



GANDHI AND CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

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Gandhi always tried for reconciliation though he was always tried to be get convinced from the two nation theory that was echoing due to the communalism. One of the such letter intimating Gandhi was sent by Abdul kadir in which he said, "Mahatmaji no problem in Indian politics is as important as that of Hindu-Muslim unity, because it is one of the accepted facts that the success of all schemes for the future welfare and progress of this country depends on this, that the two nations (qawmen) treat each other with tolerance." Gandhi should not, he emphasizes, gather the impression from this writing that "I am opposed to Hindu-Muslim political unity, because "in my opinion, the welfare of this country depends on the two nations working together (mil jul kar) in politics".¹

Even Gandhi was also observing the situations that once he said at the height of the Khilafat movement that "I know there is much distrust of one another as yet. Many Hindus distrust Muslim honesty. They believe that swaraj means Muslim raj, for they argue that without the British, Muslims of India will aid Muslim powers to build up a Muslim empire in India. Muslims, on the other hand, fear that the Hindus being in an overwhelming majority will smother them."²

Another and the most important step taken by Gandhi was the maintenance of peace and amelioration in spite of having all the riots taking in various part of the nation. He visited to villages, preached them the lesson of unity, he travelled miles in order to ensure peace in the communal riot affected areas. Such as the visit of the Noakhali, the area lies in the province of Bengal. Bengal has already seen the pain of partition prior to the partition of

¹ An open letter to Mahatama Gandhi, P.4

² Quoted in Ram gopal, Indian Muslims, Bombay, 1959, P. 152.



the nation. Bengal was divided into eastern and western part, claiming by the British that it was done on administrative basis because Bengal was too large to control. Lord Curzon was the then viceroy in 1905. Though talking of administration problem their main intention was to divide it on the religious basis. The partition of Bengal of resented, the Bengali masses were protesting and in exemplary fashion the religious unity was shown. Again in the same province after the proclamation of direct action day, killings happened at a large scale. The most famous region of it's affect was Noakhali. When the communal riots Noakhali, Gandhi ji went there with his pupils, he travelled by foot from village to village asking and requesting the people to end this mass destruction. He took whatever to eat in the form of offerings made by the villagers. His attempts were successfull upto a large extent, he was able to curb violence through his efforts.

The Calcutta killings- “When justice and equity failed, the shining steel should decide the issue”.³

All India Muslim League's 'Direct Action' resolution passed on July 29, 1946, has been compiled in the Indian Annual Register. The resolution said, “Whereas the League has today resolved to reject the proposal embodied in the statement of the Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy of May 16, 1946 due to the intransigence of the Congress on the one hand and with the breach of faith with the Muslims by the British Government on the other; and whereas Muslim India has exhausted without success all efforts to find a peaceful solution of the Indian problems by compromise and constitutional means; whereas the Congress is bent upon setting up a caste Hindu Raj in India with the connivance of the British; and whereas recent events have shown that power politics and not justice and fair play are the deciding factors in Indian affairs; whereas it has become abundantly clear that the Muslims of India would not sit content with anything less than the immediate establishment of an independent and full sovereign State of Pakistan and would resist any attempt to impose any

³ Abul Hashim's speech in the Legislators' Convention, New Delhi, 10 April, 1946. reported in Star of India.



constitution, long terms or short term, of the setting up of an Indian Government at the Centre without the approval and consent of the Muslim League, the Council of the All-India Muslim League is convinced that the time has now come for the Muslim Nation to resort to direct action to achieve Pakistan and assert their just rights and to vindicate their honour and to get rid of the present slavery under the British and the contemplated future of caste Hindu domination. “The Council calls upon the Muslim nation to stand as a man behind their sole representative organisation, the All-India Muslim League and be ready for every sacrifice.”

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAMME-

The Secretary of the Calcutta District Muslim League notifies:-

The All India Direct Action Day, declared by the All India Muslim League, will be directly observed in Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly, Metiaburz, 24 Parganas mill areas under the direction of the Calcutta District Muslim League. The programme for the Day is as under Complete hartal and general strike in all spheres of civic, commercial and industrial life save and except the essential services of water works, hospitals, physicians’ clinics, maternity centres, light, electricity, gas and postal services. Processions, “Kafelas” and “Akharas” with music bands and Tabaljungs will start from all Mahallas in Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly, Metiabruz and 24-Parganas and coverage at the foot of the Ochterlony Monument (present ‘Shaheed Minar’) between 3 and 6-30 P. M. Joint mass rally and meeting of Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly, Metiabruz and 24-Parganas will be held at foot of the Ochterlony (present ‘Shaheed Minar’) Monument from 3 P M on Friday the 16th August. Hon’ble Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy leader, Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Party and Prime Minister, Bengal has consented to preside. Representatives of Minority suppressed and oppressed people and anti-Fascist parties who have been unjustly by-passed by the British Government and who are ready to make common cause with the League in its fight for the equal freedom of Muslims, the Hindus, the Scheduled castes, the Adivasis, the Tribals, the Christians and



