

# Spitting at the Sun

Assassination of Gandhi : Facts vs. Falsehood

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## TELL THE WORLD

If I die of a lingering illness, nay even by as much as a boil or a pimple, it will be your duty to proclaim to the world, even at the risk of making people angry with you, that I was not the man that I claimed to be. If you do that it will give my spirit peace. Note down this also that if someone were to end my life by putting a bullet through me—as someone tried to do with a bomb the other day—and I met his bullet without a groan, and breathed my last taking God's name, then alone would I have made good my claim.

- Gandhi

*(The words uttered less than twenty hours before his death)*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Dr. Pravin Sheth

Shri Chunibhai Vaidya is a committed sarvodaya worker. Even at 88, Shri Vaidya, as an able leader of Gujarat Lok Samiti, continues to make significant contribution to the fields of water management, land to the landless, Gandhian thought and action, secularism and equitable development.

Inspired by Gandhi's struggle for freedom, Shri Vaidya left formal education to get experience in the school of life. Remaining underground, he worked against the British Raj during the Quit India Movement. He then joined Shri Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan Movement. Along with Narayan Desai and Prabodh Choksi, he was one of the founders of Yajnya Prakashan Samiti, and later on he edited 'Bhoomiputra'.

Twice, he had lived in Kashi to look after the publications of Sarva Seva Sangh. During Shri Vinobaji's Assam Yatra, he went to Assam. Meanwhile, in the wake of the Chinese aggression, following Vinobaji's directive, he stayed on there for twelve years. On his return to Gujarat, he worked as the editor of 'Bhoomiputra'. Its role as the fearless voice against the Emergency landed him into jail for seven months. 'Bhoomiputra' made history by winning the case against pre-censorship of the government.

Shri Vaidya then took up the leadership of Gujarat Lok Samiti and led many a successful battle on issues like pension of Gujarat MLAs, and closure of the liquor shop at Ratanpur. As an active member of the peace committee of the Nagarika Sangathan, he contributed to restoring peace and bringing about the amicable settlement of the dispute around reservation issue during the turbulent agitation of 1985 in Gujarat.

Shri Vaidya's perseverance is reflected in his half a decade long successful struggle to attain the riparian rights of communities living in the downstream region of the river Banas. He initiated the modified concept of the hidden dam in the Sipu-Banas areas. Such dams have become symbols of grass-root

development for water conservation. More than 10,000 Bighas of land are irrigated by these dams.

On behalf of the Sarva Seva Sangh, and Gujarat Sarvodaya Mandal, he successfully carried out the movement against the multinational Cargill Corporation. The Gujarat government had sold public land of 200 Bighas in Kadadara village to an MNC. He led the villagers' struggle against such a deal, which forced the government to abandon it. And he still leads number of movements on the issues of justice to the poor, communal harmony, land to the landless, a mega-port etc.

His sensitivity developed while undertaking relief work in the arid regions of Gujarat during 1986-88; and the awareness about the scarce water resources led him to support the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Project and carry out pro-dam movement.

He undertook rehabilitation of 230 plus riot affected families in Gujarat in 2002 post Godhara riots and helped reconstruction work in Kutch, post Kutch earthquake.

Recently the virus of communalism is systematically sought to be spread by the champions of Nathuram Godse, the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi. This has led Shri Vaidya to write a booklet in Gujarati as an ideational counterpoint, which, by now, has been translated and published in eleven languages.

Shri Vaidya has succeeded in reviving our faith in Gandhi at a time when we need to follow him the most.

## LIGHT BEYOND DARKNESS

Prakash N. Shah

All of us, especially the rising and pulsating generation, will remain grateful to Chunikaka for setting forth, in a dialogue form, some of the fundamental ideas, in a climate in which the cult of killing appears to be the order of the day as it were.

Our struggle for freedom and its leadership of Gandhi constitute an epic of our times, spanning over the earlier half of the twentieth century, the way *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* present the living images of our cultural transitions and tensions involved in the social change of earlier times.

Of late, there has been going on a sort of continual symposium at the rate of three sessions a day on misinformation and disinformation about Gandhi, who attained the bliss of death while leading an epic life as Socrates and Jesus did, rather more so as Lincoln did. And there seems to have been generated an environment in which the elements and forces indulging in the inhuman politics of the cult of killing masquerade as the authorities on our national life. In this context, the controversy centering round the play, "Mee Nathuram Godse Boltoy" furnishes an opportunity for the crystallization of ideas in the new era. Chunikaka has drawn very well its constructive quintessence which throws light on the personality and action of one with whose help and support we have to move into the twenty-first century as well as understand what to give up for going forward.

## A WORD OR TWO

**Chunibhai Vaidya**

The Gandhians suffer from an apparent handicap. They hardly study, but tend to be up to their neck in work. Needless to say, I am, too, one of them. But the moment there was commotion at Mumbai and Delhi in reaction against the staging of Pradeep Dalvi's play, 'Mee Nathuram Godse Boltoy' [I, Nathuram Godse Speak], they woke up with a start as it were. Thanks to the write-ups of Prakash N. Shah, Jagan Fadnis, Ramesh Oza and others and particularly to my conversations with Prakash, I gathered more relevant information than I was aware of. This furnished a vital context to the writing of this brochure. We could venture to present it to the readers because of the zest of friends who wished to disseminate it. While preparing this booklet I was not unmindful of the facts that the bigot followers of all religions had fallen a prey to dogmatism culminating into fanaticism, intolerance, and violence and also that Hinduism was regarded the world over as one of the most pluralistic religions and catholic in essence and practice. I was also aware of the fact that the Bharatiya Janata Party had very recently, in its organ "BJP Today", had come out with an article which implied that Godse played a tool in the hands of the British Imperialists. Indeed, no sane person, not to talk of a national party, could own up a heinous crime as the one committed by Godse. But I must add, much more will have to be done to clear the dust gathered till now.

I am sorry, there might be some insinuations against RSS in this small work, and that too in spite of the organisation's publicly disowning of the perpetrator of crime. But its anti-Muslim and anti-Gandhi mindsets are two handicaps—one born and the other acquired. These are also denied, but its followers and their deeds tell a different story altogether. I wish I were wrong.

I am thankful to Shri Bang Saheb of Sarva Seva Sangh who expressed his readiness to send its Hindi version round the Hindi speaking world while at the same time assuring me to endeavour to render it in all the other Indian languages as far as possible. Gandhi did not belong to Gujarat alone, nor to

India alone either. He belonged to the whole of humanity. He admitted of no frontiers of caste, creed or nationality that tend to divide man and man. We thought it desirable, that this little document of facts, centering round the assassination of Gandhi, were also put in the world language. And hence the English version for readers at home and abroad.

Professor Ramesh Dave, putting aside all his commitments, attended to my SOS and took great care while translating the original Gujarati into English. I am happy to see that it reads as if it was originally written in English. His Epilogue is a sensitive summing-up.

I can't help acknowledging the contribution of Dr Pravin Sheth, Shri C.N. Patel and his daughter Dina Patel, and my young colleague Sagar Rabari who shared my concern for improving the book as far as possible.

The encouraging response of so many readers who have read this little book has overwhelmed me. This is the real source of support to my endeavors.

I shall feel gratified if this little book enables me to serve a little the cause of truth.

### SOME POINTS DEALT WITH IN THIS BOOK

1. The foremost is the freedom of ideas and expression. One might argue that Godse was free to have his own approach and gag Gandhi's utterances, even to eliminate him heinously! But how about the logic of those who misinterpret the ban on a play, based on utter distortion of truth, as a violation of the fundamental freedom of expression, particularly when the sole motive of writing the play was to justify the assassination of one of the greatest men of our age, and cause grave and widespread provocation?
2. The chronology of attempts to kill Gandhi.
3. So far as the question of crime and punishment is concerned, the state alone has the authority to punish, none else.
4. The excuses put forward for assassination are fabricated—patent lies. Even long before there was anywhere a brainwave of partition, there were attempts on Gandhi's life. Why?
5. The efforts to bring the Muslims into the mainstream of the nation were there prior even to Gandhi's return home: separate electorates; the part played by the other leaders in securing greater measure of representation for Muslims exceeding their legitimate share etc. Gandhi never took any partisan stand.
6. The concept of Pakistan; the open though unconscious support of the Hinduists.
7. The ambivalent process of accepting as well as alienating the Muslims.
8. A sense of futility and helplessness of the so-called Hindu protagonists in the face of Gandhi's faith in God, religion, humanity, and unity.
9. Gandhi's pursuit of integral oneness vs. the reactionary process of the separatist Hinduists.
10. A Gobellian move to defame Gandhi and the Indian National Congress: "Repeat a lie a hundred times and people will start taking it as truth."

