CHAPTER IX

GANDHI AND THE MOUNTBATTEN PLAN

In view of the prevailing deadlock between the Congress and the League over the long-term plan of constitution-making, the Prime Minister, on February 20, 1947, announced His Majesty's Government's definite intention to take the necessary steps to effect transfer of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1, 1948. He said that if no agreed constitution could be evolved by June, 1948,

"His Majesty's Government will have to consider to whom the powers of the Central Government in British India should be handed over, on the due date, whether as a whole to some form of Central Government for British India, or in some areas to the existing Provincial Governments, or in such other way as may seem most reasonable and in the best interests of the Indian people."\(^1\)

The Congress hailed the announcement as 'wise and courageous' but Gandhi interpreted it differently and remarked:

"This may lead to Pakistan for those Provinces or portions which may want it. No-one will be forced one way or the other."\(^2\)

Attlee was convinced that in view of Wavell's failure to implement their policies properly and in order to solve the Indian tangle through closer personal contacts with

\(^1\) Nicholas Mansergh, op.cit., vol. IX, pp. 773-775. also V.P.Menon, op.cit., pp. 519-520. also R.C.Majumdar (General Editor), Struggle for Freedom (Bombay: Bhartiya Vidyabhaban, 1969), p. 757.

Indian leaders, a new incumbent for the office of the Viceroy was necessary. The Cabinet decided to replace Wavell by Mountbatten and assigned to him the definite objective of obtaining a unitary Government for British India and Indian States through the medium of Constituent Assembly set up in accordance with the Cabinet Mission Plan. The Viceroy was to try his utmost to bring round all the parties to this plan without compelling anyone of them to accept it. After exploring all the chances of settlement, he was to report to His Majesty's Government by October 1, 1947 about the steps to be taken for handing over power by the due date. He was also directed to secure the closest cooperation of Indians in carrying on the administration of British India. 3

Consequently, after his arrival in India on March 22, 1947, Mountbatten invited Gandhi and Jinnah for a dialogue which produced a favourable reaction. 4 In the first meeting with Gandhi, on March 31, the Viceroy kept the discussion confined to his personal life in order to establish close rapport with him. The next day, Gandhi presented an outline of his plan to Mountbatten which embodied: 5

1. Mr. Jinnah to be given the option of forming a Cabinet.


2. The selection of the Cabinet is left entirely to Mr. Jinnah. The members may be all Moslems, or all non-Moslems, or they may be representatives of all classes and creeds of the Indian people.

3. If Mr. Jinnah accepted this offer, the Congress would guarantee to co-operate freely and sincerely, so long as all the measures that Mr. Jinnah's Cabinet bring forward are in the interests of the Indian people as a whole.

4. The sole referee of what is or is not in the interests of India as a whole will be Lord Mountbatten, in his personal capacity.

5. Mr. Jinnah must stipulate, on behalf of the League or of any other parties represented in the Cabinet formed by him that, so far as he or they are concerned, they will do their utmost to preserve peace throughout India.

6. There shall be no National Guards or any other form of private army.

7. Within the framework hereof, Mr. Jinnah will be perfectly free to present for acceptance a scheme of Pakistan even before the transfer of power, provided however, that he is successful in his appeal to reason and not to the force of arms which he abjures for all time for this purpose. Thus, there will be no compulsion in this matter over a Province or a part thereof.

8. In the Assembly the Congress has a decisive majority. But the Congress shall never use that majority against the League policy simply because of its identification with the League but will give its hearty support to every measure brought forward by the League Government, provided that it is in the interest of the whole of India. Whether it is in such interest or not shall be decided by Lord Mountbatten as man and not in his representative capacity.