other peoples are welcome in the meeting. Every Ward and Branch League must prepare a complete list of mosques in its area, depute three workers in every mosque on Friday, the 16th August to explain the new policy and action plan of the League before JUMA prayers and to report to the District League about this arrangement. A manifesto on the Subject has been specially published and is available from 8, Zakaria Street, Calcutta. Special Manajat (Prayer) should be offered in every mosque on Friday after Juma prayers for the freedom of Muslim India, the Islamic world and the peoples of India and the East in general. The “Munajat” has been printed and published and is available from 8, Zakaria Street, Calcutta. I appeal to the Musalmans of Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly, Matiabruz and 24-Parganas to rise to the occasions and make the rally a unique success. We are in midst of the rainy season and the month of Ramzan fasting. But this is a month of real Jihad of God’s grace and blessings, spiritual armament and the moral and physical purge of the Nation. It is a supreme occasion of our trial. Let Muslims brave the rains and all difficulties and make the Direct Action Day meeting a historic mass mobilization of the Millat. Muslims must remember that it was in Ramzan that the Quran was revealed. It was in Ramzan that Battle of Badr , the first open conflict between Islam and Heathenism was fought and won by 313 Muslims and again it was in Ramzan that 10,000 Muslims under the Holy Prophet conquered Mecca¹⁰ and established the Kingdom of Heaven and the Commonwealth of Islam in Arabia. The Muslim League is fortunate that it is starting its action in this holy month.⁴

1. All Muslims of India should die for Pakistan.
2. With Pakistan established whole of India should be conquered.
3. All people of India should be converted to Islam.
4. All Muslim kingdoms should join hands with the Anglo-American exploitation of the whole world.

⁴ The Programme of Direct Action Day was published in the star of India on 13.08.46



5. One Muslim should get the right of five Hindus, i.e. each Muslim is equal to five Hindus.

6. Until Pakistan and Indian Empire is established, the following steps should be taken :-

(a) All factories and shops owned by Hindus should be burnt, destroyed, looted and loot should be given to League Office.

(b) All Muslim Leaguers should carry weapons in defiance of order.

(c) All nationalist Muslims if they do not join League must be killed by secret Gestapo.

(d) Hindus should be murdered gradually and their population should be reduced.

(e) All temples should be destroyed.

(f) Muslim League spies in every village and district of India.

(g) Congress Leaders should be murdered, one in one month by secret method.

(h) Congress upper offices should be destroyed by secret Muslim Gestapo, single person doing the job.

(i) Karachi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Goa, Vizagapatam should be paralysed by December 1946 by Muslim League volunteers.

(j) Muslim should never be allowed to work under Hindus in Army, Navy, Government services or private firms.

(k) Muslim should sabotage whole of India and Congress Government for the final invasion of India by Muslims.

(l) Financial resources are given by Muslim League. Invasion of India by Nizam communist, few Europeans, Khoja by Bhopal, few Anglo-Indians, few Parsis, few Christians, Punjab, Sind and Bengal will be places of manufacture of all arms, weapons for Muslim Leaguers invasion and establishing of Muslim Empire of India.

(m) All arms, weapons should be distributed to Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Madras, Bangalore, Lahore, Karachi, branches of Muslim League.



- (n) All sections of Muslim League should carry minimum equipment of weapons, at least pocket knife at all times to destroy Hindus and drive all Hindus out of India.
- (o) All transport should be used for battle against Hindus.
- (p) Hindu women and girls should be raped, kidnapped and converted into Muslims from October 18, 1946.
- (q) Hindu culture should be destroyed.
- (r) All Leaguers should try to be cruel at all times to Hindus and boycott them socially, economically and in many other ways.
- (s) No Muslim should buy from Hindu dealers. All Hindu produced films should be boycotted. All Muslim Leaguers should obey these instructions and bring into action by September 15, 1946.⁵

Mr. Jinnah after the direct action day said “What we have done today (the day when the League Council passed the Direct Action resolution) is the heroic act in our history. Never have we...done anything except...by constitutionalism. But now...we bid goodbye to constitutional methods.”