11. The nationalist Mahomedans and the Indian National Congress.
12. Mountbatten's ultimatum—a puzzle for the Congress.
13. The sense of betrayal—helpless reconciliation with the inevitable.
14. An incomprehensible demand of the Hinduists: Why did Gandhi not join hands with the others who were opposed to partition?
15. The problem of fifty-five crores of rupees—the rejection of tit for tat policy—the universal moral principle.
16. The reason why Gandhi pervaded all over.
17. Why was the conspiracy to kill Gandhi hatched? Who was responsible?
18. Gandhi's harsh words not merely to the misguided Hindus but also to the Muslims.

## DIALOGUE

*Q: Is not the ban on the play, "Mee Nathuram Godse Boltoy", a violation of the fundamental freedom of expression of thought? Godse firmly believed that his act was a ritual, and there was at bottom a religious thought. This play delineates that Gandhivadh like 'Sisupalvadh' was an act prompted by religion. An idea should be refuted only by an idea, not by the ban that strangles expression.*

**A:** Let us begin with the last argument first. When you argue that an idea should only be answered by an idea and not a ban, could one put a simple question? What did Godse do? Did he answer an idea with an idea? One is intrigued by the logic that upholds Godse's right to assassinate Gandhi, just to gag for ever his freedom of expression, and all the same condemn the ban on the play, based on utter falsehood and calculated to justify the inhuman killing and cause grave and widespread provocation, as the violation of a fundamental freedom. The crime that Godse perpetrated cannot be undone. It puts us in the mind of the saying, "Even Satan can cite scriptures", particularly when the heretical deed of taking the life of a universally revered great man is described as an act of religion, a sacrificial ritual.

Next, the freedom of expression is indeed a fundamental freedom but not a charter of license. If there is in the Constitution section 19(1) regarding the fundamental freedom of expression as a basic right, there is section 19(2) also to curb its abuse. The Constitution has legally accepted dissent. That is precisely the reason why the leader of the opposition enjoys the same privileges and status as a cabinet minister. Nonetheless, it is not limitless, it is liable to certain restraints. What happens when one while exercising his autonomy of expression, lets himself lose all sense of veracity and discretion and acts in a way detrimental to the society? Then there is no way; the state ought to intervene. The society cannot do so lest it should be tantamount to taking law in their hands. It might perhaps sometimes seem to be proper, but often inappropriate, even disastrous.

In Dalvi's play the facts are misinterpreted, even distorted. During the actual performance of the play, they say, there used to be wholesale deviation from the original script submitted to the Censor Board for approval. Many more provoking words and statements were interpolated. The playwright publicly contended that he would deem it a success only when the audiences exiting from the playhouse after watching the play went on a rampage, demolishing Gandhi's statues and monuments or smashing even the boards bearing his name. What a *raison d'etre*! It is as clear as daylight that the motive of writing the play is to vindicate Godse and cause grave provocation. Here is a distinct dichotomy of appearance and reality, a strategy to evade the rule of law. This is not merely a lack of discretion, it is willful dishonesty. The pursuit of defending, nay justifying a crime such as this is nothing short of mental perversity, a criminal attempt to waylay the society by manipulating falsehood as facts. We value the freedom of expression and have also courted imprisonment while serving its cause. But let us not forget that the condition is adherence to truth and self-restraint. Liberty does not ever mean license.

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*Q: Godse's statement in self-defence in the court seems to be a very well organized and cogent argument, doesn't it?*

**A:** Godse had got ample time to draft his defence after the assassination. As such, he was fairly educated. He used his time to gloss over the heinous sin. But none else than the state alone has a right to punish. Murder is murder, call it what you will. It admits of no defence or justification. May be, Godse's argument might seem to be so cogent as to leave one tongue-tied and even dazzled. So what? Don't even judges, at times, get misled by deceptive words or eloquence? Don't we sometimes see right mis-presented as wrong and wrong as right? Granting that Godse could do so, he does not cease to be guilty. He did commit a crime against humanity. All he did was to fabricate falsehood to cover it.

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**Q:** *Two reasons are put forth as to why Godse killed Gandhi:*

*(1) Gandhi partitioned the country by conceding the demand of Pakistan.*

*(2) He compelled the Government to pay to Pakistan rupees fifty-five crores, when it was waging an undeclared war against India. What have you to say?*

**A:** This was certainly not the first attempt on his life; there were about ten attempts in all, of which six I have been able to verify as recorded.

1. Way back in 1934, while Gandhi was on his way to attend the reception held in his honour by Poona Municipality, a bomb was hurled at him. But it hit the car ahead, and Gandhi was saved. The Chief Municipal Officer, a couple of police constables, and four others were injured then. Where was then any problem of partition or fifty five crores of rupees in the year 1934? Nevertheless there was the dastardly attack.

2. Another attempt on his life was at Panchgani in 1944. A man with a dagger in his hand rushed toward him. According to Manishankar Purohit, the proprietor of Poona Surati Lodge, the assailant was none else but Nathuram Godse. It has been a recorded evidence that B.D. Bhisare Guruji, the ex-Congress MLA from Mahabaleshwar and Chief of Satara District Central Bank had snatched away the dagger from Godse. Gandhiji soon sent for Godse, but he did not turn up! Those who insist on an idea being answered by an idea shall only do well to take a serious note of this. Gandhi was forever accessible to all. But Godse not even once cared to meet him, at least for exchanging ideas. Why? Surely, in 1944 also neither the issue of paying fifty-five crores nor partition was anywhere there. And still, however, there was this attempt on Gandhi's life!

3. The third attempt dates back to September 1944. Gandhi was scheduled to go from Wardha to Bombay to meet Mahomed Ali Jinnah. A group from Poona went to Wardha, to attack Gandhi and sabotage the program. When Gandhi came to know about this, he insisted that he would walk along with the demonstrators and not board the car until they allowed. But before his departure, the police had apprehended the group. One of them, G.L. Thatte,

was detected to be carrying a dagger, but he told the police that he had only intended to tear off the tyre of the car by which Gandhi was to travel! Quite early in the morning Mahatma Gandhi's personal secretary, Pyarelal, had also received a phone-call from the D.C.P. cautioning against any probable untoward happening at the hands of the demonstrators. There was no cause or ground then for any allegation against Gandhi favouring partition or insisting on paying off fifty-five crores of rupees to anybody.

4. The fourth attempt took place in June 1946. Gandhi was traveling to Poona by a special train. They had hatched a plot to derail the train in that dark night between Neral and Karjat by putting huge stones on the rail track. Thanks to the engine driver's vigilance and skill the tragedy was averted although the engine was damaged. At that time also partition was not on the agenda. Why was even then a plot to kill him? Later on, mentioning this incident in a prayer meeting Gandhi said: "So far I have been saved from seven attempts on my life. But I am not going to end up that way. I hope to live for 125 years." Nathuram Godse responded retortingly in his journal, "Agrani": "But, who will let you live?" This implies that he had already determined to kill Gandhi, long before the partition which was used as a pretext for what they call 'Gandhi-vadh.'

5-6. On January 20, 1948 one fanatic, Madanlal Pahwa, had hurled a bomb at Gandhi at the prayer meeting. It missed him, and Gandhi continued his prayers unperturbed. At last, on January 30, ten days later, Godse assassinated Gandhi on the prayer ground. Let us not forget that the problem of fifty-five crores etc. had cropped up only after January 12 and not earlier. But over a long span of years attempts by the Hindu fundamentalists to eliminate Gandhi were afoot. All they were looking for was a chance to do so; any excuse was good enough to assassinate Gandhi, and they spared no pain to find one or fabricate it.

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*Q: Don't you subscribe to the view that had Gandhi not pampered the Muslims so much, Pakistan could not have been created?*

**A:** There are three stages of the process that divides man and man. It starts off with a sense of discrimination between "ours" and "other's" as we call it. That is exactly where you have the seed of separation. There stems from it verbal conflict, eventually leading to isolation or separation. So far as the maintenance of the country's integral unity was concerned, Gandhi and the other nationalists were as much concerned or even more so than the Hindu fundamentalists. They had all stood up against the partition of the country. But the ways of the two were different, diametrically opposite. The Hindu fundamentalists considered the Muslims 'Mlechchha'—aliens and saw no way to live with them in harmony. They contended that the land was theirs alone. They seemed to be saying: "This land is Bharatvarsh. You are aliens, but you don't have to part. We are the masters of the land, and you have got to live here the way we want." Gandhiji and the other nationalist leaders warned them against continually dubbing the Mahommedans as aliens or outsiders, for that was apt to intensify their sense of alienation or not belonging. Nor would it suffice to call them "ours" only superficially. Only if they were accepted wholeheartedly that their sense of alienation would go and they would imbibe a sense of belonging. Working unitedly and thus living together, our sense of oneness will be reinforced genuinely. In the passage of time, wounds could be healed or festered. What do we really want to do? To heal it or add salt to the sore? The fundamentalists kept on adding salt to the sore whereas Gandhi and his associates endeavoured to heal it.