9. If Mr. Jinnah rejects this offer, the same offer to be made *mutatis mutandis* to Congress.

However, he asked Mountbatten to be firm and face
the consequences of the sins of his predecessors. He said:

"The British system of 'Divide and Rule' had created a situation in which the only alternatives were, a continuation of British rule to keep law and order or an Indian blood bath. The blood bath must be faced and be accepted."\(^6\)

The Viceroy considered the plan 'far-fetched but potentially feasible'\(^7\). He directed Lord Ismay to put that into a proper draft. The plan was discussed by Mountbatten's staff at a meeting on April 5. It was described as 'an old kite flown without disguise'. The Viceroy was advised not to allow himself to be drawn into negotiations with Gandhi but should only listen to his advice.\(^8\)

Mountbatten's staff was conscious of Patel's objection to any such plan but they were afraid that Nehru might succumb to Gandhi's influence. Therefore, they decided to make it clear to Nehru, before Gandhi got to work too hard upon the Congress, that Mountbatten was far from committed to Gandhi's plan and that it would need careful scrutiny.\(^9\)

Mountbatten informed Gandhi also that though his plan was attractive, he wanted to keep an open mind and discuss the matter with other Indian leaders.\(^10\)

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7. Ibid., p. 57.
8. Ibid., p. 55.
9. Ibid., p. 57.
According to Azad, Gandhi had assured him before meeting the Viceroy that so long as he was alive, he would never agree to the partition of India and that he would not allow the Congress to accept it. He told him that a way out from partition could be found in his suggestion of letting Jinnah from the Government and choose the members of the Cabinet. Mountbatten had also told Azad that partition could still be avoided if Congress worked on Gandhi's suggestion because that would convince the League of the fair intentions of the Congress and win the confidence of Jinnah. The Congress Working Committee, however, did not approve of Gandhi's suggestion. He became conscious of the wide gap between his approach and that of the Congress Working Committee and started losing interest in the partition controversy. He decided to withdraw himself from political parleys and informed the Viceroy to conduct the future negotiations with the Congress Working Committee.

The Viceroy had a meeting with Jinnah on April 6. The latter discussed with him the Muslim massacres and described the horrors at length. He complained to him that Gandhi's position was mischievous because it entailed

12. Ibid., p. 219.
authority without responsibility. In support of his contention, he referred to the history of negotiations with Gandhi. He described the rejection of the Cripps Plan and the launching of Quit India movement as his Himalayan blunders. He said, "The Congress want to inherit everything. They would even accept Dominion Status to deprive me of Pakistan." On April 10, Mountbatten tried his level best to persuade Jinnah to keep India united but the latter was adamant on his stand. Mountbatten sadly concluded, he (Jinnah) was "a psychopathic case hell bent on this Pakistan."

The communal situation in the meantime had worsened. Serious riots and communal outbreak spread throughout the country following the 'Direct Action' launched by the League. A virtual civil war was threatening the country. Taking its clue from Attlee's Statement of February 20, 1947, the Muslim League was making frantic efforts to acquire control over the Governments in the Muslim majority areas. In the Punjab, where the Muslim League had failed to form a Government after the election of 1945, it concentrated all its efforts on ousting the coalition ministry led by Khizr Hyat Khan. The Direct Action launched by the League over the issue of banning the Muslim National Guards unnerved Khizr and he resigned. The Muslim League could

15. Ibid.
not form a ministry because of its inability to carry the majority with it and came out more vehemently against the Hindus and the Sikhs. Aggression was followed by retaliation and soon unprecedented communal violence engulfed the Punjab. In Bengal, a riot stricken Province since August, 1946, the situation was very explosive. The hostility between the two communities had acquired frightening proportions. In the North-West Frontier Province also, the Muslim League organised demonstrations against the Congress ministry and let loose the reign of terror.

In view of the deteriorating law and order situation and after having talks with the various leaders, Mountbatten was convinced that there was no hope of arriving at an agreed solution on the basis of a united India and 'Pakistan was inevitable'. He, therefore, diverted his attention to the formulation of an alternative plan on the basis of Attlee's Statement of February 20, 1947, for the transfer of power to existing Provincial Governments or in such other way as may seem most reasonable and in the best interests of the people. The broad outlines of his Plan included:

1) The responsibility for partition, if it comes, is to rest fairly upon the Indians themselves.
2) The Provinces, generally speaking, shall have the right to determine their own future.

3) Bengal and the Punjab are to be notionally partitioned for voting purposes.

4) The predominantly Muslim Sylhet District in Assam is to be given the option of joining the Muslim Province created by a partitioned Bengal.

