

## ROLE OF MAHATMA GANDHI'S NON – VIOLENCE THEORY IN PREVENTING COMMUNAL RIOTS IN INDIA (1946-47)

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### *Abstract*

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, known to all of us as Mahatma Gandhi, has applied the principle of non-violence as a significant tool of the anti-British struggle in the history of India's independence movement. The principle of non-violence that began to be practiced in the history of India with various regional movements, its subsequent use in various all-India movements transformed Mahatma Gandhi from a common leader to the 'father of the nation'. On the eve of India's independence in 1946, communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims were raging in various parts of India, especially in Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar, as well as in Calcutta immediately after independence. At this time, Mahatma Gandhi kept himself away from the competition for power in Delhi, embraced the ideals of true justice and violence, visited villages in East Bengal and Bihar, including Calcutta, and appealed for the cessation of communal brotherhood. He marched incessantly to bring the misguided Indians to the path of peace and possibility. He left for Noakhali on 6 November 1946 to spread the message of non-violence in the wake of the communal riots in Noakhali. Along with him, he established an ashram there to serve the needy. This time he said his ordeal of non-violence in Noakhali. However, seeing the attitude of the Hindu-Muslim community towards him, he admitted within a month that it seems that my non-violence did not respond to the Hindu-Muslim. He then set out for Bihar. There he also marched to spread the message of non-violence. However, some people of the Hindu community there, being influenced by him, realized their mistake and wrote a letter to Gandhiji expressing their remorse for the riots. This is the success of Gandhiji. This communal riot plagued Gandhiji so much that he, who at one time was a staunch opponent of partition, was compelled to accept partition despite strong reluctance only to maintain communal harmony. However, during the period of independence, there was a hint of communal riots in Calcutta. So Gandhiji came back to Calcutta on 9 August 1947 in the role of savior. When the riots broke out in Calcutta on September 1, Gandhiji went on a hunger strike to restore normalcy in city life. In this case, he achieved a lot of success. While other leaders in Delhi were busy gaining power in independent India, Gandhiji, far from Delhi, was busy maintaining communal harmony. This is why he became known as 'Mahatma.'

**Keywords:** Satyagraha, Non-violence, Communalism, Humanity, Riots, Savior

Mahatma Gandhi emerged at a crucial time in the politics of subjugated India. When the failure of the alternative moderate appeal policy of the extremist and terrorist movement plunged the Congress leaders into a mire of despair, Gandhi breathed new life into the Congress with his policy of renewing non-violent Satyagraha. Although he adopted the policy of mass movement, he kept that movement on the path of control and non-violence. The first step in Gandhiji's rise in Indian politics by using non-violent Satyagraha was the movement against the indigo planters with the help of the peasants of Champaran district in Bihar (1917). "The Champaran incident

may be regarded as the first stage in the emergence of Gandhi as the political leader of India.”<sup>1</sup> The following year (1918) Gandhiji's Satyagraha movement in support of the peasants against the increase in government revenue in the Kheda district of Gujarat and in support of the textile mill workers in Ahmadabad brought him immense popularity by bringing him into contact with the needy in India. One after another, the Rowlatt Satyagraha (1919), the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), and the Disobedience Movement (1930) against the British government made Gandhiji an all-India leader and gave him immense popularity. Mahatma Gandhi became the only leader of our people. After independence, till his death, Mahatma Gandhi was the symbol of the moral and moral strength of the nation. He was literally the 'Father of the Nation'. However, it should be noted that he did not resort to violence in any of these movements or he did not tolerate any kind of violence. Non-violence was his motto in all movements. Gandhiji believed that non-violence is a power, man must have this power, and then he can overcome violence. If non-violence is actively present in the human mind, it will be possible to remain non-violent even if any attack occurs during a violent movement on behalf of an individual or society. Even Gandhiji's basic explanation of non-violence is – 'I agree to punish myself to prove you wrong.'

