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Mahavir Tyagi's 'Tyagi Police' and Tandan Ji's 'Hind Rakshak Dal': At A Glance

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Abstract

This paper covers the 2 volunteer organizations namely the 'Tyagi Police' and the 'Hind Rakshak Dal' formed by two great Gandhian Freedom Fighters – Mahavir Tyagi and Purushottam Das Tandon respectively. It critically analyzes both the leaders' concept. Mahavir Tyagi Ji and Purushottam Das Tandon Ji were two great Gandhian freedom fighters amongst whom the former had been imprisoned for some more than 11 years in British Indian jails while the latter was also imprisoned many times. Both were great patriots and had deep concerns with the people of India. The Muslim League's call for the 'Direct Action Day' on August 16, 1946 was an eye opener for all the contemporary patriots. Killings of the Hindus in violence on 17th day of Ramdhan corresponding to August 16 compelled many amongst whom Tandon Ji had been liquefied. He planned to form 'Hind Rakshak Dal' based on the 'Akhada' system, a system developed by Indian people to resist the foreign rule during the Medieval India. Similarly, Mahavir Tyagi, planned and executed by forming a volunteer corps (security force) based on the police model of British India. It was named as the 'Tyagi Police' in the U.P. Government Gazette.

Keywords

Tyagi Police, Hind Rakshak Dal, Direct Action Day, 17th Ramdhan, Muslim League, Indian National Congress, Akhada, Ochterlony monument, Husseyn Suhrawardy, Calcutta.

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Mahavir Tyagi's 'Tyagi Police' and Tandan Ji's 'Hind Rakshak Dal': At A Glance

After a bracket of long time of 90 years from 1857, India obtained her Independence on 15th day of August in 1947. One year before, the most infamous "Direct Action Day" scheduled on 16th August, 1946 was announced and had been executed. The Muslim League had declared its schedule and instigated to plot violence against the common Hindu population. Its leaders were shamelessly provoking general Muslims to launch massacres of the Hindus. The date was not coincidentally a preferable one for the Muslim orthodoxy as it was 17th day of the month of *Ramdhan*¹ which is celebrated as the day of victory of the Muslims against the non believers of Macca (Arab) in the Battle of Badr.

In Islamic history, on 17th day of *Ramdhan* of 2 Hijri (corresponding to 624 A.D.), *Gazwa a Badar* was fought by 313 Muslim rozedars against about one thousand citizens of holy city of Macca who were practising their ancestral faith. In Islamic history, 17th *Ramdhan* is considered as the most important day to commemorate the prophet.²

Writing about the Direct Action Day, Yasmin Khan mentions³:

"A few days before Direct Action day, the Calcutta district League set out its own plans; there would be a complete strike of Muslim workers in shops and factories, then numerous processions accompanied by musical bands and drums would converge from all over greater Calcutta from Howrah, Hooghly, Matiaburz and elsewhere - ending in a mass rally. Leaguers were told to go out to the mosques, where they should tell people about the plans, hand out pamphlets and say special prayers for 'the freedom of Muslim India, the Islamic world and the peoples of India and the East in general. Older networks of *mullahs*, mosques and *pirs* were put to work, to spread the call for direct action in Bengal.

On the morning of 16 August League supporters opened their newspapers to find large printed advertisements inside them:

"Today is Direct Action Day

Today Muslims of India dedicate their lives and all they possess to the cause of freedom

Today let every Muslim swear in the name of Allah to resist aggression

Direct action is now their only course
 Because they offered peace but peace was spurned
 They honoured their word but they were betrayed
 They claimed Liberty but were offered Thralldom
 Now Might alone can secure their Right.