5) General Elections are to be held in the North-West Frontier Province.

He discussed the draft of his plan with the Governors of the various provinces on April 15 and 16. Jenkins, Governor Punjab, was against the partition of the Province on the ground that within the districts, the communities were not evenly distributed and city and town population had a different communal composition from that of adjoining countryside. On similar grounds, he was opposed to the partition of the country as the divided provinces would include discontented minorities. Tyson, an I.C.S. Officer, who represented Governor of Bengal Fredrick Burrows on account of latter's indisposition, conveyed that many Muslims were against the partition of Bengal and after partition, Eastern Bengal would become a rural slum. He said that there were about 25 million Hindus in Bengal, constituting 45 per cent of the entire population of the province, who wanted to remain in Hindustan.

Summing up, Ismay observed, "No one liked the idea of partition but no one could suggest how it could be avoided."

He concluded that there was a unanimity of opinion in so far as an early solution of the problem was concerned. Gandhi had become conscious of the great sea of difference that lay between him and the Congress.\(^2\) He was not convinced that partition provided the only solution which the Congress must accept for fear of chaos. He said that in no circumstances he would accept partitioning of the country at British hands as the price of peace.\(^3\) He conveyed similar views to Jayaprakash Narain also.\(^4\)

He told Nehru that Congress High Command's argument of accepting a 'Lesser Evil' did not appeal to him. He said,

"If the Congress accepted the logic of partition, it would ultimately lead to conflict and the disintegration of India for which generations to come would have to pay the price."\(^5\)

In order to avert the partition which appeared inevitable to the British and the Congress leadership, Gandhi made another attempt to persuade Jinnah by calling at the latter's house at Delhi on May 6, 1947. They had a cordial talk for about three hours but without getting any fruitful result. Gandhi wrote to Mountbatten:

"We did talk about Pakistan cum Partition. I told him that my opposition to Pakistan persisted as before and suggested that in

24. Ibid., p. 159.
view of his declaration of faith in non-violence he should try to convert his opponents by reasoning with them and not by show of force. He was, however, quite firm that the question of Pakistan was not open to discussion."

He even appealed to the British to refrain from implementing any plan of dividing India. He wrote to Mountbatten on May 8, 1947:

"... it would be a blunder of first magnitude for the British to be a party in any way whatsoever to the division of India ... If it has to come, let it come after the British withdrawal. ... I feel sure that partition of the Punjab and Bengal is wrong in every case and a needless irritant for the League."

He repeated his earlier suggestion that the Interim Government should be formed either by the League or by the Congress as the experiment of coalition ministry had not succeeded.

In the meanwhile, on May 2, 1947, Ismay left for London along with George Abell to get the approval of the Cabinet on the draft of transfer of power to India. The scheme was an adaptation of the Cabinet Mission Plan in the sense that it involved the transfer of power without the willing consent of party leaders and with a federal rather than a strong Central Government.

The draft was approved by the Cabinet with a number of amendments and cabled back to Mountbatten from London on May 10, 1947. Having a sudden hunch, he showed it to Nehru, who happened to be at Simla as his guest, the same day. Nehru expressed his strong disapproval of the plan and said that the Congress would in no circumstances accept it. He observed:

"The picture presented by the proposals in the plan is an ominous one. Not only do they menace India but they endanger the future relations between Britain and India. Instead of producing any sense of certainty, security and stability, they would encourage disruptive tendencies everywhere and chaos and weakness. They would particularly endanger important strategic areas. ... The inevitable consequences of the proposals would be to invite the balkanization of India; to provoke certain civil conflict and add to violence and disorder; to cause a further breakdown of the central authority, which could alone prevent the growing chaos, and to demoralize the army, the police and the central services. ..." 31

In view of Nehru's disapproval, the Viceroy asked V.P. Menon to prepare another draft. On May 16, 1947, Menon prepared a draft 'Heads of Agreement' which provided for ascertaining the wishes of the people regarding the division of India. Depending on the decision for a united India or two sovereign States, the power was to be transferred to


appropriate hands on the basis of the Government of India Act, 1935, modified to conform to the Dominion Status position. The Governor-General and the Governors were to be reappointed. The boundaries were to be demarcated by a Commission and the Armed Forces were to be divided between the two Dominions in the event of partition.  