“Now the time has come for the Muslim Nation to resort to direct action. I am not prepared to discuss ethics. We have a pistol and are in a position to use it.”

“Jinnah said he did not restrict Direct Action to non-violence, we have also forged a pistol that is non-violent. We mean every word of it. We do not believe in equivocation.”

A Few Hour-Wise Reports on Murder, Assault And Loot On 16th August 1946-

Stabbing commenced at 4-30 a.m. Between 6-30 and 7-30 a.m. large number of armed persons gathered at Maniktala area.

7-00 a.m. : Rioting broken out at Maniktala Bazar.

⁵ Taken from : Stern Reckoning—G.D.Khosla,Oxford University Press, N.D.—110001



7-30 a.m. : Sergeant E. Williams of Lalbazar Telephone Office reported that he was escorting lady operators in a police truck along Central Avenue and the same lorry was obstructed by Muslim youths.

7-35 a.m. : There were communal clashes at the crossing of C.R. Avenue and Beadon Street crossing. At the junction of Bowbazar St. and Lower Circular Road (Sealdah junction) large crowds of Muslims armed with lathis and iron rods had assembled.

8-25 a.m. : Terretti Bazar—fighting going on.

8-30 a.m. : Communal clash started before City Cinema in Lower Chitpur Road.

8-32 a.m. : Fighting between Hindus and Muhammedans in Lower Chitput Road.

9-00 a.m. : Situation in Sealdah was very grave.

9-05 a.m. : Disturbances going on in Wards Institution Street.

9-12 a.m. : Stabbing going on in Ripon Street, Wellesly Street and Mullick Bazar.

9-15 a.m. : There were various messages of riots from various other quarters. Between 9-15 and 9-30 the Control (room) received messages in quick succession and from all over Calcutta from Shambazar on the one side and Watgunge on the other.

9-30 a.m. : Burtolla Police Station was in fact attacked by Muslim mob, and Burtolla was shouting for armed police force from Lalbazar.

9-55 a.m. : Repeat of the same message from Burtolla P.S.

10-10 a.m. : Thousands of Hindus and Muhammedans fighting in Dum Dum Road and Muslims starting fire.

10-12 a.m. : It is reported that at Garpar, Jugipara Lane—that is Canal area in North Calcutta-east of Upper Circular Road—disturbances going on.

10-30 a.m. : Trouble in Harrison Road—fighting going on before Rippon College (now Surendranath College).



10-30 a.m. : Information received that Muslims of Maniktola and Narkeldanga had stabbed some of the Hindus and looted Hindu shops.

11-05 a.m. : Riot ensued savagely in front of Rippon College and its vicinity.

11-08 a.m. : Special Branch officer reported that fire was set on Kamala Bastralaya at 2/2 Vivekananda Road.

11-50 a.m : Informed that situation of Harrison Road, Central Avenue, Vivekananda Road, College Street, Cornwallis street, Mechuabazar Street, Tarachand Datta Street, Zakaria Street and Chitpur Road was tense –arson, murder, looting and rioting taking place in these places–rioters for outnumbered the police force and were all armed with dangerous weapons. At Mirzapur St. junction (Upper Circular Road) the road was filled with excited Muslims, mostly armed. A little to the north of Sealdah crossing there was rioting in progress. Between 8 and 8-30 on Circular Road near Science College and near corner of Vivekananda Road, brick- batting was in progress. Rai Sahib B.C.De wrote a letter to the Police Commissioner that his house had been broken into. Mr. Banerjee, a Judge of Dharmatolla was killed while protecting a little boy.

11-50 a.m. : A large turbulent procession of Muslim rioters proceeded, while looting indiscriminately, from Sealdah to Bowbazar. Another procession of same nature engaged in the same type of nefarious acts proceeded towards Maidan from Upper Circular Road. Another gang of rioters with naked swords and lathis advanced upto Hatibagan from Shyambazar.

1-30 p.m. : Fire set on Hindu houses at Sasthitala; five corps of Hindus found on Narkeldanga Main Road.

3-00 p.m. : Massacre happened at Garpar area. Hindus are slaughtered on the western side of the canal. Arson was largely committed. Large crowd of Muslims gathered at Maidan near the monument. Ruffians and goons largely attended the gathering. They slipped off from the meeting and got involved in arson, looting and murderous assaults even before the meeting was ended. It was confirmed by intelligence report of the armed forces.



