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LET MAHATMA SPEAKS: AN APPRAISAL OF GANDHI AND THE REALITIES OF JAMMU KASHMIR ISSUE

¹Dr. Dilip Kataria

¹Assistant Professor

¹The M. S. University of Baroda,

On August, 06, 2019 the Parliament of India passed historic legislations to reorganize the state of Jammu and Kashmir into two Unions Territories and to modify certain temporary provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution that were causing a hindrance in the integration of the state with the Indian Union. The State Reorganization Bill proposed that the current state of Jammu and Kashmir will be bifurcated to form two Union Territories - i) Ladakh, which will become a Union Territory without a legislature and ii) Jammu and Kashmir will be a Union Territory with legislature. The objectives of this Bill was to fulfill the long standing demand and aspirations of the people of trans-Himalayan strategic Ladakh, who have been demanding Union Territory status since decades and to localize the anti-national elements within the Kashmiri valley, which does not consider the State of Jammu and Kashmir as an integral and inalienable part of India. The decision of the Parliament to set right this wrong was welcomed by the people of the State especially from Ladakh and the rest of India as well as by majority of the political leadership across the nation. Since independence, territorial disputes over the Kashmir region sparked two of the three major Indo-Pakistani wars in 1947 and 1965, and a limited war in 1999. Besides these wars Pakistan also has extended support to militants in Kashmir region due to which people are losing their lives in present time as well. During the decade's long Pak-sponsored terrorism in J&K, in over 51,000 terrorist incidents around 27,000 persons including about 9,700 civilians and over 3000 Security personnel have been killed.¹ The violence caused extensive damage to private and public property, with large number of people, particularly minority Hindus, being forced to migrate from the Valley. More than 4 lakhs Kashmiri pundits who are considered as an integral part of Kashmiri civilization have had to leave their home land and live as displaced persons in various parts of their own country.

The current conflict has its roots in the post-independence partition of the Indian subcontinent. British rule in the Indian subcontinent ended in 1947 with the creation of new states: the dominions of Pakistan and India, as the successor states to British India. The British Paramountacy over the 562 Indian princely states ended and according to the Indian Independence Act, 1947 these states were asked to join either India or Pakistan. The

¹ <https://mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?18987/Fact+Sheet+on+Jammu+and+Kashmir>

State of Jammu and Kashmir was an interesting and unique case because of its diverse ethnic and religious communities. The smallest Kashmir province consisting of the Kashmir Valley and Pakistan occupied the Muzaffarabad district (total 22,000 Sq. Km) had a majority Muslim population (over 90%). The Jammu province, consisting of 10 districts, and Pakistan occupied Mirpur and Poonch area of Jammu province (total 32,000 Sq. Km) had more less equal Hindu and Muslim population While Largest area include the mountainous Kargil- Ladakh district (59,000 Sq Km) in the east had a significant Buddhist presence and Shia Muslim majority in Gilgit-Baltistan (72,000 Sq. Km).² At the time crisis, the Pakistani had started its policy of aggression and trained army and armed Pakistani tribes on the Kashmiri border, beginning to invading the region. Outgunned and outmanned, the Maharaja turned to India for aid and accepts integration with India with support of local population and local democratic Leadership. The accession of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir to India took place in terms of the India Independence Act. While the signatory to the offer of accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India was the ruler of the state, Maharaja Hari Singh, Sheikh Abdullah, a Muslim, and the acknowledged political leader of the State, endorsed the decision. His rationale for endorsing the accession was "if we accede to India there is no danger of a revival of feudalism and autocracy." ³

