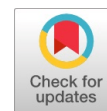


Quit India Movement: An Analysis of Its Nature and Ideas Behind It



Abhigyan R. Duarah

Abstract: *The spontaneity of the Quit India Movement has been discussed throughout the literature as a sudden reaction, in comparison to other Nationalist movements that preceded the event. On the contrary, however, certain instances do proceed to limit this understanding of the movement as merely a reaction, thereby providing insight into the specific logical planning behind the movement as such. The current write-up aims to bring both discussions into a unified perspective of analysis, thereby enhancing understanding and, in turn, furthering the debate on the movement above.*

Keywords: *Quit India, Contrary, Movement, Comparison, Nature*

I. INTRODUCTION

The consensus regarding the understanding of the Quit India movement lies beneath the desire to comprehend the particular movement and its connection to the outburst of nationalist understandings and approaches; thereby becoming a pillar of what is considered “India” as one knows and is familiar with. This analysis towards the National Movements as such; and not just in regards to the Quit India Movements; not just engages with the idea of the movements as the “*most precious*” moments of Indian history along with the Vedic and Mughal era; but thereby in doing so; observes the narratives within the context of the National Movements on a very similar manner. As Irfan Habib puts forward; “In any case, anyone who is seriously interested in Indian history must be confronted in his mind with the nature of the National Movement, which could be regarded as the greatest creation of the Indian people to date, and, within the nature of Gandhi’s legacy” (Habib, 1995, 3) [4]. As such, even narratives such as the confrontations with national leaders gain the title of “the great”, thereby limiting the arguments within the same framework. In light of this, another argument can be brought forward regarding how analysis is conducted in terms of the narratives behind the movements, particularly in the context of the Quit India movement.

which so happens to raise a question as to whether the movement was a tactically planned one; having a specific philosophy just like its predecessors; having a certain planning involved; or did it lack planning and shifted towards a spontaneity to achieve the desire of “*Swaraj*”; and in doing so; it brought a shift towards the National Movements; thereby resulting in the consequences of independence? Comprehending the same, it might be viable to understand a particular manner through which the analysis shall be done; to facilitate the argument, put forward by the question being discussed.

II. ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES

Based much on the lines of social psychology and how humans are placed within a particular situation within which the human acts, not just in terms of micro; but also thereby acting through macro processes; it can be very much stated that the Quit India Movement did not extensive political mobilization; especially if one contextualizes the processes through which, or rather the phases through which the movement proceeded. These phases, though interlinked with each other in terms of bringing about the process of the movement or ‘revolt’, determine how the idea of ‘Quit India’ was promoted: be it as a do-or-die revolt, or do so strategically. The analysis can be conducted through the following discussions.

III. GANDHI’S ATTEMPT TOWARDS VIOLENCE

In 1942, serious concerns arose in global affairs, as processes were, to a considerable extent, dynamic, creating an imbalance between the old world order and the emerging new world order, particularly due to the ongoing effects of World War II. With the advancements of the Japanese troops towards the Indian mainland, after the fall of Burma, Singapore and the Malay Peninsula; the situation in India worsens up; with Gandhi bringing forth a militant attitude towards dealing with the “British problem.” In his work, *Modern India 1885-1947*, Sumit Sarkar states “Leave India to God or anarchy, he repeatedly urged the British-‘this orderly disciplined anarchy should go, and if as a result there is complete lawlessness, I would risk it.’” (Linlithgow to Amery, reporting Gandhi’s press interview of 16 May, Mansergh, Vol. H, p. 96). Even within the lines of his Do or Die speech; this militant aggression towards letting Indians rule their land was observable; which further was observed within the contexts of the ‘Quit India’ resolution passed in the Bombay session of AICC on 8th August 1942, stating “mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale”

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* Correspondence Author (s)

Abhigyan Raktim Duarah*, Student, Department of Political Science and History, Christ University, Bengaluru (Karnataka), India. E-mail: abhigyaanrduarah@gmail.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2655-7048>

