human history. Gandhi was a helpless witness because he could not stop Patel from patronizing the violence in Punjab and Nehru from opting the military solution of Kashmir. It was a very different Delhi, raged with communal hatred and flooded with Hindu, Sikh and Muslim refugees from different areas especially from Punjab. Not only the people of Delhi even leaders of Congress became the victim of communal frenzy, some notable Muslim nationalist like Zakir Hussain and the family members of Dr. Ansari and Johar were attacked and humiliated. They were staying at hotel due to fear of attack which caused pain to Gandhi.⁷⁶

Gandhi visited refugees' camps at Delhi and heard their tragic tales. He faced harsh attitude of Sikh and Hindu refugees from Punjab especially Hindus criticized him for the appeasement of

Muslims.⁷⁷ This harsh attitude of refugees from Punjab also reflected the difficulty of his task in Punjab. Gandhi opted to restore peace at Delhi and control the fire of revenge. He urged Muslims to show their loyalty towards Indian Union, and urged Muslims of Pakistan “not to go mad” against Hindus and Sikhs, which ultimately facilitated the protection of Muslims of India. He also urged both governments for mutual agreement meant for the protection of minorities.⁷⁸

Gandhi frequently visited refugees camps; Muslim refugees perceived him as a rescuer and persuaded their enraged brethren that “This old man has come to serve us, to wipe our tears.”⁷⁹ Gandhi also advised Hindus that four and half carore Muslims could not be eliminated from India. He advised them not to harass Muslims with the threat “they should be either ready to die or go to Pakistan.”⁸⁰ Gandhi was so dejected and depressed that he wished to die although he previously desired to live for 125 years.⁸¹ He was also portrayed as the friend of Muslims and enemy of the Hindus and the Sikhs.⁸² The communal polarization in India was between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs and they became one community against Muslims and were jointly referred to; even Gandhi referred always to them jointly and Muslims separately. He frequently referred that Muslims are comparatively a violent community against Hindus. He considered Muslims as responsible for this chain of violence; he said “The Muslims went brisk. They thought that since they were now free they could kill and slaughter. It all started from here.”⁸³ Gandhi faced dual dilemma: majority of Muslim masses regarded him as enemy of Islam while some Hindu considered him as the friend and savior of Muslims. He clarified that “how can I, who am a Hindu by birth a Hindu by creed and a Hindu of Hindus in my way of living, be an ‘enemy’ of Hindus?”⁸⁴ He associated himself with Hindus and asked them to show restraint “we shall not harm the Muslims any more. If they wish to go on their own, we would let them go. But we shall not force them to leave.”⁸⁵ Despite this assimilation, Gandhi failed to eliminate his pro-Muslim image in Hindu fanatics’ perceptions.

Gandhi advised that formation of Pakistan was the result of an agreement and now any effort to destroy Pakistan would ultimately destabilize the region; he said “if we try to destroy Pakistan both the countries are going to sink.”⁸⁶ Gandhi vehemently opposed the violence, forced migration and forced conversion. He was not against the migration by choice, or repatriation of refugees. He concentrated his energies on the protection of minorities in both dominions especially the protection of Muslims in India. He considered that retaliation was not human; the killing of Muslims in India in retaliation to the killings of Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan was not a civilized or human reaction.⁸⁷ The reality of India was far from his vision of non-violence; it was not the India of his dreams. Later on, he pacified Delhi after massive killings by his fast unto death and ultimately succeeded to restore peace and communal harmony in India to some extent.⁸⁸ He also succeeded in normalizing the situation at Delhi, the Indian Government also agreed to release the outstanding amount in cash balance to Pakistan. But Hindu fanatics turned against him and finally decided to punish him to death due to his pro-Muslim and Pro-Pakistan stance.

Soon he realized that “his writ runs no more” and his appeals for communal harmony were “a cry in wilderness.” He received abusive letters. His prayer meetings were frequently interrupted by recitation of Holy Quran. He faced the slogans of Gandhi *Murdabad* and also came to be called as Muhammad Gandhi by Hindu fanatics.⁸⁹ After his successful fast for reunion of hearts of all communities he was killed by a Hindu fanatic Nathu Ram Godse. Hindu fanatics charged him as a pro-Pakistan and pro-Muslim leader and killed him to save India and Hinduism.⁹⁰

But in his condolence message Jinnah still referred to him as the “one of the greatest men produced by the Hindu community and a leader who commanded their universal confidence and respect.”⁹¹ Nehru announced the death of Gandhi and said “the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere.”⁹² Even Nehru while addressing to Constituent Assembly admitted his utter failure and shame to protect the greatest treasure of India. He declared Gandhi as “the greatest

Indian of the day and the greatest Hindu of the age.⁹³ Nehru declared him martyr for the cause of unity for which he devoted his life and struggled till the last breath. He was the personification of unity among Indians and especially among Hindus and Muslims.⁹⁴

Conclusion:

The partition, instead of solving the communal problem, further aggravated it. The deep rooted hatred and the subsequent communal violence permanently cemented the animosity and hatred between these two newly independent nations. The paramount objective of Gandhi's struggle was the achievement of *Swaraj* and Hindu-Muslim unity; he succeeded to achieve *Swaraj* but failed to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity. Gandhi defeated the mighty British Empire but was defeated by the menace of communalism. The establishment of Pakistan as a separate Muslim homeland was a great setback for Gandhi's creed of politics and his vision of India. He could not provide assurance to Muslim minority that eventually decided to chart its own course. This failure of Gandhi was due to his peculiar position of weakness when he was rendered irrelevant by the top leadership of Indian National Congress. The congress leadership was busy in taking decision based on realpolitik and they termed the views of Gandhi as utopian and impracticable. However, the last days of Gandhi's life were the finest hours of his life; despite his utter failures to quench the fire of hatred, he emerged victorious in another way. Despite of his long standing hostility against the idea of Pakistan, he adopted conciliatory approach towards new state of Pakistan and became a sole voice in the environment of hatred, revenge and savagery. Although he claimed "my life is my message" but his death had more profound effect and he emerged as a lasting source of inspiration for his followers at home and abroad. His philosophy of adherence to non-violence won him admirers and followers the world over and he left a lasting legacy. However, he is still criticized by many as being utopian and impracticable in his approach towards politics.

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