Casteism, discrimination between the 'high' and the 'low' prevalent in the Hindu society also played a part. How come, there is such a large Muslim population in India, much higher than in any Islamic country barring Indonesia? Because of the discrimination between the 'high' and the 'low' and idolatry of multiple deities some Hindus themselves courted Islam. Some of them, who were treated and condemned as untouchables, underwent conversion with a sense of

bitterness, whereas there were many of them who were coerced into conversion. Later on, quite a few of them desired to return to Hinduism but the doors were closed on them. Most of the Muslims today in India and even in Pakistan and Bangladesh were, once upon a time, Hindus. A very few of them, a microscopic minority, hailed from Arabia.

There is Hindu blood in their veins. But the Hindus, with their professed non-dualism versus dualism in practice, fostered in them a sense of separation. The Hindu society could not take them back because of their intense discrimination and sense of untouchability. It has been a recorded history that the Kashmiri Muslims expressed once their willingness to be reconverted to Hinduism. But after a prolonged discussion the pundits of Kashi at last turned them down. As a result Kashmir remained predominantly Islamic, the situation that Pakistan exploits to the hilt. Kashmir has been, till today, our great headache. Generation after generation this sense of alienation persisted and prevailed. The British rulers who perceived their vested interests in this situation of tension supported and aggravated it with a selfish motive. At last came Jinnah and his followers, exploiting, with the British support, this divisive sentiment and created Pakistan as a separate nation. The partition was the tragic outcome of the divide and rule policy of the British.

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*Q: What do you think of the charge that Gandhi put in efforts, out of all proportion, to appease the Muslims?*

**A:** Gandhi is accused of appeasing the Muslims, and they say, the partition was only the result of this attitude. But it is far from truth. Much prior to Gandhi's return home from South Africa efforts were on to bring the Mahomedans into the mainstream of the nation. For instance, during the fiftieth anniversary of 1857, way back in 1907 in England, Savarkar had described the Mahomedans in India as one of the hues of the rainbow. By the Lucknow Pact in 1916 the Muslims were given greater measure of representation in proportion to their population. Gandhi had indeed arrived but he was then a new entrant in the public life of the country. He had no share in the Lucknow negotiations. Who

were then the leaders? Annie Besant, Lokmanya Tilak and Mahomed Ali Jinnah. Justifying the pact, Tilak observed:

*“Some eminent people accuse us of attaching far greater importance to the Mahomedans. I would go to the extent of saying that personally I would have no objection if self-rule were granted to the Muslims alone. If the Rajputs also got a similar right I won't mind. Nor would I object to this right being given to the most backward classes among the Hindus. This statement of mine reflects the national spirit of all India. When you are struggling against the third force, above everything else, all you need is your own unity—communal, religious, political and ideological.”<sup>1</sup>*

This courageous affirmation of Lokmanya silenced all those who had opposed the pact.

Even Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookherji, after quitting the first Cabinet of Ministers of the Independent Indian Government, did not return to the Hindu Mahasabha, for he thought it improper on the part of any political party not to accommodate the Muslims and the other communities. Subhash Chandra Bose too complained against the inadequate representation of the Muslims in the Indian National Congress. It is quite clear that it was not Gandhi alone who persevered in his efforts to take the Muslims along. The other leaders also, including the Hinduists, were working toward it. How could then Gandhi alone be accused of appeasement or partisan stand?

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*Q: It was the Indian National Congress and Gandhi who had accepted the proposal for Pakistan. Should Pakistan have ever come into being if they had stood up against it?*

**A:** Although the proposal for Pakistan was set forth later, in principle its concept had cropped up much earlier. We are never tired of singing with joy and zest "Sare jahan se achchha Hindostan hamara" on all occasions of the celebration of our national independence. Are we? The very poet of this patriotic, beautiful song, Iqbal, while addressing the Allahabad convention of the Muslim League as early as in 1930 had said:

*I wish that the Punjab, North-West Frontier, Sindh and Baluchistan were bunched up together in a single state. So far as the West-North and India are concerned, let the West-North be an Islamic state, within or without the framework of the British rule. This alone seems to be the destiny of Mahommedans.*

This argument of Iqbal was stoutly supported in 1937. Please read:

*"India cannot be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogenous nation, but on the contrary there are two nations in the main—the Hindus and the Muslims."*<sup>2</sup>

Don't they sound to be Mahomed Ali Jinnah's words, as it were? Isn't it a pronounced acceptance of the two-nation theory? Do you guess, who affirmed thus and when? Would you know? It was none else than Veer Savarkar, who as the President of the Hindu Mahasabha, had proclaimed this at their Ahmedabad convention as far back as 1937. One more excerpt from Savarkar's statement on August 15, 1943:

*"I have no quarrel with Mr Jinnah's two-nation theory. We, the Hindus, are a nation by ourselves and it is a*

*historical fact that the Hindus and the Muslims are two nations.”<sup>3</sup>*

Iqbal demands for the Muslims a separate state at a Muslim League convention as the only solution of the crisis, whereas Veer Savarkar proclaims from the dais of the Hindu Mahasabha that the Hindus and the Mahomedans are two distinct and separate nations. Naturally, the division was inevitable. Who reinforced the idea of Pakistan? Unquestionably Iqbal and Savarkar to begin with. So far as Savarkar is concerned, among the Hindu fold he was not alone. Later on, he was equally strongly supported by Guru Govalkar in propounding this theory. They did not merely utter these words, the very foundation of the Hinduistic movement was the separatist. The Hinduists are as much responsible as the Muslim League for the partition.

We have a point-counterpoint political scenario. On one hand the separatist forces were steadily advancing, on the other the Indian National Congress and Gandhi were striving for the Hindu-Muslim unity. Even while he was in South Africa, the hymns of all religions— Hindu. Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, etc— were being recited during Gandhi's prayer meetings. That we are all God's children is the truth which was continually repeated and recognized. There were at the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad ideal Muslims like Qureshi Saheb as inmates. Communal harmony was a vital force of the freedom movement. The conscious efforts in this direction have been recorded in history. The Indian National Congress included scores of Muslim leaders of national stature—Dr. Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Badruddin Taiyabji, even the earlier Mahomed Ali Jinnah, to name a few. The greatest of them was Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan whereas Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was the Congress President. But the Hinduists like the Muslim fundamentalists had a single agenda: clash and conflict. Now judge, who nurtured the separatist spirit?

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*Q: How about the charge that it was the Congress and Gandhi who supported the making of Pakistan?*

**A:** Remember Gobells of the Hitler gang? He believed that if you repeated a lie a hundred times people would be taken in and start believing it, thus turning it into 'truth'. Those fundamentalist politicians, who were out to grind their axe and win elections by hook or by crook, propagated false charges all over the country in a systematic way. The people were hoodwinked, and these politicians reaped the benefit. This is the fact above all questioning. Else, how would those, whose contribution to the freedom struggle was nil, come to power? Mainly due to the misinformation calculatedly given to the people.

So far as Gandhi and the Indian National Congress are concerned, we have the open pages of history. Lord Wavell invited Jinnah and Gandhi for negotiations, one to represent the Mahommedans, the other the Hindus. Gandhi could at once see through the game, 'divide and rule'. He replied saying that Jinnah represented only the Muslim League and not the total Muslim community; and deputed Abul Kalam Azad to represent the Indian National Congress. The net result was, on both the sides of the Viceroy there were Muslims, one fundamentalist, the other nationalist. The Congress had not at all subscribed to the two-nation or two-community theory. The question of Gandhi ever conceding it does not arise. He had gone to the extent of saying that partition could take place only on his dead body. But Jinnah had succeeded in poisoning the minds of a big chunk of Muslims in India.

In the 1946 elections to the Central Assembly the Muslim League won all the 30 seats i.e. cent percent whereas in the Provincial Assemblies it secured 425 seats out of 492 which means more than 86 per cent. The tide had certainly turned in favour of the Muslim League and what it stood for. This too had a bearing on the minds of all concerned including the British Government. A number of nationalist Muslim leaders—Zakir Hussian, Maulana Azad, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Prof Abdul Bari of Bihar and above all, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan were all opposed to it. But because of the grave provocation by Jinnah and his company

there broke out violence and bloodshed all over the country that had come out of the Pandora's box of the divide-and-rule policy of the foreign rulers. Poor common man was confused in the traumatic nightmare.