On this particular issue various leaders of this country have expressed their views. This paper has tried to emphasis on the Gandhi's view and to analyze his role. The views of Gandhi have relatively significant on the issue of Kashmir the reason behind is that Gandhi was considered as objective leader between these two countries at that time. Gandhi had played the role of arbitrator between these two countries and had made efforts to resolve various issues between these two countries. Gandhiji's was attached with issue from beginning when he visited the Kashmir valley first time in August, 1947 (31st July to 2nd August, 1947). Various scholars have different opinion regarding Gandhi's visit to Kashmir, some European and Pakistani scholars believed that Gandhi played major role in the attempt to convince Maharaja Hari Singh for merger of Kashmir with India. Josef Korbel (Czech-American diplomat and the chair of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan, and author of book titled "Danger in Kashmir") wrote that "Gandhiji before returning to Jammu on 3rd August, 1947 had discussions with Hari Singh in his palace at Hari Niwas, Gupkar, Srinagar. What exactly transpired between the two is not precisely known, The Times, London, October 25th 1947 reported the fact that India had been taking lively interest in the subject of Kashmir and that Hari Singh was much influenced by representations made by Gandhi who visited Kashmir cannot be denied."⁴ The veteran Kashmiri journalist, Ved Bhasin, has also similar views, in his words: "In this backdrop Gandhiji visited Srinagar on 1st August 1947 and met the Maharaja. Though Gandhi declared that his mission was not political and he was only fulfilling an old promise to the Maharaja to visit Kashmir, there were clear indications that he had advised him to join the Indian Union."⁵

² Daya Sagar, J&K: 1947, Accession and events thereafter, Jammu Kashmir study Centre, New Delhi, 2012. p.12

³ <https://mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?18987/Fact+Sheet+on+Jammu+and+Kashmir>

⁴ Josef Korbel, "Danger in Kashmir", Surbhi Publication, Guragaon, 2016. p.59

⁵ Experiences of Partition: Jammu 1947', paper presented at Jammu University in 2003 by Ved Bhasin, cited by Saeed Naqvi in *Being the Other: Muslim in India*, 2016, p. 176

The divulging opinions of various scholars, journalists and politicians since his last visit to Kashmir, throw many questions. Can Gandhi's position on Kashmir be absorbed into the narrative offered by the left wing? Can Gandhi be understood in isolation? This paper tackles with both these issues—Common belief is that Mahatama Gandhi visited Kashmir to advice Maharaja Hari Sinh to join Indian Union. However, the reality is that the visit to Kashmir at the time of crisis was basically planned by Sardar Patel. After the Kashmir tour of Lord Mountbatten, Jawaharlal Nehru wanted to visit Kashmir, but Sardar Patel had opposed his visit and given his consent in favor of Mahatama Gandhi. Sardar Patel believed that negative attitude of Maharaja Hari Sinh towards Jawaharlal Nehru and 15th August was drawing near while Nehru was the Prime Minister-designate of independent India, he may be criticized and strong possibility that Nehru's visit could be misinterpreted in the context of Kashmir as an attempt to influence its decision of aligning it with India after the British withdrawal. That's why to assess the ground condition and view of Maharaja Hari Sinh, Sardar Patel decides to send Gandhiji despite of Gandhi himself was not ready. Initially Gandhi has refused to visit Kashmir latter on accepted advice of Sardar Patel. In his letter to Sardar Patel on 28th July, 1947, Gandhi sought the permission and approval of Sardar Patel to visit Kashmir. He had written that *"Jawaharial told me last night that you might not approve of his going to Kashmir but not mine; he has, therefore, left me free to do as I like. Therefore I propose to leave tomorrow for Lahore. Lahore and Amritsar on the 30th, Rawalpindi on the 31st. I may stay there for a day and then take the train for Patna. If this is all right, please endorse it."*⁶

From the beginning Mahatama Gandhi did not want to consider this visit as political and his effort to pressurize the Maharaja. In his prayer meeting of 29th July, 1947 held in Delhi he said, *"I am not going to suggest to the Maharaja to accede to India and not to Pakistan. The real sovereign of the state are the people. The ruler is a servant of the people. If he is not so then he is not the ruler. This is my firm belief, and that is why I became a rebel against the British - because the British claimed to be the rulers of India, and I refused to recognize them as such. In Kashmir too the power belongs to the public. Let them do as they want...I do not want to do anything in public when I am in Kashmir. I do not even want a public prayer, though I may have it, as prayer is part of my life."*⁷ Even Regarding the purpose of this visit Historian Ramchander Guha states in his article titled as *"Gandhi in Kashmir, Gandhians on Kashmir"* that, M.K. Gandhi visited Kashmir Valley once, in the first week of August 1947 with two aims; to get the Maharaja Hari Singh to release Sheikh Abdullah from the prison and the second aim was to get sense of what the Kashmiri people were thinking.⁸