What 'direct action' meant, though, was wide open to speculation and distortion. During the build-up, handbills and fly posters using religious language urged Muslims to act and linked the earliest Muslims with the contemporary situation, announcing that, 'In this holy month of Ramzan, Mecca was conquered from the infidels and in this month again a Jihad for the establishment of Pakistan has been declared. This kind of Islamic populism drew on older myths and stories, reworking history and compressing time.' The Mayor of Calcutta himself commanded: 'We Muslims have had the crown and have ruled. Do not lose heart, be ready and take swords. Oh *Kafir!* Your doom is not far and the greater massacre will come.' On the morning of the 16th, thousands of Muslims, many of them armed with *lathis* and brickbats, processed to a mammoth meeting at the Ochterlony Monument in Calcutta to hear speeches made by Husseyn Suhrawardy, the Provincial League Chief Minister, who, if he did not explicitly incite violence, certainly gave the crowds the impression that they could act with impunity, that neither the police nor the military would be called out and that the ministry would turn a blind eye to any action that they unleashed in the city. Whether he anticipated the carnage that followed is a different matter, and whether the Calcutta riots were a product of questionable political naïvety or a calculated pogrom is still a moot point."

In the light of the facts discussed above, every *mulla*, mosque and *pir* were the preachers of Battle of Badr and that of the Direct Action; thus one can easily understand the motivational force about the day of 17th *Ramadhan* and it was Mohammad Ali Jinna's best choice to provoke Muslims in general to get themselves prepared for the killings of innocent Hindus at large. It was his strategy to compel the Indian National Congress.

As was planned by the Muslim League was executed by its fanatic Muslims. The Hindus were brutally massacred,⁴ their female stock was gangraped and their daughters were kidnapped and male issues

were cut into pieces. It was committed in Bengal.⁵ No doubt the Hindus were defenseless because the police remained inactive.

There existed few men who could give resistance to the Muslim *gundas* with bravery. Gopal Patha⁶ is remembered for his courage shown by him against the *gundas* of the Muslim League at Calcutta on the Direct Action Day on 16th August, 1946.

But that leader should be considered as an exception because the Hindus at large could not resist to their Muslims oppressors.

During those days of communal violence, *gundaism* and rapine were witnessed.⁷ There was a little number of great Gandhian freedom fighters who could see something black at the bottom. Amongst them at least two belonged to the United Provinces. One was Purushottam Das Tandan⁸ and the other was Mahavir Tyagi.⁹ The former was straight forward on communal violence but submissive in individual sacrifice while the nature of the latter was seemed contrary to the former. Mahavir Tyagi was a straight Gandhian who was not straight forward on communal violence though he was always ready to sacrifice all his individual belongings.

In 1936-37 the provision of the election for Provincial Legislative Assembly was accepted according to the India Act of 1935. The U.P Legislative Assembly was formed accordingly and Tandan Ji was elected unopposed from the Allahabad seat.¹⁰ He was unanimously elected as the Speaker of U.P Legislative Assembly on 30th July, 1937.¹¹ Govind Vallabh Pant was elected as Chief Minister. Mahavir Tyagi was declared unable to contest as his speech was noticed highly objectionable by the Government during the last movement and it was in a public meeting when Jawahar Lal Nehru Ji was delivering his speech. Before his speech, Tyagi Ji showed punch to the police from stage. The Lieutenant Governor did not give permission to his name. And, so his wife Smt. Sharmada Tyagi was made candidate from Dehradun seat by the PCC.

On 2nd September, 1939 the Second World War began. The British Government declared India as a participant in war without taking consent of Indian people. The British Parliament forcibly made India's entry into the Second World War. The I.N.C called the provincial ministries to give resignation and that was done accordingly.

In the meantime, in its Session held on 23rd March, the Muslim League passed the resolution of two nations theory.¹² This theory was proved as the background of the Direct Action Day called after 6 years. Both the great freedom fighters under discussion were staunch Gandhians in ideology though they had differences on few points.

Tandan Ji and Tyagi Ji were two great leaders who could question Nehru Ji after Independence. Both the leaders were brave and farsighted personalities. At one end, Tandan Ji was known for serving Hindi language in Devnagri script,¹³ but Mahavir Tyagi was silent on that issue. Tandan Ji was so dedicated to that cause of Hindi and Devnagri that he could go against Gandhi Ji on that point.¹⁴ Similarly, there exists a platform where Tandan Ji and Tyagi Ji are witnessed doing the same thing but with different angles and it was to maintain peace and harmony during the early days of Independent India. It was just after 15th August, 1947.