There was a patent hazard. If the political parties failed to arrive at an agreement at the national level, the British would exploit the situation and evade independence of India under one pretext or another. For a moment it appeared as if the prospects of freedom were just slipping off. On top of it all Mountbatten had a plan to quit leaving India in the lurch, which implied that about seven hundred native states, big and small, would be absolutely free. The vast British ruled territory would also be left free.<sup>5</sup> The massacre would not then be confined to the clashes between the Hindus and the Mahommedans alone. Even the native states would be free to invade one another as well as the erstwhile British territory. The national leaders were confronted with the prognosis of terrible anarchy and wholesale genocide. What was the way out? The Indian National Congress gave in following the adage "something is better than nothing." But so far as Gandhi was concerned, he was still not reconciled to the idea of partition. He even floated an idea for the foreign rulers to appoint Jinnah as the Prime Minister and quit India.<sup>6</sup> But, both Mountbatten and to an extent the Congress under his spell, found Gandhi's suggestion impracticable.

Gandhi felt betrayed and let down. But once he came out of the trauma, he started wondering as to who he really was! What was the value or power of his solitary wish and views? In utter frustration he started to speak in an anguished idiom: "O God, please take me away!" He was completely frustrated and broken down. He carried on his mission of peace though. When a lady returning to Sevagram, asked for a message, he replied: "No; people must now be guided by what they have assimilated from my teaching. It is not good for them always to look for guidance from me. In fact, my prayer to God is to take me away from the bed of torture that life has become to me." To a friend he wrote: "There is no prospect of my ever returning to Sevagram." What an intuition!

Gandhi was let down, deserted, left alone. Even Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel apprised him of partition as a fait accompli after the decision was already taken! But there was no way out really. For, if the Congress were weakened it would be an incalculable harm to the country. There was no other viable force or credible leadership which could handle the Himalayan task of governance of the post-partition India.

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*Q: Why did Gandhi not resort to fast unto death against the partition the way he did with reference to his insistence on giving away fifty-five crores of rupees to Pakistan later?*

**A:** Gandhi himself has answered the question. While talking about a letter he had received stated to this effect:

*Who am I? As an individual I have no value. The people, whom I represented and spoke for, have deserted me. They do not share my views. They have accepted the partition. It might be their helplessness. I have an unswerving faith in my ways even today. But for whom shall I struggle when those whom I represented and fought for so far find the partition acceptable and have lost faith in me? The whole country has been staging the dance of death and violence. They are not happy with my plea for friendship, fraternity, peace, and love. The Hindus want to drive the Mahommedans out of this country. When the entire situation has changed, with whose support shall I fight for an integral and undivided nation? The negation of partition is no small job!*

The country was at last physically divided, but hearts could certainly be united. Gandhi had often expressed his desire to go to Pakistan to meet Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, and also to ascertain how in reality were implemented Jinnah's promises to the minorities. Gandhi had declared that he considered Pakistan

also his own country. Had he lived longer, the world should have perhaps witnessed him offering 'satyagraha' across the frontiers of Pakistan, the way he had done across the border of Transvaal in South Africa. This could be also his way of protest against the partition. He must have surely experienced a most painful sense of betrayal. Nevertheless, he also realised how helpless his associates were. The evil of partition was inevitable.

There was another aspect also. Some people had offered to rally round Gandhi if he chose to fight against the partition. But who were they really? They were only those who were opposed to Gandhi's way of love, peace, and nonviolence all along. They wanted to maintain the geographic or physical integrity of the country, but at the same time intensify and aggravate the communal dichotomy and reinforce the two-nation theory. They thought that the Muslims could live here merely as second class citizens. The essential Hinduism inheres the concept of non-duality, the whole world as a family. But here were the people who wanted to divide hearts; they were bent on settling scores. It is a fact universally acknowledged that once there is heart burning or split in a family, it would certainly be divided. The Hinduists had failed to recognize this fact; they refuse to face it even today. They might be loving the country. Who does not? But they are out and out for discrimination. They wanted to divide the children of the land as the privileged and the unprivileged. They had been fumbling for excuses to clash. If the Hindus and the Muslims were not divided, what should happen to their leadership, to their vocation and avocation? How could Gandhi join hands with such as they?

What is most intriguing, and calls for an explanation is this. Why did the Hinduists alone demand that Gandhi should have fasted against the partition? All along, they looked down upon him as a traitor, anti-Hindu, and deserving to be sacrificed. How come they looked forward to Gandhi's championing their cause, hands in gloves so to say? Where were then their own leaders—Savarkar, Hedgewar, Mookerji, Bhopatkar, Munje, Khare and others? They knew too well that barring one or two of them, fast, if at all undertaken by them, would have no moral effect on the masses, for they had not suffered or sacrificed anything

for the cause of freedom. The masses had hardly heard anything about them. Gandhi alone commanded that strength and stature. Gandhi had returned home during Tilak era. Savarkar then was a budding youth, ten years Gandhi's junior. There were some other leaders also. But how come they all failed to do anything akin to what Gandhi did? It was so simply because their words sounded hollow; they had no moral appeal. They had only one agenda—to poison the people's mind and sow therein the seeds of enmity and hatred and thus to provoke violence.

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*Q: You haven't yet referred to the giving away of fifty-five crores of rupees to Pakistan. Wasn't the fast undertaken merely to coerce the Government to pay off the money? Does it not reveal Gandhi's pro-Pakistan and pro-Muslim attitude?*

**A:** It would be inappropriate to describe this as his "pro-Muslim" attitude. Gandhi could foresee things; his vision was very wide, cosmic. Like the partition of the country, the division of the movable and immovable property of the country was done under the mediation of the British. Normally, therefore, Mountbatten would insist on India keeping the promise. He also talked to Gandhi in that context on January 6 and January 12. But Gandhi did not decide to undertake his fast on this issue. Gandhi himself has observed that when he arrived from Calcutta on September 9, on his way to the Punjab, Delhi, which once upon a time was overflowing with joy, appeared to be as desolate as a grave-yard. He at once realised that he had no way but to stay on at Delhi and work following the principle, "Do or die." On the eve of undertaking the fast he had stated that of late, he had been hearing some inner voice, but he could not arrive at any conclusion with reference to it. At least for three days prior to his going on fast, his mind was seized with that idea. It ought to also be conceded that it was his conviction that the payment of fifty five crores was the moral responsibility of the Government of India. How was it ever possible that the man, who was devoted to truth all his life and had rejected the policy of tit for tat (shatham prati shathyam) but followed the principle of truth and goodness

in response even to deception (shatham pratyapi satyam) would swerve from the path of truth in the nick of time? The moment Gandhi announced his decision to go on fast, Dr. Sushila Nayar, who took his constant care, "came running to me with the news—Gandhiji had decided to launch fast unto death unless the madness in Delhi ceased" writes Pyarelal, the brother of Dr. Nayar and author of "Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase."

(i) There was no reference whatsoever to fifty five crores of rupees here. Nonetheless, even in that climate of momentary and deep anguish the mention of the fifty five crores did not come out of her mouth which shows that the issue was not at all there. Maybe, some such words might have perhaps been missed by her, but there is not even a trace of anything of the sort in the statements of Gandhi made in a cool light of reason.

It would be untrue, hence, to say that he undertook the fast for this purpose. In case it was really so, Gandhi should have definitely mentioned it as a condition before going on fast. In fact there was not a single syllable about this in his statements. Secondly, acetone was traced in his urine on the third day of his fast, and although immediately there was no serious risk, there was a hazard of some permanent handicap and therefore he should have given up the fast. Moreover, on the very day, the Government of India had announced the decision to pay off the sum. In spite of there being these two sound reasons of giving up the fast, he did not do so. He broke his fast only when the committee headed by Rajendrababu assured him to take four steps towards the restoration of peace. (vide: Appendix-v). Nowhere was there any reference to the payment of fifty-five crores then.

(ii) Nor is there any reference in the declaration of the Government of India to suggest that the decision to pay off was ever in response to Gandhi's demand. (vide Appendix-iv)

(iii) In reply to a query, Gandhi clearly stated that his fast was not undertaken to condemn any action of the Home Ministry of the Indian government; the fast was undertaken in protest against the Hindus and the Sikhs of India and the Muslims in Pakistan. It was in defence of the minorities in India and Pakistan.

Things would be in perspective if one reads the texts of Gandhi's statements on January 12 and 13 as well as the proclamation of the Government of India printed here (vide Appendices-i, iii, iv). It is quite clear that nowhere is there any reference to the money. But it intensely troubled his mind that the subcontinent that had attained freedom following the way of peace and non-violence and was in a position to lead the world on the right way, was going to pieces through the acme of violence by spilling wholesale blood of their own brethren and molesting and raping women both in India and Pakistan. One of the desperate remedies to bring round the people who had gone mad in both the countries was to go on fast and nothing else.

