



Twilight of India's Independence

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Interim Government, Cabinet mission, Executive Council, INC, Muslim League.

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ABSTRACT *Transfer of power to India from British rulers in the year of 1947 was an eventful period which was marred with prolonged debates, negotiations and table talks with British authorities. Formation and eventual failure of interim government, appointment of Lord Mountbatten for awarding independence to India at a lightning speed were among those interesting episodes which made their indelible impressions in the pages of Indian history. This paper in a very succinct manner highlights only few of such episodes in a very brushing manner to refurbish the memories of history lovers.*

After the failure of Interim Government Viceroy Wavell who returned to England for a brief hibernation did not have montage of good experience to share with anyone. He was dejected and was sullen as his plan was still not accepted in totality both by Congress and Muslim League. Interim Government was formed but the members were not interwoven in a thread of unity directed towards the interest of the nation. The aftermath of Direct Action Day did play a spoil sport by effacing the reconciliatory efforts taken so far. It was rather a difficult task to colligate the events that made Interim Government initially handicapped and later dysfunctional because Muslim League though joined Interim Government had declined to join the Executive Council. No amount of gemutlich persona of Wavell could yield substantial breakthrough. Provenance of Interim Government proved one thing that it was a dog in the manger like attitude which kept the unified governance of India at the bay.

Wavell was shangaied off his multiple plans for India by utter discordance and vitriolic political attack between the two major parties. An intentional shilly shallying tactics adopted by Congress and Muslim League kept India lingering under British rule. Wavell was about to return to India but this time he was feckless and disillusioned. However, it is worth mentioning that Wavell did not take leave of his aplomb. He persuasively kept on asking the Congress to accept the 16 May Statement without reservations. He repeatedly requested the Muslim League to join the Constituent Assembly. Congress wanted unified India and assured Muslim League that all their demands and legitimate aspirations would be met forthwith once India had her own Constitution. However, the promise of Congress was regarded as a political claptrap by Muslim League and hence League denied joining the Executive Council. Thus no party proved to be stickler to inherent philosophy of 16 May Statement.

Unfortunately, it was a poor nescience of Wavell that he could not gauge that his grotesque caricature started to be drawn. Atlee, in a single stroke, careened the long held career of Wavell. Soon it was announced that Wavell would be replaced by Mountbatten as new Viceroy of India.

Mountbatten was attracted by Attlee's offer of appointing him the Viceroy of India. He looked a bit iridescent and happy. He wanted to produce a blockbuster of his life time. He did not want to get trapped in a banality of a streak of bad luck and in an allegory of optimism and pessimism like Wavell did. He wished a clear statement which would indicate the British determination not to perpetuate their over-lordship which the Vice regal system symbolized. Mountbatten debonairly wanted to deck up his entry into India with an open invitation by Indian parties in a capacity which they would themselves define.

The Prime Minister of Britain achieved counter valence by giving Mountbatten a definite time limit for terminating the British Raj in India. He wanted June 1, 1948 as a date of British flight to take off from India but this was held to be too stickler and definite a date, and ultimately, the British Cabinet agreed to June 1948. Mountbatten was laden with special powers and privileges as British Government had an intention this time to project him as a stern winder troubleshooter. Atlee seemed to have given a serious heed to the camarilla of his coterie.

Without an element of political hocus-pocus and grandiloquent parlance, on February 20, 1947, the British Prime Minister Attlee made a statement in the House of Commons declaring that it was the definite intention of the British Government to withdraw from India by a date not later than June 1948. Attlee further declared that if birth of acceptable Constitution as per Cabinet Mission Plan fails to take place then British Government shall exploit her own discretion and political judgment as to whom the power should be handed over by the specified date.

With Atlee's pronouncement, Congress and Muslim League started unleashing their vatic sense. For them it was now clear beyond any iota of doubt that British business in India would soon be over. The political jingoism was at its peak. The more they sensed the proximity to India's freedom, the more they appeared to be ignivomous against each other. Instead of vouchsafing the underline principles of Cabinet Mission Plan, they looked to be flexing their muscles to see their ultimate dreams come true. The League was apparently ready for flagitious leadership as it wanted to weaken the central government to maximum possible extent by causing it irreparable damages and severe psychological dents. Muslim League leaders were indulged into fanfaronades as they visualized taking over the Muslim majority provinces wholesale, even those where League ministries did not exist.

Now Jinnah started feeling restless like fish out of water for not being there in a driving seat. He knew unless Congress Government is driven out of Interim Government and unless Muslim League takes reins of control in its hand, the Pakistan of his dream would remain a distant reality. He, therefore, took out the whip to virtually marmalise the Congress Government. He decided to launch a Muslim mass movement to bring down a Constitutional Government by unconstitutional means. This led to ostromogulous incidences of serious communal strife, widespread violence of horripilating nature, orgies of murder and arson, and populous cities like Amritsar and Multan became scenes of horror and devastation.