Mountbatten showed the draft to the leaders of major political parties and sought their consent before going to London for securing the approval of the Cabinet. British Cabinet took only 5 minutes to approve the plan. Mountbatten acknowledged with thanks the role played by the Reform Commissioner Menon. He told Campbell-Johnson, "But for this plan, Dickie Mountbatten would have been sunk and could have packed his bags."  

The Viceroy returned on May 30, 1947. June 2, 1947 was an eventful day in the history of India as on this day the Plan was broadly accepted by the major political parties. On June 3, the Viceroy in a broadcast announced the Plan. Nehru, Jinnah and Baldev Singh also gave short speeches explaining in brief the reasons for their acceptance. The Plan embodied:  

The work of the existing Constituent Assembly would not be interrupted but the constitution framed by the Assembly would not apply to the parts of India which were unwilling to accept it.  

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In order to ascertain the wishes of the different parts, two methods were suggested, viz., either through the existing Constituent Assembly or through a separate Constituent Assembly consisting of the representatives of those areas which decide not to participate in the existing Constituent Assembly.

Regarding the Provinces and States the arrangements would be:

The Legislative Assemblies of Punjab and Bengal would be divided into two sections, one for the members belonging to the Muslim-majority districts and the other for the rest of the Province. If they opted for the partition of the Province(s), each section would join the Constituent Assembly of its choice.

The Legislative Assembly of Sind would decide which Constituent Assembly, the Province would join.

In the North-West Frontier Province, the choice would be exercised through a referendum.

The district of Sylhet in Assam would also decide its choice through a referendum.

The Governor-General would prescribe the method of ascertaining the will of the people of Baluchistan.

There would be elections in the parts of the Punjab and Bengal and in Sylhet for choosing the representatives to the Constituent Assemblies.

The policy contained in the Cabinet Mission Memorandum of May 12, 1946 would remain unchanged towards Indian States.

Regarding the administrative matters, negotiations will be held:

Between the successor authorities concerning the central subjects in regard to the administrative consequences of partition.

Between the successor authorities and His Majesty's Government for treaties in regard to matters arising out of the transfer of power.
Between the parts of the partitioned
Provinces concerning the administration
of provincial subjects.

With this desire, His Majesty's Government
are in full sympathy and they are willing to
anticipate the date of June 1948, for handing
over of power by the setting up of an independ­
ent Indian Government or Governments at an
even earlier date.

Gandhi had not yet lost all hopes of preventing the
partition. He was not only making frantic efforts to carry
the Congress leadership with him but also was knocking at the
door of the Muslim League leader and the British for keeping
India united. He was sure that if the Congress High Command
refused to have a dialogue with the British on the basis of
Pakistan till peace was restored in the country, the issue
would be decided by reason alone. But the Congress could not
take any firm stand and yielded to the partition proposal.
Nehru had already conveyed to Mountbatten:

"Our committee are prepared to accept the
principle of partition based on self-determination
applied to definitely ascertained areas. This
involves the partition of Bengal and the Punjab*.
"

He made it clear that though they were passionately attached
to the idea of a united India, they had accepted the
partition in order to avoid conflict and compulsion.35

May 1, 1947, pp. 17-18, N.M.M.L., New Delhi. also
Resolution, N.M.M.L., New Delhi.
also
V.J.Desai and S.V.Desai (Translated by),Letters of Mahatma
Gandhi to Sardar Patel (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing
House, 1957), p. 212, Letter from Gandhi to Patel March 22,
1947.

