India achieved its independence on the 15th August, 1947. The present generation hardly knows where was Mahatma Gandhi, the main architect of the achievement of our freedom, on that day, and how he was spending the day. Mahatma Gandhi was staying in a dilapidated house in Beliaghata in East Calcutta at the time, near the crossing of Beliaghata Main Road and Raja Rajendralal Mitra Road, a few metres away from the ‘Alochaya Cinema Hall. He spent the day of our independence, 15th August, 1947, fasting and observing silence since the Freedom Fighters never wanted a truncated motherland. As such when there was celebrations in Delhi Mahatma Gandhi was engaging himself in bringing back peace and harmony in the riot-torn Calcutta. Another eminent Personality, the elder brother of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Sarat Chandra Bose was observing fast and silence in his famous 1, Woodburn Park residence. He proposed a ‘United Bengal Plan’ to prevent partition of Bengal, but failed to work it out. Of course it is a different story.

In October 1946 there happened the infamous ‘Great Calcutta killing’ and taking advantage of this the majority community unleashed a reign of terror and organised a dreadful riot on the minority community in Noakhali and Tripura in Eastern Bengal. As soon as this news reached Delhi Mahatma Gandhi decided to go Noakhali to stop the riot, bring back peace and amity and raise the morale of the victims and arrange relief and rehabilitation. He reached Sodepur Khadi Pratisthan and left for Noakhali on the 6th
November, 1946, from here. After going from village to village for four months he left for Bihar via Calcutta on the 3rd March, since Bihar retaliated. Later he came back to Calcutta on the 9th March to go again to Noakhali. But as there was recurrence of communal riot in Calcutta he stayed back for some days. Meanwhile Punjab and Kasmir were involved in communal riot and as the situation deteriorated there he went to Kashmir and Lahore via Delhi. In the history of the world there never occurred such an endeavour of an old person of seventy seven years running from one end of the country to the other to bring about peace by changing the minds of men.

Gandhiji reached Calcutta on the 9th August, 1947, again to go to Noakhali as the work there was incomplete. But as the day of Independence was nearer and the Muslim leaders became afraid, they requested Gandhiji to stay in Calcutta. Gandhiji thought that if the Hindus in Calcutta restrained themselves the Muslims in Noakhali would also reciprocate. Then this house was selected on the 12th August, 1947. Poor Muslim people were living around the building. The dilapidated house was made habitable and Gandhiji started living there from the 13th August. Gandhiji, as was his wont, called it ‘Manjil’. Presently it is known as the ‘Beliaghata Gandhi Bhaban’. He made two (2) conditions—1. the Muslims living there would look after him, of whatever standard this might be and 2. Surawardy must live there with him. Surawardy could not absolve himself from tacitly supporting the ‘Great Calcutta killing’ in the year 1946.

The very evening, on the 13th August, 1947, quite a big assembly of Hindus came there and asked Gandhiji that when in October, 1946, Calcutta was burning why he did not come at that time. The day before Independence came, that is the 14th August, 1947, Gandhiji told an assembly of around ten thousand people
during the evening prayer that the next day would be both of joy and
sorrow as independence would come but the country would be
divided. As such the day should be spent in restraint.

On the 15th August, 1947, the day of Independence, Calcutta
witnessed a unique communal harmony and the sky was rendered
with the cries of 'Bhai, Bhai'. In the afternoon Dr. P.C. Ghose, the
Chief Minister, took Gandhiji to places to witness this communal
harmony. In the day-time B.B.C requested him for a Message.
Gandhiji observed 'I have forgotten English'. When the Information
Department of the newly independent Indian Government
requested for a Message he wrote— "I have run dry.....".

However, there had been disturbances in the districts around
Calcutta and Gandhiji was taken to Barrackpore, Titagarh,
Kanchrapara, Barasat, etc., from the 18th to 20th / 21st August,
1947.

On the 31st August evening there was an assembly of men
belonging to the Hindu Community near the Beliaghata House and
showed Gandhiji a person with a bandage on his forehead. They
complained that Muslims had hurt him. Dr. P.C. Ghose was there at
that time and on examining the person he found that it was falsely
applied. Brickbats and sticks were thrown at Gandhiji also and
Calcutta was gripped with riot again.