During this entire visit of Kashmir, Mahatama Gandhi got huge response from people of Kashmir. His doctor Sushila Nayar, who was with him, wrote that *"men and women flocked from the neighbouring villages to have a glimpse of the Mahatma. Friends and foes alike wonder at the hold he has on the masses. His mere presence seems to soothe them in [a] strange fashion."*⁹ During his visit he hadn't find much difference between Hindu and Muslim in Kashmir for this he had given credit to Sheikh Abdulla for establishing Kashmiriyat i.e. identity of Kashmir. During this visit Gandhiji had accolade Abdulla with the title *"Sher- a- Kashmir"* and leader of both

⁶ Gandhi M K, *Letter to Sardar Patel*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1957. p.216

⁷ Ramamurthy, V., *Mahatma Gandhi: The last 200 Days*, Kasturi & Sons. Publishing House, Chennai, 2004 p.29

⁸ Guha, *"Gandhi in Kashmir, Gandhians on Kashmir"* The Telegraph, 16/08/2019 <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/gandhi-in-kashmir-gandhians-on-kashmir/cid/1698228>

⁹ Ibid

the communities i.e. Hindu and Muslim. During this visit when Gandhi entered into Srinagar city, he was welcomed by thousands of Kashmiri people on either side of the road; they were shouting slogans like “Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai.” the bridge across the river Jhelum had been taken over by the crowd. Gandhi took a boat to the other side, where he addressed a public meeting of more than 25,000 people convened by Begum Akbar Jehan Abdullah, Sheikh Abdullah’s wife.¹⁰

During this visit, He had also met to Maharaja Hari Singh and their Prime Minister Ramchandra Kak. In the course of his meetings with the Maharaja what Gandhi told him can be too hard to guess. During this visit Pakistan Media criticize the Gandhiji’s visit to Srinagar made with a purpose to influence Maharaja Harisinh to take decision in favor of India. They accused Mahatama Gandhi that Maharaja had abandoned the idea to declare his State “Independent” and took such decisions which revealed his inclination towards India. Immediately after Gandhi’s departure, Maharaja made administrative reshuffle by removing Prime Minister Ramchandra Kak, and replaced him first by Janak Singh, and later Mehar Chand Mahajan, considered a pro-India element.¹¹ Pakistani Media accused these changes were due to the Mahatama Gandhi instruction. This is proved wrong because of Ram Chandra Kak was removed from the post of the Prime minister on 10th August, 1947 and Sheikh Abdullah was released on 29th September, 1947. On 9th August, 1947 Gandhi had written a letter to Sardar Patel in this letter Gandhi had mentioned that Maharaja was fed up with his famous prime minister Kak and hence Maharaja wanted to remove him. “I am sending a note to Jawaharlal. File will give it to you to read. Kak has written a letter to the Maharaja. There is great sweetness in his words at any rate. I spoke with the Maharaja and the Maharani for one hour. He agreed that only what the subject’s desire should be done, but said nothing about his next move. The thing is he wants to get rid of Kak.. Sir Jailal was almost sure to succeed Kak. You should do something in the matter. In my opinion the situation in Kashmir can be improved.”¹²

After this episode there is a change in status of Kashmir, The Maharaja couldn’t take decision regarding merger of Kashmir with any of the country within time limit given by Lord Mountbatten till 15th August, 1947 and hence put up a proposal of contract of maintaining status quo for one year. Pakistan had consented to this contract but before the contract had happened with India, Pakistan had started its policy of aggression. Pakistan had started to stop the supply of important goods through the routes of Kashmir and west Punjab further not only this Pakistan had extended support to Kabalis (Tribal Warrior) in the month of September and sent the group of Kabalis on the borders of Kashmir. The Maharaja of Kashmir had realized that they have only one solution to keep themselves away and safe from the pressure of Pakistan and the solution was they had to gain public support due to this Sheikh Abdulla had set free on 29th September, 1947. On the other side these Kabalis had started to move towards Srinagar. Kashmiri Army became helpless against forces. On 24th October, the Maharaja of Kashmir had made contact with government of India and requested for the ammunition and army support but government of India had already decided that it would not help Kashmir till maharaja decided to merge Kashmir with India, and if India took such step it would be against its policy.¹³ On 24th October, 1947 Maharaja of

¹⁰ Akbar, M.J., *India: The Siege Within*, Penguin Books, 1985. p. 232

¹¹ Gupta, Sisir, *Kashmir: A study in India-Pakistan relations*, Asia Publishing House New Delhi, 1966. p.67