*In view of the bloodshed in the Punjab, the Congress
Working Committee had demanded the partition of the Punjab
in March, 1947, without even seeking the advice of Gandhi.
In a prayer meeting on May 31, 1947, Gandhi said that if Pakistan of Jinnah's conception was a reasonable proposition, he should have no difficulty in convincing India. He deplored the outside interference in one's domestic matters and asked Jinnah not to look to London or to the Viceroy but to look to themselves. He appealed to the League leader to establish peace with him or without his association and afterwards convene a meeting of Indian leaders of all classes and communities and plead with them the cause of Pakistan and wait till he had carried conviction to them. But Gandhi was ploughing only a lonely furrow. His arguments did not appeal even to his fellow-workers and admirers. He said remorsefully on June 1, 1947,

"Today I find myself all alone. Even the Sardar and Jawaharlal think that my reading of the situation is wrong and peace is sure to return if partition is agreed upon. ... They did not like my telling the Viceroy that even if there was to be partition, it should not be through British intervention or under the British rule. ... They wonder if I have not deteriorated with age. ..."

He continued:

"We are setting about this business the wrong way. We may not feel the full effect immediately, but I can see clearly that the future of independence gained at this price is going to be dark."


37. Ibid.

for him, the partition was a tragic event in the history of India. The very thought of partition tormented his soul and made him say:

"I shall perhaps, not be alive to witness it, but should the evil I apprehend overtake India and her independence be imperilled, let posterity know what agony this old soul went through thinking of it. Let it not be said that Gandhi was party to India's vivisection. But everybody is today impatient for independence. Therefore there is no other help." 39

Gandhi did not see the glow of independence and felt lonely and forsaken. His intense remorse is apparent from his death wish which found expression in the following words:

"I have no zest left to live for 125 years now. If I have to become a helpless spectator to all this violence, it is best that I go now." 40

He added:

"My life's work seems to be over. I hope God will spare me further humiliation." 41

On June 3, when the Working Committee formally approved the Mountbatten Plan, Gandhi observed:

"I repeat that the division of India can only do harm to the country's future. The slavery of 150 years is going to end but from the look of things it does not seem as if independence will last as long. It hurts me to think that I can see nothing but evil in the partition Plan." 42

He added:

"I have admitted my mistake. I thought our struggle was based on non-violence, whereas in reality it was no more than passive resistance which essentially, is a weapon of the weak. It leads, naturally, to armed resistance wherever possible."  

In the evening, when Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur conveyed to him the acceptance of the partition plan by all the three parties, Gandhi on whose countenance sorrow was writ large muttered, "May God protect them and grant them all the wisdom." Chandiwala, one of the disciples, who was present at that time observed that he did not witness such a sad countenance of Gandhi before.

Nevertheless, he was not ready to take any step against the decision of the Congress Working Committee for various reasons. He rather urged the All-India Congress Committee which met on June 14, 1947, to consider and endorse it for the sake of peace in the country. Appealing to the members, he said that he did not want to take any step which would stand in the way of the Working Committee in implementing its previous decision. Sometimes certain decisions, however,

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unpalatable they might be, had to be taken. He added that though the All-India Congress Committee had the right to reject the resolution of the Working Committee yet before doing so they must weigh the pros and cons of the rejection of the resolution. It should not accept the resolution out of any false sense of moral compulsion if on merits it was not convinced. It could reject the resolution if it was sure that such a rejection would not lead to turmoil and strife in the country.\footnote{48}

Gandhi's support to the resolution clinched the issue and completely demoralised the opponents of the partition in the Congress who had been depending upon him for mustering sufficient support in the All-India Congress Committee to reject the resolution. This also belied the hope of Socialist leaders who were opposed to partition. Ram Manohar Lohia criticised Patel and Nehru for the division of the country.\footnote{49} Jayaprakash Narayan, however, in the unfinished autobiography, being serialized by a New Delhi fortnightly has absolved Patel of this charge and observed:

"I do not know what would have happened if he (Patel) had been the Prime Minister. I wonder if India would have been divided. He would have found some way of keeping the country together without force."

\footnote{48} Hindustan Times, June 15, 1947, Gandhi's Address to the A.I.C.C. Members. Also Pyarelal, Mahatma Gandhi-The Last Phase, op. cit., vol. II, p. 252.

\footnote{49} Ram Manohar Lohia, Guilty Men of India's Partition (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1960), pp. 10-12, p. 17, p. 19.