To make a balance understanding of the Muslim League's Direct Action Day in the provinces of North-Western Frontier Province and Punjab,¹⁵ it is advisable to look upon the statements of Abdul Quayum and that of Sir Feroz Khan Noon respectively.¹⁶

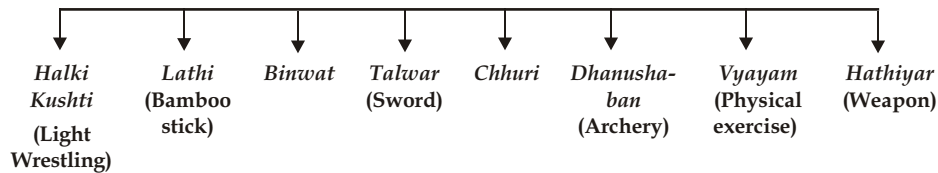
Both the leaders Tandan Ji and Tyagi Ji were against the partition of India till last. The idea of Tandan Ji was that if Hindus had learnt to increase strength by organizing themselves, the level of barbarity done to them by the Muslims would have been comparatively of some low degree. Within a period of 25 days after 15th August, Tandan Ji had written a letter to one Hansraj Arora.¹⁷ He had written it in the capacity of the Speaker of the United Provinces Legislative Assembly.¹⁸

In fact, it was his reply to the latter's letter written on 6th September 1947.¹⁹ This evidence shows that the former and the latter were in correspondence to each other even before 6th September, 1947. It will be better to have a look upon the former's reply written from the Speaker Bhawan, Lucknow. Needless to say, that all their worries were about safety of the innocent Hindus from the Muslim League's *gundas* barbarity.

The Blue-Print in the mind of Tandan Ji can be revisited through his letter written to one Shiv Singh Choyal on 16th May, 1945. This letter has been published by Prof. Vighnesh Kumar in his article published under the title of "Tandan Ji ka Hind Rakshak Dal : Katipaya Bindugat Visheshtayen (*Unke 3 Patron ke Aalok Mein*)".²⁰ The following table shows his plan:²¹

<i>Hind Rakshak Dal</i>	(U.P. Level)
↓	
[Zila] <i>Sanchalak</i>	(at district level)
↓	
<i>Thanapati</i>	(at police station level)
↓	
<i>Nayak</i>	(at <i>Akhada</i> level)

The curriculum of the *Akhada*-level activities was also designed by Tandan Ji. It can be shown as follows:



It is quite noteworthy that one Jugal Chandra Ghosh was running an *Akhada* at that time in Calcutta. He has been mentioned as follows²²:

Eyewitness accounts of what took place in the aftermath of the dispersal of the mass meeting are chilling. Jugal Chandra Ghosh was running an *akhara* at the time, a gymnasium which also served to drill squads of young men. He later admitted his own role in organizing retaliation on the streets of Calcutta, remembering "a place where four trucks were standing, all with dead bodies, at least three feet high; like molasses in sacks, they were stacked on the trucks, and blood and brain was oozing out... the whole sight of it, it had a tremendous effect on me." It was no longer warring political groups who were involved in the battle over India's future. Ordinary people going about their daily business were targeted, from tea-shop owners and rickshaw drivers to stall holders who had been dragged out, beaten and burned or had their property looted. Hindu-owned shops and homes were looted and smashed by those in cahoots with League activists.

In Calcutta, people were outraged not just by the events themselves, but also by the way in which political leaders, especially Suhrawardy, failed to deploy the military and police quickly. A definite impression was gaining ground that the state's resources had been exploited by the murderers with the League's blessing; rioters used state-owned trucks and had mysteriously accessed extra petrol coupons.