¹² Gandhi M K, *Letter to Sardar Patel*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1957. p.216

¹³ Daya Sagar, *J&K: 1947, Accession and events thereafter*, Jammu Kashmir study Centre, New Delhi, 2012. p.45

Kashmir accepted annexation with India. Apart from this Maharaja asked Abdulla to form interim government and he accept the post of prime minister. With this annexation National council and Sheikh Abdulla had also merged and further he stated that when the situation was normalized the question of annexation of Kashmir with India was decided by plebiscite. After this annexation in the early morning of 27th October, 1947 Indian Army had started to move towards Srinagar disperse Kabalis from Kashmir. When Indian forces entered into the Kashmir region on October the locals communities had started to form small defense group to counter the Kabalis and forced them to vacate the territory. In these insurgency operations many people got martyrdom, Brigadier Usmaan had sacrificed his life in the line of duty. Mir Maqbool who was youngest member of the Rastriya Parishad got martyred in this struggle. On his martyrdom Gandhi had said that any one irrespective of one's religion can take pride on his martyrdom.

Mahatama Gandhi had supported the policy of India on Kashmir. He had stated that Pakistani government was supporting the attack on Kashmir directly or indirectly. He further stated that the prime minister of bordering state had given support to attack and also made appeal to Islamic world for help. Therefore, the decision taken by central government by sending army troops to save the beautiful city is appropriate. He said that *"Some of you may ask if I am aware of what is happening in Kashmir. Yes, I am aware of it. If the reports we are getting are correct, it is really a bad situation. All I can say is that we can neither save our religion nor ourselves by resorting to violence. It is reported that Pakistan is trying to coerce Kashmir to join that dominion. That should not be so. Today it is Kashmir. Tomorrow it can be Hyderabad. Next it may come to Junagarh or some other state. I do not wish to sit in judgment on this issue. I only believe in the principle that nobody should force anyone into doing anything."*¹⁴ On 27th October 1947, he again said *"I respectfully submit also that Kashmir has to establish popular rule in the state. The same is the case with other states like Hyderabad and Junagarh. The real rulers of the state must be their people. If the people of Kashmir are in favour of joining Pakistan, no power on earth can stop them from doing so. But they should be left free to decide the question for themselves. They cannot be asked to decide while being attacked and coerced by having their villages and houses burnt. If the people of Kashmir, in spite of being Muslims in the majority, wish to accede to India then too no one can stop them."*¹⁵

For this many people had compared the act of Mahatama Gandhi with Churchill, Hitler and Mussolini. Not only this some people have raised question on Congress that why they hadn't advised Gandhi on Ahmisa. He had replied to this criticism and said that he was not deviated from the path of Ahmisa further he added that his principle of Ahmisa do not stop him giving credit to one who are doing right even if that person has faith in violence. *If I could have my way of nonviolence and everybody listened to me, we would not send our army as we are doing now. And if we did send, it would be a nonviolent army. It would be a nonviolent right, if our people went there and gladly met their death at the hands of the Afridis. It would be a nonviolent war."*¹⁶

¹⁴ Ramamurthy, V., *Mahatma Gandhi: The last 200 Days*, Kasturi & Sons. Pub. House, Chennai, 2004 p.277

¹⁵ Ibid p. 277

¹⁶ *Collected Works of M. K. Gandhi*, Publication Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1984, Vol- 97 p.480