But the available facts do not reveal conclusively that Patel resisted the partition decision when the matter was placed for consideration before the members of the Congress Working Committee.*

The acceptance of partition created a difficult situation for the Congress as throughout its history it has been striving for keeping the unity of India intact. Its leadership had been vociferously condemning partition. Under these circumstances, the acceptance of the partition proposal by the Congress evoked a mixed reaction. The leaders, therefore, felt the necessity of explaining to the people the reasons for the reversal of their stand in order to keep the masses with them.

The Congress President, J.B. Kripalani, said:

"The Mountbatten Plan offered us freedom from British rule at the price of the division of India. We agreed to pay the price because freedom was the prime necessity of our national existence and the British were bent upon extorting the price to secure for the Muslim League its pound of flesh. Secondly, the plan seemed to open a way out of this tangle, chaos and frustration resulting from the deteriorating communal situation in the Punjab, Bengal, Bihar and the Frontier Province. The Provincial Governments were unable to cope with the riots. We agreed to accept the plan in the hope that the Muslim League having got what it wanted will cease its hymn of communal hate and cooperate in the reconstruction of social and economic structure of the two States."


*Alan Campbell-Johnson recorded, "His(Patel's)approach to the whole problem was clear and decisive. India must get rid of the Moslem League." (Alan Campbell-Johnson, op.cit., p. 46).
He remarked that partition of the Punjab and Bengal "was a just consequence of an unjust demand."\textsuperscript{52}

He admitted that the alternative to the acceptance of the plan was withdrawal from the Interim Government and commencement of a non-violent struggle against the British which Gandhi would have liked them to follow. But the Congress leadership found the prospect of an immediate and peaceful transfer of power too tempting to resist.\textsuperscript{53}

Similarly Sadiq Ali, Permanent Secretary of the Congress, defended their action on the ground that the division that they accepted was not a division as demanded by the Muslim League but it was in terms of the principle of self-determination agreed to by the Congress in 1942 itself.\textsuperscript{54}

The Congress Working Committee justified their stand on similar grounds.\textsuperscript{55}

Patel was convinced during Interim Government that the best course was to hasten the departure of the British even at the cost of partition of the country.\textsuperscript{56} He argued

\textsuperscript{52} Hindustan Times, June 26, 1947.

\textsuperscript{53} A.I.C.C. File No. G-71, 1946-47, N.M.M.L., New Delhi, also J.B.Kripalani, Fateful Year (Bombay: Vora and Co., 1948)

\textsuperscript{54} A.I.C.C. File No. 6/1947, Sadiq Ali's Article "India partitioned and Congress stand", N.M.M.L., New Delhi.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., Part I, Resolution of A.I.C.C., June 3, 1947, pp. 44-46, N.M.M.L., New Delhi.

that he agreed to partition as a last resort "when we had reached a stage when we would have lost all." He said that the choice was whether there should be just one division or many divisions. It was better to have one clean fight and then separate than having bickerings every day. As a practical statesman, he admitted that there were two nations in India.

Nehru said:

"... I suppose it was the compulsion of events and the feeling that we couldn't get out of that deadlock or morass by pursuing the way we had done; it became worse and worse. Further, a feeling that even if we got freedom for India, with that background, it would be a very weak India, that is, a federal India with far too much power in the federating units. A larger India would have constant troubles, constant disintegrating pulls. And also the fact that we saw no other way of getting our freedom - in the near future, I mean. And so we accepted and said, let us build up a strong India. And if others do not want to be in it, well, how can we and why should we force them to be in it."59

On another occasion, he said:

"We saw the fires burning in the Punjab and heard everyday of the killings. The plan for partition offered a way out and we took it. ... But if Gandhi had told us not to, we would have gone on fighting, and waiting. But we accepted."60

60. Leonard Mosley, op.cit., p. 248.
Kaka Kalelkar, a follower of Gandhi, who was initially not happy over the partition decision, admitted later on:

"If we did not accept partition, then we would have to surrender and stop our struggle for independence. The danger was that if we allowed the British rule to continue it might have continued for a long time ..." \(^{61}\)

But all these arguments were for mass consumption and to keep up the facade that partition was accepted not out of any weakness or allurement for office but in the larger interest of the country.