The head of opposition party, Churchill was a hardcore

imperialist. For him peripheral matters like situation in India, international opinion, cost associated with holding on to India were not consequential matters. It was not only an appetite of imperialism which was so acute in Churchill but he was equally a leader of ignominious self esteem and ego. He was a kind of a military leader who would like to raise his iron hand against the subjects of British Empire. He lambasted Atlee's announcement and Labor Government for expressing strong commitment to effectively transfer the power to Indians by definite time span.

Back in India, both Congress and Muslim League appeared to be heading to meet their Waterloo. Nothing between them now left to be called Milk of Human Kindness. The unkindest cut of all was that now they were planning to dethrone each other and part their ways permanently. The seeds of province partition were being watered. To a neutral observer, it might have felt like both the parties were using sledgehammer to crack the nut. It was a fact that the things had gone beyond any possibility of mending the fences. The possibility of reunion through negotiations seemed vanished into the thin air. Congress Working Committee finally decided to pass resolution condemning the League's unlawful activities and demanding the partition of Punjab.

It was felt by the senior members of Congress Working Committee that it was not a lugubrious decision on the part of Congress to go ahead with the partition of Punjab but an appropriate decision to kill the malafied intention of Muslim League to pocket the whole of Punjab. Now with the division of Punjab into Muslim and non-Muslim base, Muslim League would get just minuscule of Punjab and their ugly intention of galloping the whole of Punjab would get killed in the nip.

With the success of sponsored disturbances at Punjab, now Muslim League wanted to produce the replica of the same in North West Frontier Province. The lacuna which was hitting Muslim League members was that they didn't prove to be successful in pocketing the whole of Punjab province. Without pocketing of North West Frontier, creation of Pakistan was like crying for moon and getting the sand particles in hands. A strong Congress Ministry under towering and influential leadership of Khan Sahib was ruling North West Frontier. For Muslim League the possibility of galloping the whole of North West Frontier seemed even murkier.

It was a multidimensional crisis at play in India as new nations were about to be created. The fate of newly created minorities was hanging loose in the balance. No one knew whether they would become the victims of ruthless arm of vengeance from majority or they will be forcefully migrated. The anxious discussions were playing heavy on Indian psyche regarding its ultimate fate as unified India or divided India. The British Government itself found to be totally unprepared because the manner of haste in which Mountbatten was asked to transfer the power to India gave birth to large scale sense of insecurity and ultimate violent frontal attack from both sides.

It makes a huge difference in the leadership characteristics of some individuals which makes them undisputable immortal iconic leaders. Gandhi was one of such leaders who did never have any sort of conflict for vested interest. When India was on the threshold of freedom, this ascetic leader was indulged in pacifying the wounds inflicted by Direct Action Day violence. He held a larger view in his eyes and grand dream in his heart for the mankind. His moments were filled with utter sadness ever since Congress, though with heavy heart, gave concurrence to division of Bengal and Punjab. During one of such sad moments, he suggested to Viceroy that he should invite Jinnah to form the government on behalf of Muslim League. He also assured that if such government works in the larger interest of the citizens of India then Congress would lend her support to it. Somehow, Gandhi wanted to avert the crisis of division of the country on communal lines. He

wanted to reverse the psychological readiness of the people for division of the country.

Gandhi had never adopted a short cut approach to solve the problem. Gandhi was not in any kind of hurry and was ready to prolong his struggle against British Empire even for ten more years to save partition of the country. In the pursuit of the righteous cause, hardships were a joy worth suffering for him. He loved till last breath of his life the struggle with utmost values and selflessness which gave birth to wonderful philosophies like non violence and passive disobedience against unjust tyrannical government.

Jinnah argued that many smaller states than the proposed Pakistan existed in Europe and other countries. For Jinnah, small Pakistan was thousand times better than living under the suffocation of reservations and secondary status. Therefore despite of all round talks about non viability of moth eaten Pakistan with Mountbatten, Jinnah did never give any heed to the same. So adroit a politician he was. In spite of having six meetings between Jinnah and the Viceroy, the output was a big zero. Jinnah was not ready to budge even an inch from his demand of separate Pakistan. Jinnah was arguing in favor of the division of India on the basis of a complete surgical operation and Mountbatten was countering by pressing the absolute necessity of dividing the Punjab and Bengal.

One of the toughest moments in the life of Nehru was to communicate with a somber voice about inevitable tragedy of India's partition to the people of India. Up till now there was a murmurings and hearsays about India was heading for tearful disconnect. The situational leadership accounts for rising to the situation no matter how grim it is. Nehru did not choose to shy away from the people of India though his heart was lacerated and mind was not ready to come to the term with the fact unity and integrity of India has ultimately been bulldozed. He knew what he is required to tell to the people was going to be sadly inscribed in the hearts of millions and millions forever and ever.

Nehru broadcast his announcement on June 3. It was not easy for him to announce that the Congress had agreed for partition. Hence with heavy heart, he said, "It is with no joy in my heart that I commend these proposals to you, though I have no doubt in my mind that this is the right course. For generations we have dreamt and struggled for a free and independent united India. The proposals to allow certain parts to secede, if they so will, is painful for any of us to contemplate. Nevertheless, I am convinced that our present decision is the right one even from the larger viewpoint... There has been violence... in various parts of the country. This must end. We are determined to end it... On this the eve of great changes in India we have to make a fresh start with clear vision and a firm mind, with steadfastness and tolerance and a stout heart."

