

Mountbatten and the Partition of British India: A Role Analysis

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The year 1947 brought to the people of Indian subcontinent partition, and in its wake, the creation of two independent states. In many ways it was a unique event unfolding new and different episodes of long-term significance and far reaching consequences. Apart from the redistribution of boundaries, it also redefined the concepts of leadership, thus giving new perceptions of its standards and perpetuating new ideals.

In the context of partition, few would deny the primacy of the role assigned to and played by Lord Louis-Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of United India. His personality has been analysed and discussed by a number of scholars in a variety of ways and from different angles. His royal blood, remarkable naval career, and high ranking contacts coupled with his personal charm, captivating glamour, and youthful looks have led many to attribute heroic qualities to his being. British and even certain Indian circles have depicted him as a "super statesman-cum-Prince charming who solved the subcontinent's problems in record time through a combination of military forthrightness, sheer personality, and tact."¹ Above all the circumstances of his appointment and arrival in India as the Viceroy designate have further added to the appeal and enigma that he himself was conscious enough to convey, for he was extremely mindful of the manner, his acts and decisions

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1. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1857-1947* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 452.

would reflect in history.² The image thus put across does in no way fall short of a great leader with extraordinary powers to execute the destiny of one fifth of humanity. However, the extent to which this garb of leadership suited his person remains a question to be viewed and analysed in all its manifold dimensions.

Leadership is a strangely unique and singularly powerful phenomenon, which is easily stamped but vaguely understood. It is a form of art that combines genius and luck requiring both force and vision to an extraordinary degree in varying circumstances of time and place. Moreover, it operates in the form of a triangle, to the existence and successful functioning of which the other two elements of "followers" and "goal" are indispensable. Most of the literature on leadership is unitarian, often confusing it as a single self-sufficient whole, functioning as an independent entity, more or less in a vacuum.³ This is a misconception. The nature and character of leadership is trinitarian. A leader, therefore, is one who shows exceptional capability to mobilize other towards a goal that is commonly shared by the leaders as well as the followers.⁴

The usual qualities attributed to great leadership are discipline, self-confidence, and intelligence of a high calibre, hard work, and above all a fiery zeal to mould a dream into reality notwithstanding the magnitude of adverse implications. Charged with a great vision, inspired by a goal and drive by an unseen force of energy and zest, the leader moves the nation and ignites the flame of courage and struggle in the masses. Almost invariable the product of tumultuous times, the leaders can both be loved and hated by the people for the very same acts. One thing, however, is certain: they are seldom indifferent toward him.⁵

Leadership does not attempt to vaguely influence others. It is rather actually focused and struggles for the joint quest of a specific ideal that, in turn, spells out the "kind" of leadership in question. War, natural disaster, management crisis, revolution,

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2. Richard Hough, *Mountbatten: Hero of Our Time* (London: Widenfeld & Nicholson, 1980), 206.
 3. Gary Wills, *Trumpets: The Call of Leaders* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 17.
 4. *Ibid.*
 5. Richard Nixon, *Leaders* (New York: Warner Books, 1992), 5.