Above all, he could perhaps perceive the effect of India's liberal attitude on the world. At a deeper level, he was hoping that India and Pakistan would be reunited failing which they would at least live in peace, love, and friendship. Even for an objective like this a gesture of sportsman spirit was quite essential. Gandhi's fast stemmed from this profoundly human aspiration. It had not failed. Maulvi of Bareilly had publicly stated in response to Gandhi's fast:

*There is no greater friend of Musalmans than you, whether in Pakistan or Hindustan. My heart bleeds with yours at recent Karachi and Gujarat (Pakistan) atrocities, the massacre of innocent men, women and children, forcible conversions and the abduction of women. These are crimes against Allah for which there is no pardon. Let the Pakistan government know that. Much less, can an Islamic state be founded upon such heinous crimes against Allah's creation? I order my followers in Pakistan and appeal to the Pakistan Muslims and government to put an end to these shameful, un-Islamic misdeeds and express unqualified repentance. My order to my followers and to the Muslims of Hindustan is....(that) they must remain loyal to you and to the Union Government to*

*the last....condemn the misdeeds of their co-religionists in Pakistan in unambiguous and emphatic terms to create public abhorrence against such action....It is high time that Musalmans should realise that their sincere loyalty to the union and their leaders' confidence in themselves are the only safeguards that can protect them. The secret desire to look to Pakistan for guidance and help will be their doom. Pray break your fast and save Hindustan and Pakistan from ruin, disaster and death”<sup>8</sup>*

Raja Ghazanafar Ali Khan, the Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation in Pakistan Government, in a press interview declared:

*The appalling degradation of morals which has manifested itself in both India and Pakistan during recent months called for a drastic remedy and Mahatma Gandhi has lodged his protest against these conditions in the extreme form....If the present state of affairs lasts, our hard-won freedom is bound to come to an inglorious end.<sup>9</sup>*

Moving references to Gandhiji's fast were made in the course of their speeches by the members on the floor of the West Punjab (Pakistan) Assembly. Malik Feroz Khan Noon remarked:

*“No country in the world has produced a greater man, religious founders apart, than Mahatma Gandhi.”<sup>10</sup>*

Mian Mumtaz Khan Daulatana, the Finance Minister, said that it was their foremost duty to appreciate

*the feeling which Mahatma Gandhi's fast reveals towards the Muslims. This shows that there is at least one man in India who is ready to sacrifice even his*

*life for Hindu-Muslim unity....I assure Mahatma Gandhi from the floor of this House that his feelings for the protection of minorities are fully shared by us.<sup>11</sup>*

The Chief Minister, the Khan of Mamdot, speaking on his own and his colleagues' behalf expressed:

*deep admiration and sincere appreciation with great feeling of concern for Mahatma Gandhi's great gesture for furtherance of a noble cause, no efforts will be spared in this province to help in saving his precious life.<sup>12</sup>*

A message from the High Commissioner for Pakistan in India, Zahid Hussain on a different occasion also shows similar feelings of respect for the Mahatma:

*Today the people of India—in which I include Pakistan—are suffering untold miseries and privations resulting from hatred and conflict. All eyes are turned to Mahatma Gandhi in the unparalleled crisis which has overtaken the country....India is in many ways a key to the future of the human race and we all hope and pray that inspired by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi she will play her part truly and well.<sup>13</sup>*

In another way also Gandhi's efforts were yielding definite results. Here is an excerpt from Pyarelal's "Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase"

*At about the same time, a deputation of four U. P. Muslims that had gone to West Punjab on a peace mission, submitted a report to Gandhiji on their return. In it they expressed the view that Hindus could now return to Lahore and live there in safety. The Sikhs however, would have to bide their time.*

*They went on to say Members of the U. P. Peace Mission assure their non-Muslim brethren that they would accompany those who wish to return to their homes and help to rehabilitate them. They would protect them with their lives and will not leave them till they feel safe.<sup>14</sup>*

Gandhi's fast impinged more on the Muslims, whereas vis-a-vis the Hinduists it proved rather counter-productive. The fundamentalists on both the sides, who were bent on having blood bath, whose hearts were filled up with the madness of massacre of the fellow-beings who practised what they called an alien religion, indulged in scaremongering and instigating the people. Misguided by these fanatic fundamentalists, confronted with the immediate violent scenario and influenced by reckless rumours, the people in both the countries had lost their sanity.

During the last days of his life Gandhi endeavoured ceaselessly to bring together the two countries to be united, at least to imbibe the harmony of the mind and heart eventually to see an undivided and united India! According to him there could be no conditions or compromise in the practice of virtues like love, non-violence and truth which are universal. But sadly the world is yet not ripe for it. Gandhi, however, walked alone preaching and practising it unto the very end of his life, on January 30, 1948.

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**Q:** *Will you please elucidate your statement that some citizens of Poona were at the root of the conspiracy to kill Gandhi? Please also explain: Why did leaders like Savarkar fail to influence the people unlike him? Why could they not launch 'movements' such as Gandhi did?*

**A:** Now that I am confronted with the question, I will speak hesitantly though. We had better not compare. Nobody can ever question Lok Manya Tilak's and Veer Savarkar's courage and patriotism. The other leaders, too, had their share in the march of Independence. This country ought to and will forever remain

indebted to them. But there seems to be a striking difference between Mahatma Gandhi and the other leaders.

The new age of non-violence and truth was around, on the wings of science. It called for new approaches. For instance, Tilak Maharaj and Veer Savarkar were arrested on the charges of treason for whatever they had done prompted by love and concern for the country. They denied the charges and unsuccessfully tried to defend themselves. The Government had also put similar charges on Gandhi but he faced them squarely and denied nothing in the court of law. On the contrary he went as far as to say that if whatever he had done for the freedom of the country was, according to them treason he did commit it and added that he would do so again once he was released. The British Judge, mightily impressed, called him a saint, although reluctantly sentencing him to six-year imprisonment. He was really sad to do so! Why?

The reason is apparent, as it seems to me. The new age had its own characteristic problems. The old, hackneyed methods would not work. The tit for tat policy was obsolete, irrelevant. The days were over when one could indulge in crooked ways and yet run away from the consequences. Moreover, science had struck at the very root of some sectarian and religious beliefs. A host of pertinent questions vis-a-vis myths and mythology arose in the social consciousness. In this larger context Hinduism per se appeared to be rather narrow as a mere creed. And Gandhiji entered the scene. He was second to none in his faith in God and Hinduism. He had gone even to the length of describing himself as a 'Sanatani Hindu'. The Hindu mind with its cosmic consciousness responded very well to his balanced and equanimous attitude to all religions alike and reverence for the deities thereof. He always commenced all his work with a prayer, the prayer including all major religions. The common man understood well and admired his love of God and his resignation to His will. In England he had come across Christians and studied Christianity. He had also come into contact with Islam in South Africa. As a consequence, there had arisen in his mind some doubts that were solved by Shrimad Rajchandra. Even during his days in South Africa, his prayers included the hymns of Hinduism,

Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Zarthustra. The universal human religion was manifest in his words, deeds, and thoughts. The new tendencies and approaches in tune with the new age were reflected in his life and action. There was no room for any narrow cult on the plane on which Gandhi stood, not even the constraints of Hinduism. Naturally the dogmatic Hinduists were ill at ease with him and could not come to terms with this.

Gandhi also advocated social change. He persevered to remove untouchability and the distinctions of castes and creeds, of the high and the low—the evils that had disturbed him right from his childhood. When his own sister offered to quit the ashram in protest against the rehabilitation of a 'Harijan' family down there, he let her go away. The donors at once withheld donations; the ashram was on the verge of collapse. But Gandhi did not swerve; he stood up firm sticking to his principles. His journals were entitled, 'Harijan'. He undertook Harijan pilgrimages countrywide and set up centers in the service of the tribals and Harijans. He brought the women out of the four walls of their homes and entrusted public service to them. The women in the country came up to the mark in public life, working shoulder to shoulder with men. All this did not please or suit the conservative Hinduist leaders, particularly from Poona. Incidentally, several leaders like Savarkar from Maharashtra were upset. They were all hurt.

The country was aware of Gandhi's work in South Africa which helped him in his public life. He accomplished three outstanding successes soon on his arrival. **(a)** The Government agreed to abolish the system of bonded labour for the emigrants to South Africa. **(b)** The notorious excise post at Viramgam in Gujarat was closed down. **(c)** He succeeded quite swiftly in putting to a stop the atrocities that were being inflicted on the farm labour in the indigo fields of Champaran. This was an extension and accentuation of his work in South Africa.

Soon afterwards he, along with his associates like Sardar Patel, had a number of achievements: Kheda Satyagraha, Bardoli Satyagraha, Nagpur Zanda Satyagraha etc., all in quick succession.

