

Nathuram Godse's ideology supporting the assassination of The Mahatma

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My confidence about the moral side of my action has not been shaken even after the criticism levelled against it on all sides — Nathuram Vinayak Godse

Abstract:

The father of independent India, Mahatma Gandhi, was assassinated soon after the independence by a character whose patriotism and love for motherland can never be fathomed out, however, an assassination can never be appreciated but the motive behind a crime must be thoroughly studied to have a better view for evaluation. This research paper will specifically look upon Nathuram Vinayak Godse's side of the story which provoked him for Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. It also tries to understand the circumstances which led to the deprivation of literature available on Godse and his right to appeal in the Supreme Indian Court.

Keywords: Nathuram Godse, Mahatma Gandhi, assassination, Independence, India

Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, who is credited for getting India, independence from the British, was assassinated on the evening of 30th January 1948 in the compound of Birla House in central New Delhi. The news of Mahatma's assassination was not just a source of consternation for the nation but for the British officials in England as well. No one had given it a thought that a Mahatma who preached and supported ahimsa throughout his life will suffer death in a violent manner. The portrayal of the character of Gandhi is incomplete without referring to

Nathuram Vinayak Godse, the person who shot Gandhi when he was going for his evening prayer at his residence in Birla House. Nathuram was a right-wing advocate of Hindu nationalism, a member of the political party the Hindu Mahasabha and of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh. Even after decades of Indian independence if someone looks upon and tries to bring upon Nathuram's justifications upon his brutal act, he is considered to be against the patriotic feeling. Godse is portrayed in a specific fashion and any prohibition to it, is not tolerated by Gandhians who don't want to broaden their thinking and understand the fact that we are on the same side. "Mee Nathuram Godse Boltoy" a famous Marathi play, which gives it an attempt to change the stereotype, was led into controversies with a view that it glorifies Gandhi's assassination. People today have a lot of misconceptions about Nathuram Godse and his act of assassinating Gandhi, which could only be figured by presenting them with enough content and thus help them to build their own perspectives.

The Trial and The Judgement:

A Special Court was constituted to conduct the trial of the accused and a Special Act, that was the Bombay Public Security Measures Act, was extended to Delhi before constituting the Special Court for the trial of Nathuram Godse and other accused. It was one of the fastest trials in the legal history

and also one of the three trials which took place in the Red Fort in Delhi. Shri Atma Charan Agrawal, I. C. S. was appointed as the Judge for the trial. Twelve persons were accused for different charges and they were Nathuram Vinayak Godse, Narayan Dattatraya Apte, Vishnu Ramkrishna Karkare, Madanlal K. Pahwa, Shankar Kistaiya, Gopal Vinayak Godse, Digambar Ramchandra Badge, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Dattatraya Sadashiv Parchure. Three of them were absconding, namely, Gangadhar Dandavate, Gangadhar Jadhav, Suryadev Sharma. Counsels were engaged by the accused, however, the accused themselves were supposed to give replies to the charges. Before doing so, they submitted their written statements. 149 witnesses were called by the prosecution, none by defence. The court found all of the defendants except one guilty as charged. Eight men were convicted for the murder conspiracy, and others were convicted for violation of the Explosive Substances Act. Among those accused, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was acquitted and set free due to lack of evidence and Digamber Badge was granted pardon because he testified against his co-accused. Nathuram Godse and Narayan Apte were sentenced to death by hanging and the remaining six (including Godse's brother, Gopal) were sentenced to life imprisonment. Of those found guilty, all except Godse appealed their conviction and sentence in the upper court. Godse accepted his death sentence, but appealed against the lower court ruling that found him guilty of conspiracy. Godse argued, in his appeal to the High Court, that there was no conspiracy, he alone was solely responsible for the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and that all co-accused were innocent and should be released. The appeal by the convicted men was heard from 2 May 1949, at Peterhoff