Nevertheless, Gandhi's action created an enigmatic situation for any person studying Gandhi's life and thought. One is really confronted with the baffling question: Why did he not oppose the decision of the Congress Working Committee and appeal to the nation to reject it when he was so intensely disturbed at the partition decision?

Obviously, the alternative to the plan involving partition was fresh struggle against the British. But his valiant soldiers with whose help he used to fight the non-violent battles were now tired men - tired of the long struggle that they had been waging against the British. Nehru came nearer the truth in 1960 when in an interview he said to Mosley,

"The truth is that we were tired men and were getting on in years too. Few of us

could stand the prospect of going to prison again — and if we had stood out for a united India, as we wished it, prison obviously awaited us."62

Besides, Gandhi's hold over the Congress and masses had considerably weakened. He said:

"When I made the statement I was voicing public opinion. But, when public opinion is against me, am I to coerce it? ... if only non-Muslim India is with me, I can show the way to undo the proposed partition. But I freely admit that I have become, or am rather considered, a back number."63

Yet another consideration before him was: Against whom would his struggle be directed in case he launched it to reverse the partition decision? He wrote to an Ashram colleague:

"But against whom am I to fight and to what end?"

He observed that he had fought against the white supremacy in South Africa for twenty years and for over a quarter of a century against the British power in India without being dismayed but the very idea of wielding the weapon of non-cooperation against his own countrymen made him shudder. Unless it became an imperative or an inescapable duty, he could not resort to non-cooperation with his colleagues because their judgement differed from his own.64


Further, Gandhi was conscious of the fact that the members of the Working Committee were old and tried servants of the nation and had a proven record of achievements to their credit. They had constituted the backbone of the Congress and it would have been most unwise if not impossible to replace them at that crucial moment. By overriding the decision of his colleagues, he might have prevented partition but he would have paid a much higher price for that in terms of disruption of the Congress and weakening of the non-violent struggle which could mean curing the patient at the cost of his life. Besides, he was not unaware of the fact that the leadership of the Congress that had accepted partition could not be easily replaced. He confessed that he himself did not have the strength to take over the reign of the Congress and the Government otherwise he would have declared rebellion single handed.

Moreover, majority of persons who wanted Gandhi to revolt against partition were impelled by communal sentiments. They did not have faith in non-violence. Nor did they accept his leadership. So it would have been a futile exercise for him if not a political blunder, to start a mass movement with the support of such persons.

Possibly, while supporting the resolution, Gandhi also kept in view the awkward position that the Congress would have faced in international sphere had the All-India Congress Committee refused to endorse the recommendations of the Working Committee. It would have tarnished its image and given to the League a fresh opportunity to denigrate the Congress for denying to the Muslims, the right of self-determination on the basis of which it had been demanding freedom for the country.

After the acceptance of partition by the All-India Congress Committee, it did not remain a live issue with Gandhi in the political sense. Being a follower of non-violence and Satyagraha, he assumed the role of a saintly prophet and set out on his lonely mission to alleviate the sufferings of the people and to reduce to the minimum the feelings of hatred between the two communities. Merriam has characterised these visits as 'another individual attempt' to prevent the division of India. He still hoped that before the English men finally left on August 15, 1947, he would bring the two parties together.

Further, to Gandhi, geographical division did not matter as he said:

"If Hindus in the Union Provinces regarded the Muslims as their brothers and sisters, Pakistan

He was sure that Pakistan was short lived. He believed that a time would come when the division would be undone and India would be once again a united country. 70

Not only Gandhi, but most of the members of the Congress Working Committee also who had accepted the partition thought in similar terms. Nehru said:

"We expected that partition would be temporary, that Pakistan was bound to come back to us." 71

Kripalani, the Congress President, said:

"Though we have accepted partition under certain circumstances, we have in no way given up our faith in the unity of India which the Congress has cherished and worked for ever since its inception ... though we may have to part company now. Sooner or later, the basic unity will assert itself and those who are anxious to break away now, will be equally anxious to return to the common lap." 72

Patel also believed:

"Those who had seceded today would be disillusioned soon and their union with the rest of India was assured. What nature and God had intended to be one, can on no account be split in two for all times." 73

73. Hindustan Times, August 12, 1947.