His stout protest, countrywide, against the Jalianwala Bagh genocide, the resolution for total freedom adopted by the Indian National Congress, and on top of it all the Salt March to Dandi, like an earthquake, shook the foundations of the British Empire.

The Hindu protagonists did not find all this congenial. So far as the 'religious' protagonists of Poona were concerned they had tasted power during the Peshwa regime. The cobra of the political and the religious power was beating its fangs in vain. Nothing could obstruct Gandhi's march. He became an eyesore. The only way open to them for their domination was to remove Gandhi who had come in their way. See how Godse speaks calculatingly and cunningly as well as those who cared to speak out saying that Gandhi did not say "Hey Rama!" while breathing his last. Their discomfort even on this minor point exposes their mindset. How would they concede to Gandhi an image of a devout Ramabhakta, the devotee of Rama? The rub was, so long as Gandhi lived, it was impossible to undermine his influence and hold of the Hindu mind. There was left only one way out—to eliminate him. And that is precisely what they eventually did.

This is the complex background of what they call the Poona conspiracy of Gandhi's murder. The conspiracies were hatched in the dark nooks and corners. Innocent young minds were also being poisoned. All sorts of stories were fabricated to arouse a sense of hatred and revenge. Gandhi's efforts to bring the minorities, especially the Muslims, into the main stream of the nation were distorted, misrepresented as a gesture of appeasement, as if he were out to humour them all. Thus a subtle strategy of lies and hatred was steadily evolved. Not many were hoodwinked, but so far as the elimination of Gandhi was concerned, even one was enough! All that was needed was a blind fanatic, hell bent on destroying good; and Nathuram Godse was one such.

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*Q: One more thing baffles us. Is it true that Gandhi could not speak to the Muslims in as harsh terms as he spoke to the Hindus?*

**A:** Gandhi was a Hindu and called himself 'Sanatani'. When he spoke to the Hindus he did feel he was also one of them. Ordinarily he did not speak in a harsh language to anyone. Nonetheless, at times, in a mood of unrest and frustration, he did have a recourse to strong terms. Please read the excerpts from "Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase":

*Some Delhi Maulanas came to Gandhiji on the following day. They brought with them a few rusty arms which they said the Muslims had surrendered in response to his appeal. Gandhiji told them that it was mere eye-wash. It betokened no change of heart on their part. The Maulanas said that Gandhiji's arrival had effected a "great change" in the outlook of the local Muslims. They were sanguine that before long "complete peace would reign in the city."*

*Their hyperbolic and evasive replies hurt Gandhiji "Do not deceive yourselves," he sternly warned them. "My stay here will avail the Muslims nothing if they do not thoroughly cleanse their hearts."<sup>15</sup>*

During the last week of December 1947, in the course of his prayer-talk, Gandhi said:

*I would, therefore, urge the Muslim minority to rise superior to the poisonous atmosphere and lay down the thoughtless prejudice by proving by their exemplary conduct that the only honourable way of living in the Union is that they should be full citizens without any mental reservations.*

He was painfully conscious of the atrocities against the Hindus in Pakistan. And he used to draw the attention of Muslims in India and reminded them of their duty in the situation:

*The talk with Shaheed was still in progress when a group of local Muslims came. Gandhiji repeated to them this advice. They must set forth their views in a public statement if they felt that the minorities in Pakistan were not getting a fair deal and boldly and unequivocally say that this was disgrace to Pakistan and stigma on Islam. The Muslim friends admitted that Pakistan's treatment of minorities was oppressive, unethical and un-Islamic; they thoroughly disapproved of it. They further said that it was in Pakistan's hand to insure the safety of the Indian Muslims by according proper treatment to the minorities in Pakistan."*<sup>16</sup>

On January 11, some nationalist Maulanas, who were determined to live in India and not emigrate to Pakistan but were being harassed here, called on Gandhi and complained to him, adding that they had better be packed off to England instead. Gandhi pulled them up saying:

*....You call yourselves nationalist Muslims and speak like this? Referring to this during the evening prayer he said, "In Pakistan the Muslims had gone mad and had driven away most of the Hindus and Sikhs. If the Hindus in the Union did likewise, it would spell their own ruin."*

On January 13, before going on fast he said:

*That destruction is certain if Pakistan ensures no equality of status and security of life and property*

*for all professing the various faiths of the world, and if India copies her only then Islam dies in the two Indias, not in the world.*

On that very day there flashed the news that the train from Pakistan was attacked and a huge number of Hindus and Sikhs who were travelling were all massacred. That evening, at the end of the prayer, Gandhi spoke in a most agonised tone:

*How long can the Union put up with such things? How long can I bank upon the patience of the Hindus and Sikhs in spite of my fast? Pakistan has to put a stop to this state of affairs.<sup>17</sup>*

Gandhi had said a lot of such things during the days of violence that had enveloped India and Pakistan. Those who wish to know all about it in greater depth are requested to read "Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase" by Pyarelal.

There is abundant material in the book that is apt to satisfy not only one's intellectual curiosity, but also unfold hard facts against the widespread falsehood that is being woven around Mahatma Gandhi, one of the greatest men of all time. Whenever one tries to measure a man of Gandhi's stature, it is sure to end up in measuring oneself! How could we presume to sit in judgement over Gandhi? Nevertheless if we do, let us not turn our back on truth, truth for which, Gandhi lived and died.

## EPILOGUE

Ramesh Dave

Gandhi's life story is an epic of great magnitude, a rare human phenomenon. What is revealed here is just a ripple of the waves reaching out for the shores of light. The writer of this tract, every inch a Gandhian in his eighties, felt impelled to apply his mind to a sort of research in his cottage at Sabarmati Ashram, the project that could be possible only at a university. The play to him was just a catalyst in his lifelong quest of the Mahatma; and we have a human document.

The play on Godse does not at all merit any attention. It deserves to be ignored and discarded. Truth alone prevails, not falsehood, no matter how cunningly concocted. But a moment like this has one advantage: an opportunity to speak out the truth and save the innocent and uncritical audiences from being trapped into untruth. The wholesale distortion of facts does hardly any damage to Gandhi. He is far above all petty squabbling. But if all this goes unchallenged, the silent response affords an immense, hushed scope for the lies to thrive; and the mist of misunderstanding might blur our own view, leaving us all the poorer in human worth. The play is mere perversity, not art.

It is our moral responsibility, hence, to acquaint ourselves and the world with truth and nothing but the truth. Why did we not awake earlier in the face of such a nefarious propaganda of lies? Half a century has rolled away across falsehood. Should we not discharge our debt to both truth and Gandhi by taking facts to the doorsteps of the people?

In Gandhi's vision there was no place for communalism. The people of India—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs—were to him all God's children and destined to be one nation. How stupid and merciless are the forces that tend to mar this irrevocable destiny! This is a moment of reckoning. How untenable and untrue is the argument that Gandhi was so very pro-Muslim and anti-Hindu that he deserved to be sacrificed? To try to stick any label to the hero of humanity is

patently absurd. He was far above all creeds and cults. His religion was humanity, his aim truth. And when he was confronted with the violent scenario where humanity was being uprooted, what option did he have other than to walk alone even to the end of life in the pursuit of humanity and truth? So far as his endeavour to achieve communal harmony was concerned, the efforts were also afoot to bring the Muslims into the mainstream of the nation even prior to his return from South Africa. The idea of partition in fact, arose out of the Pandora's box of narrow and self-centred politics fostered by the imperial policy: "Divide and rule". One truth, however, stands out like a light house to lead us out of ignorance. In all there were about ten attempts on the life of the Mahatma out of which eight took place years before any idea either of partition or payment of fifty-five crores of rupees to Pakistan had at all arisen.

The game to kill Gandhi had started off while Pakistan did not even exist in anyone's wildest fantasy. As for fifty-five crores of rupees, what was all the money worth as against the pursuit of restoring humanity, peace, and love in a world fractured by widespread violence and hatred? 'Gandhivadh', Gandhi's sacrifice, was a myth invented to justify the ways of evil, a fabric without facts and substance. That Gandhi found the money trash against the value of non-violence and truth was not an 'offence' meriting murder. It was a ray of light for us who were lost like the babes in a darkling wood. He was ever ready to sacrifice everything, even his own life to maintain integrity and unity of the country. The assassination of Gandhi was not an individual act. It was the waste of good involved in the process of expulsion of unbridled violence and evil as a result of mass madness. It was a great human tragedy. The light that guided us for years was put out on the flimsy excuses devoid of all truth.

Mankind had to wait for nearly two thousand years since Jesus. But when Gandhi came to 'lead kindly light,' he, too, was crucified. It is hard not to echo Saint Joan's words: "O God, that made this beautiful earth, when will it be fit to receive thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?"