Conclusion

The transfer of power from Britain to India did not happen at the drop of a hat. It was an excruciatingly a lengthy philosophical battle between Indian leaders and the British authorities for staying ahead of the political curve. Britain's appetite for colonization and eye popping cock and bull story to justify its action of invading the sovereignty of other nation was responsible factor for inhuman catastrophe. It is a saga of a tragic scandal of Empire which ended by inflicting deep wounds on the fiber of the nation.

Indian National Congress a platform created by A.O. Hume, Dadabhai Nauroji and Dinshaw Wacha along with others was aptly exploited by Gandhi. Lord Dufferin and A.O Hume were quite apt to timely understand that resentments in the minds of Indian people were growing against British Empire. They could sense the silent magnitude of resentment which could repeat the tragedy of 1857. Britain was neither oblivious nor wanted to have the history of 1857 to be repeated. Hence

the razor sharp minds of Lord Dufferin and A.O.Hume came out with a plan to create a 'safety valve' which would release the pressure of resentments from the psyche of Indians without having it translated on to the British rulers of India. The idea of creating platform in the name of Indian National Congress was to keep agitating Indian minds occupied and to create a smoke screen that their grievances were being given a serious cognizance by British authorities.

The 'safety valve' which was envisaged to be created in the name of Indian National Congress ultimately became a nemesis for British Government in India. Apty using this pedestal Gandhi churned the patriotic atmosphere of the country and launched various Movements which went on records of history as phenomenal people's movement.

Uniqueness in Gandhi's movements was that he successfully turned the class movements into the mass movements by capturing the entire pyramid of Indian society by his charismatic leadership. Had these movements remained restricted to the classes they would not have gained mammoth success in being instrumental force behind India's freedom.

India achieved her coveted independence through negotiations and table talks with British authorities. The towering political wisdom, an acute diplomatic shrewdness and unparalleled foresightedness demonstrated by India's frontline leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Maulana Azad, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and others had gone a long way making British authorities to eat a humble pie at numerous occasions.

Many of India's frontline leaders were truly erudite as they were educated in England. Their political as well as socio-economic acumen was far sharper than one could imagine during those days. Had these heroes and true champions of India's freedom not educated than it would have become quite possible for British authorities to twist and turn them in any direction. The communication prowess and linguistic proficiency of these frontline leaders was enviously of high standard. Surprisingly these torch bearers of the nation did not undergo any tailor made training class as to how to negotiate with the British authorities, yet one will get convinced that they were phenomenally successful in fetching freedom to India by dint of successful political negotiations and intelligent international diplomacy.

Discussions, negotiations and talks with British rulers from 1920 to 1947 speak volumes about towering intellect of Indian leaders. The most concentrated era of negotiations involved vibrant episodes of Cabinet Mission, Interim Government, Lord Mountbatten's Viceroyalty, integration of princely states into unified India and eventual transfer of power.

Interestingly the political game plan of this young team of Indian leaders did not remain confined within the four walls of India but it consciously propagated India's legitimate claim for her freedom into the international arena. International diplomacy demonstrated by Indian leaders by voicing her concern with America, China, Germany, Japan, Russia and other countries was just a tip of an iceberg so far as the fathomless intelligence and political wisdom of Indian leaders is concerned.

British authorities initially must have not gauged the fathomless intelligence of Indian leaders. During their salad days of capturing India British rulers must have felt like 'going to heaven in a basket.' However intellectual summersault and constant agitations through various movements pronounced by Gandhi and supported by all and sundry made British rulers to lose their charm and imperial drive.

An impressive political partnership among the political leaders of India was worthy of encomium. Decent discordance is an essence of democratic style of functioning. Despite marginal differences of opinions at no point the leaders of India took an inimical stand against its own leader which provided British authorities with spring board opportunity to pounce upon Indians.

The ruthless agony of the fact is that for any nation, liberation from foreign dominance didn't happen like a magical wand. An appetite for imperialism has always remained an insatiable urge since the ages. The more the feathers to the cap the better it is. India too had a long and excruciating history of initial co-operation till decisive battle against the strong citadel of British Empire. Like many countries who breathe in the dark tunnels of imperialism, India too had her birth under the dark clouds of reckless plundering by unorganized kingdoms. It was like the 'new host, the new game and the new set of rules'. After so many decades of slavery it was like "a countenance more in sorrow than in anger" sort of feelings which remained in the hearts and minds of Indians.

Despite of decades of travails received from external rule, it could not label India as a country destined to be a permanent subject of foreign rule no matter who ruled her. A pristine identity of India, despite decades of foreign rule, remained untarnished. 'Age cannot wither her nor custom stale her infinite variety' a prism of diversity continues to coruscate with glory. 'Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose'.

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