Shimla in Himachal Pradesh which then housed the Punjab High Court. The High Court confirmed the findings and sentences of the lower court except in the cases of Dattatraya Parchure and Shankar Kistayya who were acquitted of all charges. Godse and Apte were sentenced to death on 8 November 1949. Pleas for commutation were made by Gandhi's two sons, Manilal Gandhi and Ramdas Gandhi but these pleas were turned down by India's prime minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and the Governor-General Chakravarti Raja Gopala Chari. Godse and Apte were hanged in Ambala Jail on 15 November 1949. According to the book *Almanac of World Crime* by Jay Robert Nash, at the hanging Apte's neck broke and he died instantly, but "Godse died slowly by the rope" and choked "to death for fifteen minutes".

Nathuram Godse's Ideology:

Nathuram Godse is branded nothing more than a Hindu zealot by successive governments of the country though he was a person with a kind heart who throbbed in pain with Gandhi's action against the country in favour of a specific community. This pain was so unendurable at an instance that he couldn't find a way to cure it other than uprooting the cause. It was only after witnessing the extreme barbarity Indian communities faced at the hands of a newly made Pakistan, Godse became determined to execute Mahatma Gandhi who, according to him, was the prime reason for inviting such fate to the people of his country.

The Indian Independence Act 1947 partitioned British India into the two new independent dominions of India and Pakistan. The arbitral tribunal allotted a sum of Rs75 crore to Pakistan. Indian government initially paid

Rs20 crore and was supposed to pay the remaining amount. But meanwhile, in October, 1947, the soi-disant liberators invaded Kashmir which they, hankered for, soon after the independence with the covert support of the Pakistani Army, before the second installment was paid. This enraged the Indians as well as The Union Cabinet in a way that Indian government forfeited to pay the remaining amount of Rs55 crore to Pakistan as a gesture to destabilise the opponent's force as this money would be utilised against India. Mahatma Gandhi being occupied with a utopian and shrewed ideology, opposed the Indian decision to withhold Pakistan's money which according to him it was rightfully entitled to. When Gandhi Ji found Indian government not responding to his urge to pay Pakistan, he compelled the government to release an amount of Rs. 55 crores due to Pakistan by initiating his fast unto death. By Gandhi Ji's attitude the congress led government was in a dilemma to either surrender its will to his or it had to carry without him. No one in the congress led government has a dare enough to oppose him and they followed Gandhi Ji's primitive vision. The famous authors Larry Collins and Dominique LaPierre of the book *Freedom at Midnight* wrote about Gandhi Ji's stand that "It was intolerable to him that so soon after her birth India should be guilty of so immoral an action". Gandhi Ji constantly proved himself to be more of Father Of Pakistan by granting favours to it at every possible step irrespective to its illegitimate actions and demands against India. Gandhi Ji seems to be misguided and blind folded against Pakistan's immoral actions, which could be easily detected by a sane personality, than to the intolerable action of Indian Government which decided not to pay Pakistan for the

well being and peace of our very own country.

Nathuram Godse was against Gandhi Ji's attitude of appeasing the Muslim population of the country and being overly generous to Pakistan. He found Jinnah Sahab as a baiter, with his politics, as mere blackmail and could not bear the pain and sufferings aroused within the country due to Gandhi Ji's consent on partition. Nathuram Godse was not against Gandhi Ji rather he was against his ideology which was partial to one community. This was the reason he bowed before Gandhi Ji in reverence before assassinating him. Godse's own words during the trial, proved the fact "...it was not so much the Gandhian Ahimsa teachings that were opposed to by me and my group, but Gandhiji, while advocating his views, always showed or evinced a bias for Muslims, prejudicial and detrimental to the Hindu Community and its interests".