## APPENDIX 1

### GANDHIJI'S SPEECH AT THE PRAYER MEETING

New Delhi,

January 12, 1948

One fasts for health's sake under laws governing health or fasts as a penance for a wrong done and felt as such. In these fasts, the fasting one need not believe in Ahimsa. There is, however, a fast which a votary of non-violence sometimes feels impelled to undertake by way of protest against some wrong done by society and this he does when he, as a votary of Ahimsa, has no other remedy left.

Such an occasion has come my way. When on September 9, I returned to Delhi from Calcutta, I was to proceed to West Punjab. But that was not to be. Delhi looked a city of the dead. As I alighted from the train I observed gloom on every face. I saw that even the Sardar, whom humour and the joy that humour gives never desert, was no exception this time.

The cause of it I did not know. He was on the platform to receive me. He lost no time in giving me the sad news of the disturbances that had taken place in the metropolis of the Union. At once I saw that I had to be in Delhi and do or die.

There is apparent calm brought about by prompt military and police action. But there is storm within the breast. It may burst forth any day. This I count as no fulfillment of the vow to "do" which alone can keep me from death, the incomparable friend. I yearn for hearty friendship between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. It subsisted between them the other day. Today it is non-existent. It is a state that no Indian patriot worthy of the name can contemplate with equanimity.

Though the voice within has been beckoning for a long time, I have been shutting my ears to it lest it might be the voice of Satan, otherwise called my

weakness. I never like to feel resourceless; a satyagrahi never should. Fasting is his last resort in the place of the sword—his or others.

I have no answer to return to the Muslim friends who see me from day to day as to what they should do. My impotence has been gnawing at me of late. It will go immediately the fast is undertaken. I have been brooding over it for the last three days. The final conclusion has flashed upon me and it makes me happy. No man, if he is pure, has anything more precious to give than his life. I hope and pray that I have that purity in me to justify the step. I ask you all to bless the effort and to pray for me and with me.

The fast begins from the first meal tomorrow (Tuesday). The period is indefinite and I may drink water with or without salts and sour limes. It will end when and if I am satisfied that there is a reunion of hearts of all communities brought about without any outside pressure but from an awakened sense of duty.

The reward will be the regaining of India's dwindling prestige and her fast-fading sovereignty over the heart of Asia and there through the world. I flatter myself with the belief that the loss of her soul by India will mean the loss of the hope of the aching, storm-tossed and hungry world. Let no friend or foe, if there be one, be angry with me. There are friends who do not believe in the method of the fast for reclamation of the human mind. They will bear with me and extend to me the same liberty of action that they claim for themselves.

With God as my supreme and sole counselor, I felt that I must take the decision without any other advise. If I have made a mistake and discover it, I shall have no hesitation in proclaiming it from the house-top and retracing my faulty step. There is little chance of my making such a discovery. If there is a clear indication, as I claim there is, of the Inner Voice, it will not be gainsaid. I plead for all absence of argument and inevitable endorsement of the step. If the whole of India responds or at least Delhi does, the fast might be soon ended.

But whether it ends soon or late or never, let there be no softness in dealing with what may be termed as a crisis. Critics have regarded some of my previous

fasts as coercive and held that on merits the verdict would have gone against my stand but for the pressure exercised by the fasts.

What value can an adverse verdict have when the purpose is demonstrably sound? A pure fast, like duty, is its own reward. I do not embark upon it for the sake of the result it may bring. I do so because I must. Hence I urge everybody dispassionately to examine the purpose and let me die, if I must, in peace which I hope is ensured. Death for me would be a glorious deliverance rather than that I should be a helpless witness of the destruction of India, Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam. That destruction is certain if Pakistan does not ensure equality of status and security of life and property for all professing the various faiths of the world and if India copies her. Only then Islam dies in the two Indias, not in the world. But Hinduism and Sikhism have no world outside India. Those who differ from me will be honoured by me for their resistance however implacable. Let my fast quicken conscience, not deaden it.

Just contemplate the rot that has set in in beloved India and you will rejoice to think that there is a humble son of hers who is strong enough and possibly pure enough to take the happy step. If he is neither, he is a burden on earth. The sooner he disappears and clears the Indian atmosphere of the burden, the better for him and all concerned.

I would beg of all friends not to rush to Birla House nor try to dissuade me or be anxious for me. I am in God's hands. Rather they should turn the searchlight inwards, for this is essentially a testing-time for all of us. Those who remain at their posts of duty and perform it diligently and well, now more so than hitherto, will help me and the cause in every way. The fast is a process of self-purification.

*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 90 Page 408*

## APPENDIX 2

### GANDHIJI'S SPEECH AT THE PRAYER MEETING

New Delhi,  
January 13, 1948

BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

Today I may not finish my speech in 15 minutes as usual, as I have much to say.

Today I have come to the prayer meeting because for the first twenty-four hours after beginning a fast, the body does not feel it or should not feel it. I began eating at half past nine this morning. People kept coming and talking to me. I finished eating a little before eleven. So I have been able to come to the meeting and this is not surprising. Today I can walk about and sit up and I have also done some work. From tomorrow there will be some change. Rather than coming here and not speaking, I might as well sit in my room and think. If I have to utter the name of God, I can do it there. I therefore feel that I shall not be coming to the prayer meeting from tomorrow. But if you do wish to join in the prayer you may come if you feel like it. The girls will come and sing the prayer. At least one of them will come. I have told you my programme in case you should feel disappointed at my not coming.

I had written down yesterday's speech and it has been published in the newspapers. Now that I have started my fast many people cannot understand what I am doing. Who are the offenders—Hindus or Sikhs or Muslims? How long will the fast last? I say I do not blame anyone. Who am I to accuse others? I have said that we have all sinned. That does not mean that any one particular man has sinned. Hindus in trying to drive out the Muslims are not following Hinduism. And today it is both Hindus and Sikhs who are trying to do so. But I do not accuse all the Hindus and Sikhs because not all of them are doing it. People should understand this. If they do not, my purpose will not be realized and the fast too will not be terminated. If I do not survive the fast, no one is to be blamed. If I am proved unworthy, God will take me away. People ask me if my fast is intended for the cause of the Muslims. I admit that that is so. Why?

Because Muslims here today have lost everything in the world. Formerly they could depend on the Government. There was also the Muslim League. Today the Muslim League is no longer there. The League got the country partitioned and even after the partition there are large numbers of Muslims here. I have always held that those who have been left behind in India should be given all help. It is only humanity.

Mine is a fast of self-purification. Everyone should purify himself. If not, the situation cannot be saved. If everyone is to purify himself, Muslims will also purify themselves. Everyone should cleanse his heart. No one should find fault with the Muslims whatever they may do. If I confess before someone that I have done wrong, then it is a kind of atonement.

I do not say this in order to appease the Muslims or anyone else. I want to appease myself which means that I want to appease God. I do not want to be a sinner against God. Muslims also must become pure and live peacefully in India. What happened was that for election purposes Hindus and Sikhs recognized the Muslim League. I shall not go into that history. Then followed the partition. But before partition became a fact the hearts had already become divided. Muslims were also at fault here, though we cannot say that they alone were at fault. Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, all are to blame. Now all of them have to become friends again. Let them look to God, not to Satan. Among the Muslims too there are many who worship Satan. Among the Hindus and the Sikhs many worship not Nanak and other Gurus, but Satan. In the name of religion we have become irreligious.

Since I have undertaken the fast for the cause of the Muslims, a great responsibility has come to devolve on them. They must understand that if they are to live with the Hindus as brothers they must be loyal to the Indian Union, not to Pakistan. I shall not ask them whether they are loyal or not. I shall judge them by their conduct.

Then the name of the Sardar is being mentioned. The Muslims say that I am good, but the Sardar is not and he must be removed. They say that Jawaharlal too is good. They say if I join the Government it will be a good thing. They

object only to the Sardar. I must tell the Muslims that their argument serves no purpose, because the Government is the whole Cabinet, neither the Sardar nor Jawahar by himself. They are your servants. You can remove them. Yes, Muslims alone cannot remove them. But at least they can bring to the Sardar's notice any mistakes which in their opinion he commits. It will not do merely to criticize him by quoting some statement or other he might have made. You must say what he has done. You must tell me. I meet him often and I shall bring it to his notice. Jawaharlal can dismiss him and if he does not, there must be some reason. He praises the Sardar. Then the Government is responsible for whatever the Sardar does. You too are responsible for he is your representative. That is how things go in a democracy. Therefore I shall say that the Muslims must become brave and fearless. They should also become God-fearing. They must think that for them there is no League, no Congress, no Gandhi, no Jawaharlal but only God; that they are here in the name of God. Let them not take offence at whatever Hindus and Sikhs may do. I am with them, I want to live and die with them. If I cannot keep you united, my life is worthless. The Muslims thus carry a great responsibility. They must not forget this.