India and Pakistan have not been able to resolve the issue of Kashmir even after long talks. On one side Pakistan had created a pressure on India for withdrawal of troops from the region and for plebiscite while on another side India had asked Pakistan for withdrawal of Kabalis. To resolve this matter Mountbatten had made appeal to prime minister of Britain but Mr. Atlee who was prime minister that time for mediation but Mr. Atlee had refused to mediate and advised for taking up this issue to United Nations. Then Nehru had brought up this issue before United Nations based on the advice tendered by the British Prime Minister. Mahatama Gandhi did not agree with the involvement of United Nations in Kashmir Issues and asked for mutual settlement to resolve the bilateral issue between India and Pakistan like in various other matters the representative of both the side had done. Gandhi believed that putting the issue before UNO would do resulted in “monkey justice”, because of the involvement of the international politics of vested interests. on 27th December, 1947 Mahatama Gandhi during Prathna Sabha meeting said, that “*I shall advise Pakistan and India to sit together and decide the matter. If the two are interested in the settlement of the dispute, where is the need for an arbitrator?*”¹⁷ Four days later, Mahatama Gandhi again said that the government of Pakistan and government of India could not reach a peaceful settlement? or “honesty is died in India”? I am damn sure it is not. Again on 4th January during his prayer discourse Gandhiji had advised to Pakistan to act according to its name “Pak” which literally means pure further he said that both Hindus and Muslims had done brutal acts against each other but it doesn’t mean that it should be continued as competition and same should be converted into wars. And Gandhiji had made appeal for one voice so that India can withdraw its complaint from United Nations with pride.¹⁸ He further stated that this would happen then this step was also going to be appreciated by United Nations. But the main thing is a true heart transformation. But understanding must be of a true heart. If the hatred is nurtured in the heart it will be worst than war. He said that “*Mistakes were made on both sides. Of this I have no doubt...therefore the two dominions should come together with God as witness and find a settlement. The matter is now before the United Nations Organisation. It cannot be withdrawn from there. But if India and Pakistan come to a settlement the big powers in the UNO will have to endorse that settlement.*”¹⁹

The fear of Gandhi regarding bringing Kashmir issue to the United Nations comes true in a very short period of time. Even though Pakistan had denied many times its support to Kabalis or sometimes remained silent on this but at last Pakistan had had to accept that it had given to support to attacking force in Kashmir before the United Nations. After the due inquiry United Nations had noted that Pakistan had made encroachment on the Indian sovereignty in Kashmir region, but United Nations hadn’t used the word encroacher for Pakistan specifically. On the contrary Pakistan had filed many complaints against India in united nations and got succeed in pretending itself as complainant and this had happened due to old allies between Pakistan and British representative in united nation as a result of which India became the defendant.

To resolve this problem many people had suggested even the partition of Jammu and Kashmir like which had happened in this case of India and Pakistan. They had suggested that the region of Jammu which was Hindu

¹⁷ Ibid Vol.97, p.185

¹⁸ Ramamurthy, V., *Mahatma Gandhi: the last 200 Days*, Kasturi & Sons. Pub. House, Chennai, 2004 p.291

¹⁹ *Collected Works of M. K. Gandhi*, Publication Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1984. Vol.98.p.171.

majority should be given to India and Kashmir valley should be given to Pakistan. But Gandhiji had strongly condemned these suggestions and in his one of the address in Prarthna Sabha “*There was some talk about the division of Kashmir. It was fantastic. It was more than enough that India had been divided into two. One would have thought it impossible for man to divide a country, which God had made one. Yet, it had happened and both the Congress and Muslim League had decided upon it, though for different reasons. But that did not mean that the process of dividing should be further extended. If Kashmir was to be divided, why not other state? Where would this process end?*”²⁰ In the last week of January 1948 Gandhiji had met to Mr. Kingsly Martin the famous editor of The New Statesman and a life-long friend of India in Delhi. Mr. Kingsly had discussed various other matters along with the matter of partition of Kashmir with Gandhiji. Mr. Kingsly had asked two questions 1) Whether Punch should be given to Pakistan. 2) Whether arbitration is likely to be the means to avoid such fight between Indi and Pakistan? Mahatama Gandhi said any such thing would set wrong example for others. There are many other regions exists with Muslim majority for example Murshedabad on the eastern border of Pakistan in Bengal and Kathiyavaad on western border. The big difference between the policy of India and Pakistan is that India never believes in the partition.

Conclusion

One thing is clear from this study that under the problem in Kashmir, Gandhiji clearly believed that the decision of Kashmir to join India or Pakistan should be decided by the people as well as the king. He accepts Kashmir’s alliance with India because it was endorsed by Sheikh Abdulla, the representative of the people of Kashmir. He was not in favor of the partition of the Kashmir or taking the issue to the United Nations for a solution. He firmly believed that unity between Hindus and Muslims should be established not only in hind but everywhere and they should all be resolved honestly

²⁰ Ramamurthy, V., *Mahatma Gandhi: the last 200 Days*, Kasturi & Sons. Pub. House, Chennai, 2004 p.360