Gandhiji, a lifelong worshiper of the ideal of non-violence, was heartbroken when, immediately before independence, two children of Indian mothers - the rebellious poet Kazi Nazrul Islam referred to as 'two flowers on the same stalk' - were Hindu-Muslims in different parts of India - Kolkata, Noakhali, Bihar, Delhi. Mutual riots broke out in the Punjab province. The holder of the principle of non-violence, the embodiment of peace, the worshiper of humanity, the father of the nation then took the initiative to bring back communal harmony by removing all thought streams. In fact, wherever he has heard of torture and oppression in the world, where communalism and racism have taken blood-thirsty forms, he has extended the hand of peace and equality. He has gone where the catastrophe of humanity has taken place. Be it in Africa at the beginning of his political career or in Noakhali, Bihar or Calcutta at the end of his life - he was a pioneer of peace everywhere.

Immediately before independence, communal riots were planned in various parts of India. On July 29, 1946, the Muslim League called for a "Direct Struggle" on August 16. The result was very deadly. "The direct struggle of the League was not just a slogan, on 16th August in the name of that direct struggle the horrible fratricidal riots started. The unimaginable violence lasted for four whole days. In response to that incident in October, demonic persecution of Hindus began in Noakhali. In retaliation, a large number of Muslims were killed in Bihar. Riots spread to Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. The continuous riots of 1946-47 A.D, with which there is a direct addition of partition and fragmented independence, undoubtedly started from 16th August." <sup>2</sup>

While the Congress leaders were ready to surrender to the pressure of the Muslim League, Mahatma Gandhi, the only one to stay away from the competition for power in Delhi, embraced the ideals of truth, justice and non-violence and went from village to village in East Bengal and Bihar to call for an end to communal brotherhood. The father of the nation was not as inactive as Dhritarashtra in the Mahabharata. He marched incessantly to bring the misguided Indians to the path of peace and possibility.

The riots in Noakhali started on the night of Kojagari Lakshmi pujo on October 10, 1946. The riots involved unilateral attacks on Hindus and in addition to killings and injuries; there were rapes of women, forced marriages and conversions. The riot was carried out with a well-planned purpose at the instigation of the Maulovis. In the context of Gandhiji's arrival in Noakhali after the communal riots, Amallesh Tripathi said, - "The horror of the communal riots in Noakhali that drew Gandhiji there was an insult to femininity." <sup>3</sup> In this context Gandhiji said - "Is the cry of outraged womanhood that as promptly called me to Noakhali ." <sup>4</sup> On November 6, 1946, Mahatma Gandhi left for Noakhali and on November 7, he landed at Chaumuhani railway station and called for peace and love to all in a public meeting. Gandhiji's followers Sucheta Kripalani, Ava Gandhi, Kanu Gandhi, Parallel, Sushila Nair, Amtus Salam all spread to different villages devastated by the riots. Sucheta Kripalani talked to the raped women and collected various misfortunes. Gandhiji officially started marching for peace from November 9 to spread the message of non-violence. The next day, he walked 116 miles barefoot and visited 47 riot-ravaged villages. During this period he held various discussions with the local Muslims as well as tried to restore the confidence of the Hindus. But this time he clearly realized - "The fear psychology of the people worked behind the riots. Fear comes from hatred, fear and hatred on the opposite side of the same coin. But if non-violent people say, I have no external enemy, then fear will go away with hatred. Fear of believing in God, surrendering to God alone. The external form of surrender is prayer; through prayer it is possible to conquer anger, hatred and fear. Weapons were canceled in this war." <sup>5</sup> But in Noakhali there was animosity between Hindus and Muslims which Gandhiji could not overcome. One day while visiting a village in Noakhali, he said that his non-violence was tested in Noakhali. " Gandhiji has come to put his ahimsa to the acid test in his atmosphere of rank distrust and suspicion . The purpose of his campaign was to wipe away the tears of the oppressed, to restore confidence in their minds. Creating an environment where two communities can overcome doubts and mistrust towards each other and live in a healthy way. But his purpose did not succeed." <sup>6</sup> The most tragic thing at that time, the ruling Muslim League government of Bengal saw Gandhiji's Noakhali arrival in doubt. "For this reason, Gandhiji has repeatedly acknowledged that he did not come to Noakhali with a bad purpose." <sup>7</sup> In fact, Gandhiji's position in Noakhali was not relieved for Muslims. So the league leaders repeatedly advised him to leave this region and went to Bihar. "Violating the limits of audacity, Surabvardi advised Gandhiji to leave Bihar." <sup>8</sup> However, Gandhi wrote to him in reply - "to set up a neutral commission on Bihar and Noakhali." <sup>9</sup> Even League leader Fazlul Haque said Gandhi needed to leave Bihar now. Gandhi replied sarcastically - "I will go if I need to, but it will not be to oblige you." <sup>10</sup> Judging by the overall situation at the time, he realized that - "If non-violence is not effective in Noakhali, real freedom will not come even after the British leave." <sup>11</sup>