4-05 p.m. : Shops around Light House Cinema Hall were stormed, looted.
4-20 p.m. : Muslims, in organised gangs, stormed Bengal Club.
4-30 p.m. : Armoury shop of K.C.Biswas, near Metro Cinema, was bursted by Muslims and all guns and other weapons were looted.
4-42 p.m. : The renowned shop-store 'Kamalalaya' at Dharmatala Street was plundered.
5-10 p.m. : In areas around Dharmatala pillaging and murders raged. Chadni Chowk Bazar looted by Muslim rioters. Armed marauding Muslim goons rushed out from Bustee areas of Indra Roy Road. The junction of Mirzapur st. and Upper Circular Road witnessed large gathering of agitated Muslims. Sen & law Company's shop and Bata Shoe company's shop at Wellesly Street was looted. Hindus murdered in Wheat Factory at 8, Tarachand Dutta Street. The large Cycle shop of Laxmikanta Das at 152, Lower Circular Road gutted and pillaged. Many houses of Hindus at Raja Dinendra Street have been burnt down.⁶

The full story of what happened cannot be told yet. The sum of tragedy known at the time of writing is over 270 killed, more than 1,600 injured*, about 900 buildings on fire, much looting in many parts of the city. Direct action day has given the city two days of horror. Violence was feared, though not on so unrestrained a scale, when the Government decided on action that was certain to produce inflammatory language and communal clashes in the streets. There was however some assurance from those arranging the demonstration that it would be peaceful and orderly, though when a holiday was announced and explained as a precaution against clashes in the streets that might lead to larger disturbances it was obvious that Ministers themselves were dubious. That being so, it was incumbent on them to take precautions against a breakdown of civic order.⁷

⁶ Revealed by CDCE, 1946

⁷ Extracts from an editorial, Statesman, 18th August, 1946



Gandhi was very much disheartened after this violence and was very helpless after the insistence of Jinnah, finding no suitable way he agreed to partition by saying that a country can't be formed if its people are divided in such factions, he never agreed to partition but was compelled by the circumstances to accept it.

“During their talks in Bombay in September 1944, Gandhi had found Jinnah showing little interest in a compromise based on a small Pakistan. Since this lack of interest had persisted until 1947, Gandhi concluded that between playing a leading role in an undivided India and heading a small Pakistan, Jinnah might prefer the former. Gandhi seems to have felt, moreover, that Jinnah assuming such a role might arrest the polarization and violence that by the end of March 1947 was sweeping across the land, and lead possibly to the disbanding of the Punjab's ominous private militias, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu. Hence Gandhi's suggestion on 1 April 1947 that Mountbatten and the Congress should offer Jinnah the Prime Ministership of undivided India.

Alarmed at the possibility that Jinnah might accept such an offer, Mountbatten worked on Nehru, who soon resisted Gandhi's idea. Patel, Rajagopalachari and Prasad opposed it too. However, on 2 April 1947 Azad told Mountbatten, much to the Viceroy's disquiet, that the scheme could work and bring violence to an end. The scheme was famous only among Gandhi's close colleagues and the Viceroy's staff. Nobody else knew of it. On 11 April Mountbatten's anxiety ended, for he received a letter from Gandhi informing him that with the exception of Badshah Khan the Congress leadership was opposed to his Jinnah idea, which therefore stood withdrawn. It is not easy to assess the extent to which the Congress leaders' opposition was influenced by Mountbatten and his team, and we do not of course know whether or not Jinnah would have accepted the offer, which was never put to him. What we do know is that in 1942, when Gandhi had publicly said that if the British were unwilling to transfer power to the INC, they could pass it on instead to the League, Jinnah had responded as follows:



If the British government accepts the solemn declaration of Mr. Gandhi and by an arrangement hands over the government of the country to the Muslim League, I am sure that.... non-Muslims would be treated fairly, justly, nay generously...

But in April 1947 the last word did not belong to Jinnah, or to Gandhi. In the final act of the story of independence and partition, Gandhi remained isolated at one end, while the guardians and officers of the British Raj, the leaders of the Indian National Congress, and much of the country's articulate public, all stood together at the opposite end. Yet even this powerful grouping, which believed it had found in Partition the "solution" and the key to peace, did not have the last word. That last word was grabbed, on both sides of a new border, by the killers of August and September 1947.⁸ Even after the partition Gandhi stayed at the places where communal violence was taking place, he went, took fast and always tried with his full might to reconcilliate the factions spreading violence against each other.

⁸ the Sarat Bose memorial lecture by rajmohan gandhi at netaji bhawan, kolkata, given on 6 march 2010 with His Excellency Governor M.K. Narayanan, Professor Krishna Bose, Professor Sugata Bose in audience