According to the Tandon Ji's plan, the base unit was the 'Akhada'. He used to think that in due course of time, this organization was to take under the UP Govt. and then, the Govt. could permit and train the volunteers to handle the "weapon". Thus, a voluntary force at provincial level with missionary commitment was to be raised for the public safety in general and for the safety of innocent Hindus in particular.

One full year after the Direct Action Day, India was divided. Pakistan became a reality shocking all the Hindus. The violence

against the Hindus remained continued and thus one can assess the practicality of Tandon Ji's idea of the *Hind Rakshak Dal*.

The Noakhali²³ violent episode occurred and thousands of the Hindus was brutally massacred. Their females stock was kidnapped and gangraped and converted to Islam.²⁴ The same was done to their children. It was a thing of shocking the Hindus. The reaction came from Bihar and soon an environment was getting accelerated. In these circumstances Mahavir Tyagi came forward to safeguard the Muslims from any danger though no danger was approaching the Muslims in reality but simply in his assumption.

He planned to form a corp of voluntary police. This was a missionary job to safeguard the Muslims though in the name of maintaining law and order in those days full of both the rumors in India caused by the violence in Pakistan. He matured his plan putting on police-uniform.

Mahavir Tyagi, one of the greatest Gandhian freedom fighters of the national movement of India was similarly a staunch opponent of the India's partition. He, in his book has shown it. Actually, in the light of historical evidences, he seems sometimes too much optimist. At one instance, at least one example comes from the Assembly elections in United Provinces during 1936-37. According to him, it was Rafi Ahmad Kidwai from whose sharp mindedness,²⁵ the Muslim League had come into alliance with the *Jamiyat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind*²⁶ in the elections of U.P. Legislative Assembly held in 1937. Similarly, according to Tyagi Ji, many-a-Muslim leaders of the Congress were forced to contest as the League's candidates. Tyagi Ji named Hafiz Ibrahim and Chaudhary Khaliquzzama in that category.²⁷ At the end, Chaudhary Khaliquzzama and Nawab Ismail Khan emerged as the top leaders of the Muslim League in the U.P. Legislative Assembly.²⁸ Tyagi Ji describes as if it was a secret between Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Rafi Ahmad Kidwai who were in close contact of these elected members of the Muslim League. In fact, as Tyagi Ji writes, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Rafi Ahmad Kidwai along with Govind Vallabh Pant had already signed an accord with Chaudhary Khaliquzzama and Nawab Ismail Khan.²⁹

The political scenario and the Muslim League activities had soon proved Mahavir Tyagi's mindset a failed one to understand the communal Muslim mind. He seems ignorant as far as the Muslim mindset of those days is concerned.

No doubt, Tyagi Ji was a person whose likings for fun are well known. His memoirs viz. "*Kabutari ka Doodh*", "*Satyagrah ki*

*Dharma-Pariksha*³⁰ and his conversation with the little great granddaughter³¹ of Chaudhary Raghbir Narayan Singh Tyagi³² of Meerut are some of the examples which can be quoted as the evidences in favour of this statement.

In fact, under the memoir titled the "*Satyagrah ki Dharam-Pariksha*", Tyagi Ji seems to organize a volunteer corps to safeguard the people. It was the year of 1947, just after independence when the communal tension was at its peak. Surprisingly, he never blames the Muslims or the Muslim League. He seems trying to hide the violence having been done by them but his behaviour matches with reasonability to that of his prophet : Gandhi Ji.

It is about the formation of "Tyagi Police". It will be better to present it in his own words for the sake of originality³³:

The 'dharmic' test of Satyagraha

Tyagi Police

In 1947, when India was partitioned and communal riots and disturbances began in Pakistan and India, Mahatma Gandhi experienced deep spiritual pain. It is impossible to describe his anguish. The central and provincial governments were also greatly troubled. It seemed as if the hope of *Swaraj*, nurtured by the blood of millions of families, had suddenly been struck by frost.

At that time, I was a member of both the Central Legislative Assembly and the Provincial Assembly. One morning, I obtained a police constable's uniform from the Superintendent of Police in Lucknow, wore it, tied the belt and baton, and went to the bungalow of the Chief Minister, Shri Govind Ballabh Pant. A police inspector was standing at the door. Saluting him briskly, I walked straight into Pant Ji's room.