But realizing that his message of non-violence was not very effective in the fiery situation in Noakhali, Gandhiji admitted within a month of coming here - "It seems that my non-violence did not respond to the Hindu-Muslim response" <sup>12</sup>. Even the Hindus at that time could not have much faith in Gandhiji's words. So despite his various pleas, they refused to return to their villages. The fear worked in their minds that - "80 per cent of the people where they do not want, 20 people will be there in any sorrow, in any strength, in any hope." <sup>13</sup> Even the Hindu newspapers of that time did not show much interest in Gandhiji's Noakhali campaign. There was more importance than the oppression of Muslims, especially the brutal attacks on women. However, some kind-hearted Hindus extended a helping hand to strengthen Gandhiji's hand in quelling the riots. It is mentioned here that - "On January 29, 1947, Gandhiji reached Jayag

village of Begumganj upazila, about 30 km north of Noakhali district. Hemant Kumar Ghosh, a local zamindar and the first barrister of Noakhali district, donated his movable and immovable property to Gandhiji for expenditure in the public welfare sector to form a trust in the name of his parents. Gandhiji responded to his call and formed the 'Ambika Kaliganga Charitable Trust'. The trust was entrusted to Charu Chowdhury, a beloved servant of Gandhiji. For 4 months Gandhiji traveled to different parts of Chandpur and Noakhali and conducted the work of the trust. Its various activities continued till the partition of India in 1947. After the partition of India in 1947, the religious government of Pakistan obstructed its activities. Later, after the independence of Bangladesh, its name was changed to 'Gandhi Ashram Trust' and it was associated with various public welfare activities." <sup>14</sup>

However, it is true that at the age of 77, after enduring extreme physical hardships, he crossed miles and miles of muddy roads, but the guilt of failure tormented his mind. "Even though no one listened to his call, the Mahatma set a glorious example of walking alone by beating the thorns of the road under the blood-stained feet. But the purpose for which he came to Noakhali did not succeed. But the purpose for which he came to Noakhali was not successful, it was not possible. Gandhi's failure in Noakhali is an indication of how dangerous the communal situation has become." <sup>15</sup> Accompanying Noakhali's failure, he left for Bihar, another riot-hit area, with a message of non-violence.

The reason for the start of Bihar, the people of Bihar who came to Kolkata and preached how Muslims were torturing Hindus in Calcutta. Even in Noakhali communal riots spread by the newspaper. As a result, Hindus of the village of Patna, Bhagalpur, Munger, in provisions of Hindu Zamindar class, also carried out unilateral attack on Muslims. The riot that started on October 25, 1946, soon became a serious shape. Bihar's riots were the most harmful effects in Munger's Missouri. That was the most awful tragedy place of turmoil. The whole villages were wiped out. Almost every house broke down on the ground. So Gandhiji entered Bihar. On the evening of March 17, Gandhiji addressed his first prayer meeting in Missouri. Where 30 to 40 thousand men and women were present. Here they heard the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an in Gandhi's speech in pin drop silence. Gandhiji wondered if these could be the people who had gone mad like a riot. He was concerned about how the initial problem in Missouri started. What he found out was that the Hindus who were in such a large majority, how could they be so humble to kill innocents? Muslims complained to him that the government was indifferent to victims like them. However, Gandhiji said that he was not in favor of giving the verdict; he did not come here in the role of a lawyer or a judge. He was a reformer and humanist preacher. He came to invite criminals to repent for their foolishness. He said the government had already announced that it would investigate the cause of the unrest and appoint an independent commission to find a way to avoid its recurrence. The commission will also advise the victims on what compensation should be paid. Those who had allegations were given an opportunity to present their evidence to the commission. After addressing the prayers, Gandhiji took initiative to raise funds for the Muslim Relief Fund. The people were so impressed by the Mahatma's words that everyone in this period tried to be the first to put their wealth in the hands of the Mahatma, so some people were injured in the stampede. On his way to the prayer field that evening, Gandhi visited two villages in the Missouri region, Andari and Gorayakhori. In these villages, Muslims were persecuted by Hindus, but no places of worship were damaged during the riots. Even a person who took part in the riots repented and voluntarily surrendered to

Gandhiji. "At the same time, Gandhiji received a letter of condolence signed by 60 Hindus from Andari and surrounding villages.

