

QUIT INDIA: A LEADERLESS MOVEMENT AND FACTORY OF POST-INDEPENDENCE LEADERS

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Abstract: Every great movement carries the insignia of a leader and any movement which is not headed by a strong-minded leader falls apart. The entire history of the Indian freedom struggle is filled with movements that are launched by different leaders in different parts of the land. There is a rarity of movements that lack leadership. The Quit India movement which was launched by Gandhi Ji in 1942 became leaderless on the next day of its launch. All the leaders were arrested but the movement continued. It was the only movement in the history of INC that wasn't called off. There was a dearth of leadership but people heeded the clarion call of "Do or Die".

Keywords: incremental changes, spontaneous changes, visionary leaders, revolutions, movements, significance, Indian freedom struggle, leaders

1.0. Introduction

There are two types of changes one is incremental and another is spontaneous. Incremental changes are part of the nature of things. They are inherent and continue in the background. But spontaneous changes are brought by outside forces. These forces can be created by visionary people. The same is the case with revolutions and movements. Every movement in human history owes a great deal of significance to its leaders. Because without leadership movements become wayward and lose their objective.

This hyphenation between leaders and movements is true for the Indian freedom struggle also. Indian freedom struggle spanned over 200 years. It becomes evident in the early 19th century that Indian people are unhappy with the interference and rule of British people. So, they tried to overthrow that rule in 1857 with the 1st war of independence.ⁱ That struggle had a plethora of leaders who were leading that resistance in different geographical territories. But somehow that movement lost its battle due to a lack of visionary and energetic leadership.ⁱⁱ After losing that war India and its people tried to wage a coordinated attack on the ideas and legitimacy of the British Indian government.

Following the same Idea, an organization was created to bring like-minded people together in the form of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Freedom fighters and political reforms from different backgrounds came together and started working for the freedom of India.ⁱⁱⁱ INC became an umbrella academy for freedom fighters. Every effort for the freedom of India was coordinated and synchronized. In 1915 after coming to India from South Africa, Mahatma Gandhi also became a part of this organization. After a few years, it was Gandhi who was leading the Indian struggle for independence. Gandhi ji launched various movements of different scales and intensities. But during each campaign, there was a leader to tell the masses what to do and where to lead. But in 1942 when the Quit India movement was launched after the failure of Cripps Mission, there was no stalwart leader left to lead the movement.^{iv} But somehow that movement continued and inspired the masses for the freedom of India. To understand this movement and its consequences, this paper is divided into three sections. The first section is about the genesis of movement. The second section deals with how this movement became leaderless and continued for a long time. The final section explains the people who became leaders due to this movement.

2.0 Origin of the Movement

The Quit India movement owes its origin to the Second World War which started in 1939. Before that Indian Nationalist leaders were looking for constitutional means to salvage Indian freedom. But with the outbreak of war in Europe some radical leaders like Bose and others saw an opportunity and asked the Indian National Congress to launch a movement. But during the initial phases of the war, the Indian National Congress didn't

want to pry on the woes of the British Empire^v.

There was no final decision about India's role in the World War. However, without consulting the leaders of the Indian National Congress and other major political outfits, the British Indian government made India a party to the war^{vi}. All the nationalist leaders opposed this decision and showed their unwillingness to participate.

Later Indian National Congress demanded the British government declare its war aims and explain India's future after the war^{vii}. INC held a meeting passed the resolution and ratified this resolution in the All India Congress Working Committee meeting^{viii}. After all these appeals, there was no response from the government. So, Indian leaders declared that if the British Indian government didn't heed their demands then they would be forced to launch another mass movement. In response to the government's unresponsive behavior and keeping in view the threat of Japanese invasion, the Indian National Congress and Gandhi ji launched the Quit India Movement.

3.0 Movement without Leadership

Congress asked Gandhi Ji to lead the movement. So, in the Wardha meeting of the AICC Gandhi ji declared the launch of the mass movement. He gave the clarion call of "Do or Die" to the people. However, before giving this call he asked the British people to leave India peacefully. In the Wardha meeting, Gandhi laid out twelve points and explained the broad contours of the movement.