Pant Ji was surprised that an ordinary police constable had entered without permission. After returning my salute, he loudly asked how I had come inside. I replied that my name was Mahavir Tyagi, that I had now become a constable, and that I had come to seek his blessings. He stood up laughing and asked what strange idea had come into my mind. I said that Hindu- Muslim riots were taking place everywhere, and neither Congress workers nor the police were doing anything effective. Therefore, I had decided to recruit a volunteer police force of 250 Congress workers to try to establish peace in the country.

He liked the idea and immediately issued a notice in the government gazette stating that this force would be called the

"Tyagi Police". The members of this force would receive no salary, but they would be granted full police powers and would be provided with uniforms, belts, rifles, and rations (food supplies). The government arranged for our training at the police lines in Meerut, which became our headquarters, and rifles were also issued to the force.

After a month of training, I went in uniform to seek the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi. He was staying at Birla House in Delhi. The moment he saw me, he burst into laughter. I saluted and sat on a chair, while he was lying on a cot. As soon as I sat down, I said, *"Bapu, I have come to seek your blessings."*

"No", Bapu replied, *"I cannot give you my blessings."*

I thought that Bapu was displeased because my uniform was not made of *khadi*. I felt very disappointed. Standing up, I said, *"If you cannot bless me, then try opposing me openly. My companions and I have already stepped into the field and cannot turn back now."*

As I began to leave, Bapu said, *"You did not understand. I have no objection to blessing you, but first promise that you will make me dance."*

My mind calmed a little, but I truly could not understand what he meant by *making him dance*. When I was a child and used to run away from meals, my grandmother would get irritated and say that I made the whole household dance around me for hours. I asked Bapu what he meant by making him dance.

He replied, *"When I read in the newspaper that Tyagi was stabbed while saving the life of a Muslim, and that his body is lying in the market of Saharanpur, then I will dance with joy. So promise me that you will make me dance."*

Hearing this, my voice choked with emotion. I held both of Bapu's feet as he lay on the cot and promised, *If God helps me and someone comes with a knife, then Bapu, I swear by your feet that I will surely make you dance.*

Then Bapu immediately sat up and, placing his hands on my shoulders, walked with me to the door. On the way, he stopped and said affectionately, *"We have achieved Swaraj, but in my lifetime the true test of the religion of Satyagraha could not take place. I wish that fifty or a hundred people like you would sacrifice their lives in the test of non-violence and Satyagraha. Then the purpose of my life would be fulfilled."*

As I was leaving, I again bowed my head and said, "Now please give me your blessings, Bapu."

Bapu replied, "When I dance, that dance itself will be my blessing for you."

Notes and References

1. The 17th day of the Arabic month of Ramdhan was falling on 16th August, 1947. The *Jang-i-Badr* or the Battle of Badr was launched and fought on the orders issued by the prophet himself. One of the style of hands while performing the namaz has its origin related to that battle.
2. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II (1935-1947), New Delhi: S. Chand & Co. [by arrangements with Padma Publications, Bombay, 1947], 805-806, 818;
G. S. Chhabra, *Advanced Study in the History of Modern India*, Vol. III (1920-1947), New Delhi: Lotus Press, 2004, 182-183.
3. The process to form an interim government was in progress those days and perhaps hence, the Congress did not form any committee to submit its report on the violence.
Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition : The Making of India and Pakistan*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, New edition, 2007, 63-80.
4. *Ibid.*, 61-67.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, 66; Bipin Chandra, *Indian Struggle for Independence (1857-1947)*, Gurugram: Penguin Random House India, 1987, 501.
7. H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide : Britain-India-Pakistan*, London: Hutchinson & Co., 1969, 166-167;
Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman : Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, New York: Cambridge University Press, [1955], Edition 1994, 222-223;
Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan*, New York: Oxford University Press, , 1994, 285.
8. Birth 01-08-1882, death 01-07-1962.
9. Birth 31-12-1899, death 22-05-1980. For few details, please see : *The Samaj Vigyan Shodh Patrika*, Vol. 2, No. LVII, October 2024 to March 2025, Vighnesh Kumar, "11 Varsh ki Jail ke Sazayafat Swatantrata Senani Mahavir Tyagi ke Vansh ka Sankshipta Itihas : Ek Avalokan."
10. Lakshmi Narayan Singh, *Rajarshi Purushottamdas Tandon* (in Hindi), Allahabad: Hindu Sahitya Sammelan, Prayag, 1982, 135.
11. Sharan Bihari Goswami, *Rajarshi Purushottamdas Tandon Smriti Grantha* (in Hindi), Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan, 1991, 107;
D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. V, (1938-1940), New Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, Patiala House, 1954, 269-270;