Revered Bapu, At your sacred feet, we of Andari and the surrounding villages declare with God as witness that we are extremely sorry for what has happened. The occasion which has brought you here and which has caused you so much pain is a matter of shame for us. We swear before you that we of Andari and the surrounding villages will henceforth regard the Muslims as our blood-brothers, as we used to before the unfortunate occurrence. For the sin we have committed we beg your and God's pardon.

People of Andari and surrounding villages.

The letter was signed by sixty people. " 16

Hindus also cooperated with Gandhiji in various ways. On his advice, the Hindus went to the refugee camps. Brought the Muslims back from there and arranged food for the Muslims at their own expense. The people pledged to each other to donate to the Muslim Relief Fund. There was a distinct improvement in the environment of the village. However, Gandhiji was not easily satisfied, the situation did not give any basis for complacency. Even so, it can be said that Gandhiji's policy of non-violence in Bihar was very successful in the face of communal riots.

Of course, Gandhiji was ready to keep the communal harmony of a united India intact in return for something. So in his old age he ran to different places to maintain this harmony. Even at one time this Gandhiji was a staunch opponent of bifurcation in India for independence. Maulana Azad said in his book - "When Gandhiji stopped the riots in Bengal and got down at the railway station in Delhi, I told him, Mahatmaji, they have accepted Pakistan's demand. The old lion growled, "Then I have to take Pakistan over my dead body." 17 But in view of the situation, this Mahatma'ji was also forced to accept partition despite his strong reluctance, only to keep the communal harmony intact. But at the time of independence, there was a hint of communal riots in Calcutta. So Gandhiji came back to Calcutta on 15 August 1947 in the role of savior. The situation at that time was so alarming that many acknowledged that Gandhiji's presence could extinguish the fire of communalism. India was divided into two parts and gained independence on 15th August 1947. At this time, the headline of the Amritbazar newspaper on 17th August was 'People of Calcutta have gone mad in the name of Gandhi '. Gandhiji spent the day of independence on hunger strike. He told other Congress leaders that he did not agree with the Independence Day celebrations. Because he feared that even if Hindus and Muslims came closer to forgetting the seemingly simple division, the attitude of hatred remained in the heart. The riots in Calcutta started again on September 1, proving Gandhiji's fears to be true. To restore peace, Gandhiji went on a hunger strike again that evening. "I therefore begin fasting from 8-15 tonight to end only if and when sanity returns to Calcutta." 18 After two days of violence in different places, the situation improved on 4th September. On the same day, a group of representatives from different communities met Gandhiji at Belegkata and promised that they would not disturb the peace of the city. A group of thugs also surrendered to him. Gandhiji broke his fast at 9:15 pm that day.

Therefore, in terms of discussion, it can be said that Gandhiji used non-violence as his main tool throughout his life. It was also his main tool against the communal riots of 1946. It may not have worked completely in all cases for the frenzy of the people, as was noticed in the case of Noakhali. Again in the case of Bihar this policy played a very effective role. It worked like magic

during the post-independence riots in Calcutta. At this time, "the image of the Mahatma undoubtedly acted as a formidable force. To the peace-loving people of both Hindu and Muslim communities, Gandhiji became an awakened symbol of the anti-communal ideology." <sup>19</sup> In fact, one of the key aspects of the life of this Mahatma, the ' Father of the Nation ', the heroic son of Mother India, is that Gandhiji valued something more than Swaraj, truth and non-violence. He did not abandon his principles for success in any movement. If necessary, he wanted to walk alone on the path that was the path of truth and justice. At the end of that path he received death. But that death hit the country hard and made everyone aware of humanity. He may not have been able to give the unity of India but he has established a great ideal of secularism.

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