The Sardar is blunt of speech. What he says sometimes sounds bitter. The fault is in his tongue. I can testify that his heart is not like his tongue. He has said in Lucknow and in Calcutta that all Muslims should live here and can live here. He also told me that he could not trust those Muslims who till the other day followed the League and considered themselves enemies of Hindus and Sikhs and who could not have changed overnight and suddenly become friends. If the League is still there who will they obey, Pakistan or our Government? The League's persistence in its old attitude makes him suspect it, and rightly so. He says that he no longer has faith in the bona fides of the League Muslims and he cannot trust them. Let them prove that they can be trusted. Then I have the right to tell the Hindus and Sikhs what they should do.

The song these girls sang was composed by Gurudev. We sang it during our tours in Noakhali. A man walking alone calls others to come and join him. But if no

one comes and it is dark, the Poet says, the man should walk alone because God is already with him. I asked the girls especially to sing this song which is in Bengali. Otherwise they would have sung only Hindustani songs. The Hindus and Sikhs should cultivate this attitude if they are true to their religions. They should not generate an atmosphere in which the Muslims should be compelled to flee to Pakistan. Hindus and Sikhs should become brave and show that even if all the Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan were to be killed there would be no retaliation in India. I do not want to live to see our people copy Pakistan. If I am to live I shall ask every Hindu and every Sikh not to touch a single Muslim. It is cowardice to kill Muslims and we must become brave and not cowards.

I shall terminate the fast only when peace has returned to Delhi. If peace is restored to Delhi it will have effect not only on the whole of India but also on Pakistan and when that happens, a Muslim can walk around in the city all by himself. I shall then terminate the fast. Delhi is the capital of India. It has always been the capital of India. So long as things do not return to normal in Delhi, they will not be normal either in India or in Pakistan. Today I cannot bring Suhrawardy here because I fear someone may insult him. Today he cannot walk about in the streets of Delhi. If he did he would be assaulted. What I want is that he should be able to move about here even in the dark. It is true that he made efforts in Calcutta only when Muslims became involved. Still, he could have made the situation worse, if he had wanted, but he did not want to make things worse. He made the Muslims evacuate the places they had forcibly occupied and said that he being the Premier could do so. Although the places occupied by the Muslims belonged to Hindus and Sikhs he did his duty. Even if it takes a whole month to have real peace established in Delhi it does not matter. People should not do anything merely to have me terminate the fast.

So my wish is that Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians, and Muslims who are in India should continue to live in India and India should become a country where everyone's life and property are safe. Only then will India progress.

*Speech at the Prayer Meeting, New Delhi, January 13, 1948,  
Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi Vol-90, P. 413*

### APPENDIX 3

....My fast, as I have stated in plain language, is undoubtedly on behalf of the Muslim minority in the Union and, therefore, it is necessarily against the Hindus and Sikhs of the Union and the Muslims of Pakistan.

It is also on behalf of the minorities in Pakistan as in the case of the Muslim minority in the Union.

*Excerpt from the Speech at Prayer Meeting, New Delhi, January 15, 1948,  
Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi Vol-90, P. 428-429*

#### APPENDIX 4

On the third day of Gandhiji's fast, the Government of India in a communique announced that it had decided to pay Pakistan immediately the sum of rupees 55 crores. While justifying "on legal and other grounds" the position they had taken up before, they challenged the arguments advanced by the Pakistan Government as being contrary to facts. The communique went on to say:

The Government have shared the world-wide anxiety over the fast undertaken by....the Father of the Nation. In common with him they have anxiously searched for ways and means to bury the hatchet of ill-will, prejudice and suspicion, which has poisoned the relations of India and Pakistan. Impelled by earnest desire to help in every way open to them in the object which Gandhiji has at heart, the Government have sought for some tangible and striking contribution to the movement for ending the physical suffering of the Nation's soul and to turn the nation's mind from the present distemper, bitterness and suspicion to constructive and creative effort. The Government is anxious to remove as far as possible, without detriment to the national good, every cause which leads to friction between India and Pakistan.

*Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase by Pyarelal Vol-II, p 718*

## APPENDIX 5

The peace Committee again met on the morning of the 18th January. The absentees of the previous night were present. The representatives of all the important groups and organisations in the city were there, including representatives of the refugees from Karol Bagh, Sabzimandi and Paharganj, the three worst-affected parts of the city. They all accepted the conditions laid down by Gandhiji and gave their signatures to the following pledge:

We wish to announce that it is our heartfelt desire that Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and members of other communities should once again live in Delhi like brothers and in perfect amity. We take the pledge that we shall protect the life, property and faith of the Muslims and that the incidents which have taken place in Delhi will not happen again.

1. We want to assure Gandhiji that the annual fair at Khwaja Qutabuddin's mausoleum will be held this year as in previous years.
2. The Muslims will be able to move about in Sabzimandi, Karol Bagh, Paharganj and other localities just as they could in the past.
3. The mosques which have been left by the Muslims and which are now in the possession of Hindus and Sikhs will be returned. The areas which have been set apart for the Muslims will not be forcibly occupied.
4. We shall not object to the return to Delhi of the Muslims who have migrated from here if they choose to come back, and the Muslims shall be able to carry on their business as before. We give the assurance that all these things will be done by our personal efforts and not with the help of the police or the military.

We request Mahatmaji to believe us and give up his fast and continue to lead us as he has done hitherto.

While the signatures were being collected, news came over the phone from Birla House that Gandhiji's condition had suddenly worsened. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, with some members of the Committee, thereupon hurried to Birla

House to explain to Gandhiji in advance the conditions agreed to by the members of the Peace Committee. It would have taken some time for all the members to assemble there and every minute counted.

When all the members had arrived in Birla House, Gandhiji's room was packed to capacity. The gathering included Pandit Nehru and Maulana Azad, Zahid Husain, the High Commissioner for Pakistan, and representatives of the Delhi Muslims, the R.S.S., the Hindu Mahasabha and various Sikh organizations. The Delhi Administration was represented by the Chief Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner of Delhi.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad narrated how they had on the previous night after full discussion decided to sign the declaration then and there. But as representatives of some organisations were not present in that meeting they felt they should wait till the remaining signatures were obtained. This had since been done. In the morning meeting even those who had some lingering doubts on the previous night were confident that they could now, with a full sense of their responsibility, ask Gandhiji to break the fast. It had been decided to set up a number of committees to implement the pledge. In view of the guarantees that had jointly and severally been given. Dr. Rajendra Prasad proceeded, they all hoped that Gandhiji would now break his fast. A member described how a procession of 150 Muslims had been taken that morning to Sabzimandi, where they were greeted with fruits and refreshment by the Hindus.

Replying, Gandhiji said that they had given him all that he had asked for, but if their words meant that they held themselves responsible for communal peace in Delhi only and what happened in other places was no concern of theirs, then their guarantee was nothing worth and he would feel, and they too would one day realise, that it was a big blunder on his part to have given up his fast. They should clearly realise the implications of their pledge. What they had achieved in Delhi had to be realised in the whole of India. If things in Delhi were set right, it would set things right in Pakistan, too.

*Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase, by Pyarelal, Vol-II, pp, 728-29-30.*

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## CHARGE-SHEET

The Hinduists indulge in the various strategies of deception. They try to convince that Swami Vivekanand, Subhash Babu, Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad and the other martyrs were also Hinduists. But not one of them was a Hinduist or a fundamentalist. But there has been a ceaseless and subtle propaganda to inhibit the people's mind that way. Another such lie is to depict Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel as a partisan Hinduist. Here are two excerpts from Sardar Patel's correspondence:

"As regards the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha, the case relating to Gandhiji's murder is subjudice and I should not like to say anything about the participation of the two organisations, but our reports do confirm that as result of the activities of these two bodies, particularly the former, an atmosphere was created in the country in which such a ghastly tragedy became possible. There is no doubt in my mind the extreme section of the Hindu Mahasabha was involved in this conspiracy. The activities of the RSS constituted a clear threat to the existence of the Government and the State."

18.7.48

Vallabhbhai Patel

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*(From the letter addressed to Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. Sardar Patel's correspondence; Vol. VI, p. 323, Navjivan-1973)*

Sardar Patel in his letter dated 11<sup>th</sup> September 1948, addressed to Sarsangh Chalak of the R.S.S. wrote:

"The speeches of the Sangh leaders are poisonous. It is as a result of this venom that Mahatma Gandhi has been assassinated. The followers of the Sangh have celebrated Gandhiji's assassination by distributing sweets. "

*"R.S.S. Kaal, Aaj, Udyaa" 1983, Pub. RSS, p. 71*