Balmukund Pandey, *Rajarshi Purushottamdas Tandon: Vyaktitva evam Vichar* (in Hindi), D.Litt. Thesis in History (Unpublished), submitted to Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, 2025, 87-89;

Prabhar Shastri, *Rajarshi Purushottam Das Tandon: Vyakti or Sanstha*, Allahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Prayag, Second edition 2004, Lal Bahadur Shastri, "Tandon Ji and Congress", 243-51;

Lakshmi Narayan Singh, *op.cit.*, 135.

12. The 21st Annual Session of All India Muslim League was held at Allahabad on 29-30 December, 1930. Sir Allama Iqbal was the President.
13. Purushottam Das Tandon Ji's letter written to Gandhi Ji on 02.08.1945. Balmukund Pandey, *op.cit.*, 131.
14. Lakshmi Narayan Singh, *op.cit.*, 30.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Letter to Hansraj Arora written on 06-09-1947. Balmukund Pandey, *op.cit.*, 240.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *The Pragya Shikshan Shodh Rachna*, Vol. 1, No. 19, Vighnesh Kumar, "Tandon Ji ka Hind Rakshak Dal...", 169-71.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Yasmin Khan, *op.cit.*, 65.
23. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India (1885-1947)*, New Delhi: Macmillan India, 1983, 432-433.
24. Yasmin Khan, *op.cit.*,
25. Mahavir Tyagi, *Azadi Ka Aandolan: Hanstey Hue Aansu*, New Delhi: Kitab Ghar, 2004 edition, 205.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, 109-113.
31. Interview 23-05-2000 with Smt. Reeta Chaudhary (then Munni bahinji, age-59 years), daughter of Kunwar Sukhvansh Narayan Singh grand daughter of Chaudhary Raghuvansh Narayan Singh great grand daughter of the Great Gandhian Freedom Fighter Chaudhary Raghbir Narayan Singh Tyagi, Asaura *Riyasat*, Hapur, Uttar Pradesh. She told the first author that one good morning, a gentleman came to Uttama Vatika [now Asaura House], Meerut and asked her to inform 'Badi Sarkar', her "Babaji". On asking his name, he told "Kah dena ki unka JAMURA aaya hai". She went and inform accordingly. Hearing the name "Jamura", Babaji called a servant and said to him : "Dekho Mahavir Tyagi aaye hain." That meant a lot of instructions to that servant. Munni bahinji was married with Chaudhary Narendra Singh Ji when he was studying in B.Sc. in Meerut College,

Meerut. An elephant was given to the groom which was well enjoyed by groom's friends including a boy named Murli Manohar Joshi who had been studying living in his uncle Dr. S. S. Joshi's house. This chap is famous BJP leader Shriman Professor Murli Manohar Joshi Ji. Both the groom and the bride are now no more.

32. Vighnesh Kumar, *Meerut ke Panch Hazar Varsha*, Meerut: Hastinapur Research Institute, 1996, 299-306;

Vighnesh Kumar, *Uttar Pradesh ke Swantartrata Senani Chaudhary Raghbir Narayan Singh*, Meerut: Hastinapur Research Institute, 2009, 1-64.

33. Mahavir Tyagi, *op.cit.*, 109-113.

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