

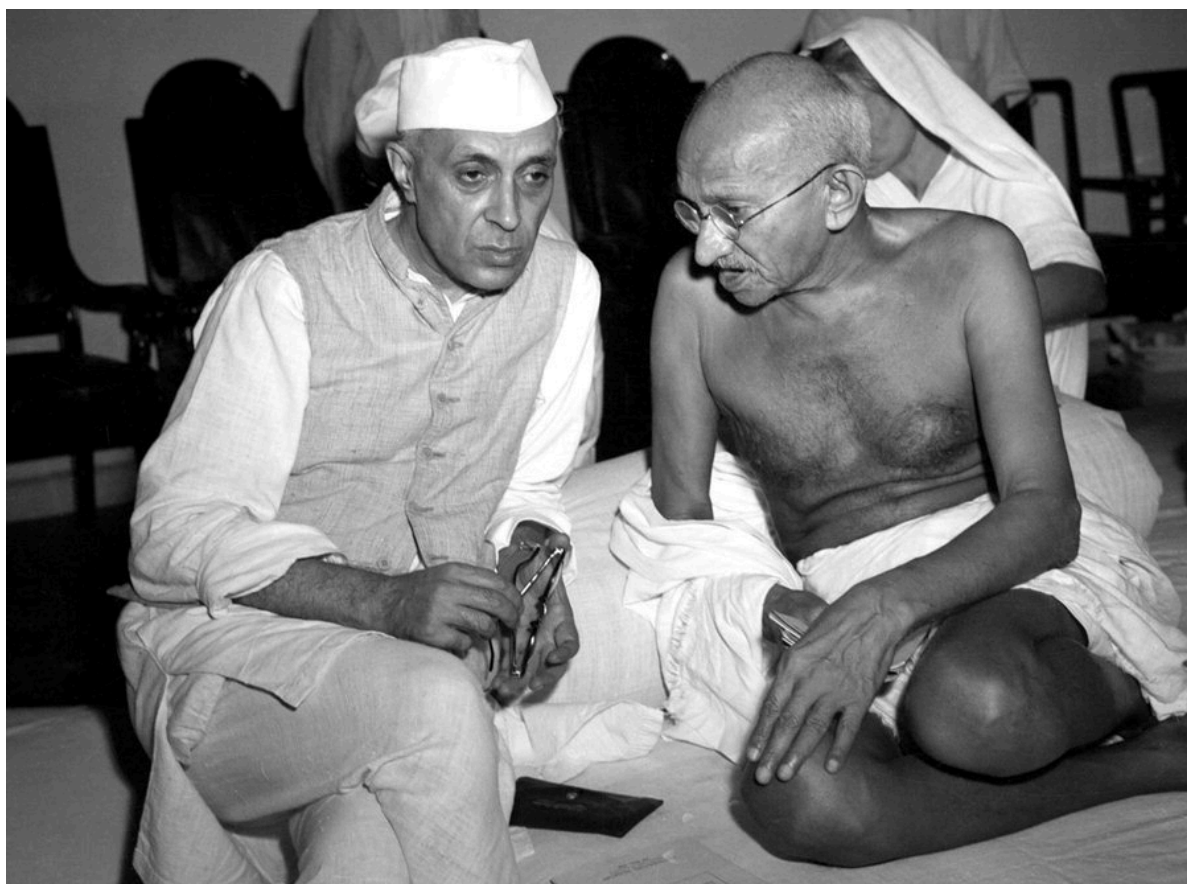
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Remembering Panditji



[editor](#) · 01:03, 3 Jun 2008 · 62047 views · 4 min read



Forty-four years ago on May 27 the first Prime Minister of India died in harness. About Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad wrote in his autobiography: 'Jawaharlal asked me in despair, what other alternative there was to accepting partition?.....I told Jawaharlal that I could not accept his views.' Azad added: 'The Muslim League had accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan, and a satisfactory solution of the Indian problems seemed in sight. Unfortunately the position changed and Mr. Jinnah got a chance of withdrawing from the League's earlier acceptance of the Plan..... I warned Jawaharlal that history would not forgive us if we agreed to partition. The verdict would then be that India was divided as much by the Muslim League as by the Congress.' Partition was then inevitable.

In the 1946 July election of Congress President, Maulana Azad would not accept the high office. He desired unanimous election. The contest meant fighting over the opposite issues: Cabinet Mission Plan or Mountbatten Plan? As Vallabhbhai was adamant and would not withdraw, Azad withdrew himself. In my view Azad should not have withdrawn. In the contest he was sure to be re-elected. His was an error of judgment, nay his life's blunder. The course of history would have been otherwise. There would have been no partition.

The majority in Congress was for the Poona Formula and Meerut Congress resolution of November 1946 – the 'Congress Formula' *vis-a-vis* Cabinet Mission Plan, and strongly against partition. Azad's Working Committee would have given an altogether different course to the events. Maulana later confessed his error. India as a whole was in no mood to accept partition. So Vallabhbhai found slender support in the Congress. There was confusion – a deadlock. The Congress was caught on the horns of dilemma. Patel had no chance. At the end Jawaharlal was found to be the missing link. He was unanimously elected July 22, 1946. This weak link soon broke down.

I am tempted to ask, why Jawaharlal, who always soared high and who was a staunch, uncompromising opponent of partition of India up to the last, at last succumbed to Mountbatten? Thou too, Brutus!.....Nehru did not hold Patel's view; on the contrary, he was radically opposed to it. In fact, Nehru admitted that 'Partition was wrong', but he felt that it was 'inevitable', and that 'it would be wisdom not to oppose what was bound to happen', and that 'it would not be wisdom to oppose Lord Mountbatten on this issue'! Jawaharlal accepted defeat, surrendered totally. He 'believed' that his friends, the Mountbattens 'acted in India's interests as zealously as any India could have done', so wrote Allen Andrews under the caption, 'The Fantastic Mountbattens'.

My own reading is: Jawaharlal Nehru might have pleaded that, in the then compelling circumstances 'individuals did not count'; no 'static' thinking would do; 'force of rapid events' were compelling; the Congress must take 'dynamic decision' in the exigency of the situation that developed; etc. That was all playing to the gallery. But the fact remains that he completely succumbed to the overtures of Mountbatten. And, as a very shrewd politician that he was, he foresaw that it was 'wisdom' not to range himself against Patel, the coming hero of partition and therefore to be the sole leader of Congress as soon as partition became a *fait accompli*: A battle for leadership! In power politics 'wisdom' is dictated by majority of votes. Jawaharlal Nehru was after all a 'democratic leader'! It is an open secret that this battle of leadership and wits between Nehru and Patel continued *ad nauseam* until the latter made his journey to the 'bourne from which no traveller ever returns'. Behold, the partition resolution of June 14, 1947, was passed in the A.I.C.C. – the last resolution in pre-independence Congress, by 29 votes *for* Patel-cum-Nehru and 15 *against*! (My father, Maulana M. Tayyebulla, Assam Congress President voted 'against'.) Too many abstentions and absentees....

With all the weaknesses that every political leader has, Panditji remains the most respected, loved, adored and remembered Prime Minister.



[editor](#)

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