The Calcutta Miracle:
After this incident Gandhiji declared that from the midnight of the
1st September, 1947, he would start a fast unto death and withdraw
it if Calcutta became normal again. There was a stir among the
leaders and ordinary people and on the 4th September bombs and
arms were surrendered to Gandhiji and 40 (forty) leaders belonging
to different communities gave a written undertaking to Gandhiji
that there was recurrance of communal riot in Calcutta they would
stop it even by sacrificing their lives. Who were not there in that building at that time? The Governor Chakravarty Raja Gopalachari, Chief Minister Dr. Parafulla Chandra Ghose, some members of his canbinet, N.C. Chatterjee and Deben Mukherjee of the Hindu Mahasabha (Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee met Gandhiji earlier), Sikh Leader Sardar Niranjan Singh Talib, the Editor of 'Desha Darpan' Dr. Jilani and Surawardy of the Muslim Leage, Dr. Abdur Rasid of the Pakistan Seamens' union and also Mujibur Rahaman, etc.. Gandhiji broke his fast after seventy three (73) hours and Surawardy gave him a glass of orange juice to broke his fast at 9:15 pm in the night. Chakravarty Raja Gopalachari observed that 'the magician' performed 'the Calcutta Miracle'.

Overwhelmed by this effort of Gandhiji to bring back peace and normalcy the Governor General of India Lord Mountbatten wrote a letter in his own hand to Gandhiji on the 26th August, 1947. He described Gandhiji as his 'One-man boundary force' and wrote that as a serving officer as well as the administrative head could he congratulate Gandhiji. Truely what he could not do with fifty five thousand (55,000) soldiers in Punjab Gandhiji alone did this in Calcutta—bringing back peace and normalcy. As a matter of fact, after the sad demise of Gandhiji, Calcutta was without any Hindu - Muslim riot for many years.

On the 7th September, 1947, morning Gandhiji left Calcutta for Delhi. Before leaving the Beliaghata house he wrote a Message for his peace Brigade in Bengal in his own hand— "Amar jibani amar bani", "My life is my Message", and signed in Bengali as M.K.Gandhi. Gandhiji could not come back to Calcutta and his Noakhali Experiment remained unfinished. On the 30th January, 1948, a fool murdered him. My notion however, is that Gandhiji became a victim in the hands of the vested interest. But that is another story.
A brief note on the Beliaghata Gandhi Bhaban, Kolkata-700010:

Beliaghata Gandhi Bhaban is a unique edifice. In a violent, conflict-ridden world it stands as a hope. For here was experimented the most humane way of Conflict Resolution through a method, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore aptly described as 'Gandhi's gift of the fight' which the world can adopt for its survival. Illustrating Tagore further observed that in this method of fight 'there is neither victor nor vanquished, no one gets hurt, both the contending parties survive and develop a lasting bond of goodwill towards each other' (General Smuts' case). Thus here was performed the 'Calcutta Miracle' bringing back sanity, harmony and normalcy in a never possible situation, within only seventy-three hours of conflagration.

Beliaghata Gandhi Bhaban is a 'pilgrimage' (Chakravarty Raja Gopalachari), a symbol of triumph of Non-Violence over Violence, good over evil, communal harmony, brotherhood and vindication of Gandhiji's belief in the essential goodness of man, and his tremendous popularity.

Naturally the Bhaban deserves much more than its present predicament. However, uncertainty of ownership, unimaginative programmes, lack of commitment, an unauthorised computer—training centre, etc., have all contributed to devoid the Bhaban of its real import and merit.

Under the circumstances, as I feel, the State Government, which acquired the Bhaban from private hands with Government of India financial assistance, re-establish itself, since the Government means a system, a discipline, organise a museum depicting the historic experimentation performed here with all its dimensions.

The Bhaban will of course be maintained as it is to preserve its historicity and adjacent to it a new structure could be built to house
a library and applied research—section to carry out studies on non-violence-violence, brotherhood and harmony, ways to mitigate conflict and terrorism in peaceful manner and undertake activities in consonance with these to make the Bhaban vibrant, educative and attractive to all sections of the public.