Godse, like many other in the country, felt that the suffering caused due to the partition could have been avoided if the Indian government and Gandhi took a stand and had proffered strong protests against the pitiless treatment meted out to the Minorities, Hindus and Sikhs, in Pakistan. Gandhi Ji was the one who was running the show and the congress led ruling government was the one following it. Godse acknowledged and appreciated the fact that Mahatma Gandhi was a great patriot and his contributions towards the freedom movement of India was beyond comparison, but that doesn't mean that he may be authoritative enough to divide one great nation. Gandhi Ji must give it a thought that he was from the country, The country was not from him.

Godse was very well aware and prepared mentally for the

outcome of his action. It can be implied through his statement in the court : *"I thought to myself and foresaw I shall be totally ruined, and the only thing I could expect from the people would be nothing but hatred ... if I were to kill Gandhiji. But at the same time I felt that the Indian politics in the absence of Gandhiji would surely be proved practical, able to retaliate, and would be powerful with armed forces."*

Nathuram Godse expressed his thoughts so eloquently and in such a lucid manner that The Judge , Justice G.D Khosla , who tried Godse in East Punjab High Court with two other judges and sentenced him to death, was so much astonished and influenced by his justifications that he had acknowledged in his book , *The Murder of the Mahatma* , "I have, however, no doubt that had the audience of that day been constituted into a jury and entrusted with the task of deciding Godse's appeal, they would have brought a verdict of 'not Guilty' by an overwhelming majority".

Politics circumscribing the Assassination:

One may disagree with Nathuram Godse but no one has the right to turn down the circulation of his opinions. Everyone , in independent India , has the right to freedom of opinion and expression , still it is after about three decades that Godse's statement reached the public. The Nehru led Government had also muzzled the press from printing and letting the people know what Godse had to tell the Judges. A statement is generally forbidden to reach the masses and circumvented when

1. the allegations can't be denied
2. the actions can't be justified

I find no reason except that , Godse , in his speech during the

trial gave various reasons about his decision to kill Gandhi wherein he even criticized government for accepting whims of an individual rather than deciding upon interest of the nation.

Nathuram Godse and Narayan Dattatraya Apte were hanged even before the Supreme Court of India came into existence. After Nathuram Godse was sentenced to death for the assassination of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Godse's family members had appealed before the privy council in London and had also sought mercy from the then governor-general. Godse had himself never sought clemency but members of his family had probably kept him in the dark about their subsequent appeals for mercy. The privy council did not grant the , permission to file the petition , to the families of the accused, including Godse. "They had refused to grant leave on the ground that even if they did admit the petition, it would not have been decided before January 26, 1950 when the Indian Supreme Court was to be born." Once the Supreme Court of India came into existence, the jurisdiction to hear the Special Leave

Petition would lie with it. Godse and other accused were denied the last appeal which as per Indian law were their legal right and they were hanged even before the murder trial had attained legal finality from the supreme Indian Court.

"Ahimsa and truth are my two lungs and I cannot live without them". Such was the testimony of Mahatma Gandhi which could not be persisted after him by his followers and family whom he sermonized the lesson of ahimsa , making a remark upon their own sensibility. Mahatma Gandhi , where ever he has been in this universe after his demise ,

must have lamented upon this trial because Nathuram Godse's and Apte's capital punishment was nothing more than a dishonour to the legacy of a man who preached ahimsa and opposed to all forms of violence in his lifespan.

Conclusion:

Although , Nathuram Godse was successful enough to rationalise his deeds before the country but killing a person in any manner can't be justified. But we must take into account that Godse's side of the story has always been muffled by successive governments of the country. The metaphor of duality upon two different aspects for a situation remains unveiled if one just look for the heavier claim. It is irrefutable that Mahatma contributed immensely for this country but we must not push aside the traits in personality of Gandhi Ji which mentally provoked such a learned man to kill the Mahatma whom he admired and supported earlier. Godse's sacred ashes are still preserved in a hope , that one day , his dream of akhand bharat will be fulfilled and it will be immersed in the Sindhu river. Nathuram expected that someday in future people would weigh his act and find its true value , so , here we are.

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