The entire program and planning of the Quit India movement were published by Congress on 5th August 1942 and was laid out by Gandhi Ji himself^{ix}. Those twelve points explained that the movement will start with a 24-hour hartal throughout the country. Then public meetings will take place, and lawyers and public servants will resign from their posts. There will be non-payment of taxes and breaking of salt laws will happen. The last step would be the setup of parallel government.

However the government had other intentions and instead of recognizing the vitality of the movement, they arrested all the leaders of the Congress working committee on the morning of 9th August 1942^x. Gandhi Ji along with his secretary was arrested in the early hours of the same morning and the government named this operation "Zero Hours"^{xi}. However, as the news of their arrest reached the masses, a great deal of upheavals and violent disturbances took place. People were without leaders and direction. So, a state of confusion erupted in the entire nation.

After the arrest of prominent leaders, the initial reaction of the masses was mild. But slowly the situation deteriorated. "Apart from hartal, Protest meetings and similar demonstrations, concerted outbreaks of mob violence, arson murder and acts of sabotage took place. These disturbances culminated in violent conflict and large-scale destruction of private and government property happened. Police and military seized the opportunity and let loose a reign of terror"^{xii}. In that state of confusion, people adopted the path of violence. Public properties and government institutions faced the ire of the masses. Police stations, railway stations, and other such institutions were burned down. Means of communication were disrupted by the public. Telegram lines were disabled and for a few days, government activities came to an abrupt standstill.

However, government took the stringent measures to repress this movement. There were repressive measures like lathi charges, indiscriminate arrests, and shootings from the government to regain the charge. Heavy fines and penalties were collected by the government from the satyagrahis and if someone was unable to pay those fines then their properties were confiscated^{xiii}. There were mass arrests by the government to suppress the movement. Indian political commentator of that time J. B. Kriplani wrote about this situation and government response "These arrangements could not have been made between the time the A.I.C.G resolution was passed and our arrests. The fact is that preparations for wholesale arrests and severe repression to put down any movement that might be started had been made much earlier. Detention camps had been set up beforehand and even lists of people who were to be arrested had been drawn up. It is, therefore, no wonder that the Viceroy refused to give an interview to Gandhi ji even when he had said in the A.I.C.C. meeting that he would seek guidance from the Viceroy before launching any movement"^{xiv}.

So, according to the Indian leaders, the government planned in advance to repress the movement. They were not looking to find any solution to the problems. So, all these arrests of Congress Working Committee members and other stalwarts left the Quit India movement leaderless.

4.0 Birth of New Leadership

After the arrest of all the stalwarts of the Indian national movement during the Quit India movement left the country without effective leadership. It appeared that the movement was fading out due to repressive measures of the government and a lack of proper leadership. However, after a few days of anarchy, a new order emerged. People assumed the strings of that movement and a new breed of leadership appeared in the national politics. Leaders like Jai Parkash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Morarji Desai, Usha Mehta, Aruna Asif Ali, and many more. Before this movement, all these young leaders were working in the shadows of other popular leaders. After the arrest of popular leaders, all the young generation of Indian leaders assumed the responsibility of the Quit India movement. They passed the instructions to the people regarding the activities of the Indian National Congress. They operated underground radios and other means of communication between the revolutionaries. All these activities helped to keep the flame burning and forced the government to change its method of operation. After the independence, these leaders carried the ideas and politics of Mahatma Gandhi. They helped to keep the politics moral and accountable to the masses.

5.0 Conclusion

Quit India movement started with so much fanfare and lofty aims. Leaders had the vision to free India in a very short time. They thought that this movement would force the British people to Quit India and hand over the power to the Indian people. It appeared that the movement failed to realize the immediate goals but steered the government towards freedom. However, one important outcome of the movement was the birth of new leaders in Indian politics. This generation of young leaders carried the movement to its logical aim.

6.0 References

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