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(Sarkar, 1989, 388) [6]. On the contrary however; a further argument can be brought about on the lines of if Gandhi resonated to violence with a volition; was a strategic deliverance used towards the effort of encouraging the popular mobilization of commons; Or was a tactic played to promote a common neutral ground to be formed between the Right wings such as Rajendra Prasad and Patel, and the Socialists such as Achyut Patwardhan and Narendra Dev. Comprehending specific texts and analysing them reveals that Gandhi's intention to attempt a shift towards a more militant approach was not sudden. On June 14, 1942, he wrote a letter from Sevagram to Chiang Kai-Shek: *"I will take no hasty action, and whatever action is taken will be governed by the consideration that it should not injure. China or encourage Japanese aggression in India or China. I am straining every nerve to avoid a conflict with the British Authority"* (Gupta, 1985, 573). The efforts towards not attempting a further movement could also be observed in a press conference of Nehru in April 1942, stating "It is, a hateful notion that after five years of war, China should be defeated; it is a dangerous notion that Russia, which represents certain human values which means a great setback to human civilization, should be defeated. But ultimately, naturally, I have to judge every question from the Indian viewpoint" (Gupta, 1985, 575). This attempt towards keeping a particular relation with the British Empire and thereby the United States of America on the lines of non-violence and cooperation could also be observed in the letter Gandhi sent to President Franklin D. Roosevelt on July 2, 1942; which stated the British and Americans might keep their troops in India at their own expense; not to interfere at the internal order of the Indians; but to prevent the Japanese aggression towards India and China (Gupta, 1985, 575-576).

IV. SITUATION WITHIN CONGRESS

The provocation of the British element throughout the entire situation also played a significant role in determining the situation of the Quit India movement. As much observed; the British had not been keen in providing a negotiating effort towards the AICC; which could be observed through the failure of Cripps mission, and the shortcomings of the round table conferences; thereby leading to a need for the inevitable upsurge of a mass mobilization within the common, the process to achieve the same was also to an extent; being predominantly vague. It could be well observed how the British authority's failure towards responding towards the Wardha resolution in 1939, which directed the resignation of the Congress Provisional governments to resign after disposing of the urgent business by October 31st, 1939 (Tendulkar, 1983, 5, 168) [7]. Again, the British in documents like Tottenham's *Congress Responsibility For the Disturbances* (February 1943) repeatedly attributed the Congress change of line to secret pro-Axis sympathies, thereby emphasizing gaining further support towards anti-fascist ideology to gain popular support during the war (Sarkar, 1989, 389) [6]. The situation for Congress seemed to be delayed further during the onset of the Quit India movement, where the arrests of Gandhi and the top leaders took place on August 9th, along with more than 1000 arrests within a week. The siege of the press, and censorship of newspapers, and with that came a sequester of files and funds

towards the AICC (Greenough, 1999, 12) [2]. As such, it fosters a proper understanding of the necessity for a specific action to be undertaken. This action, however, was not intended to be a full-scale militant-style one. Or to a certain extent, it was not portrayed as intentional. It is much observed in the comments given by Gandhi in an interview with a News Chronicle editorial on 8th August 1942; "I have contemplated an interval between the passing of the Congress resolution and the starting of the struggle. I am unsure whether what I contemplate doing according to my wont can be described as similar to negotiation. But a letter will certainly go to the Viceroy not as an ultimatum, but in earnest pleading for avoiding conflict. If there is a favourable response, then my letter can be the basis for negotiation" (Gupta, 1985, 577). As such, it was commendable that the Congress was not in a hurry to launch another movement, fearing it might worsen the situation of the allies, which had deteriorated by 1942 due to Japan's entry into the war. Congress knew the launch of another movement would mean arrests to a surety, and the reaction of the same could be observed in the resolution drafted by the All India Working Committee on 8th August; stating "A time may come when it may not be possible to issue instructions to reach our people, and when no Congress committees can function. When this happens, every man and woman participating in this movement must function for themselves within the four general instructions issued. Every Indian who desires and strives for it must be his guide..." (Greenough, 1999, 13).

V. POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

The entire reaction to the arrests of Congress leaders was observed to be an attempt by the British to suppress and thereby limit the National Movement's ability to gain independence. Confrontations with violence; attacks on government offices; and Europeans (leaving some injured and dead), Raidings and burnings over several parts of the nation: Bihar, Bengal, Bombay, United Provinces, etc., ravaged a struggle towards an unknown destination. We should keep this statement in mind, as it will be discussed later. As Gandhi wrote in his letter to the Viceroy on 23rd August 1942, *"The wholesale arrest of the Congress leaders seems to have made people wild with rage to the point of losing self-control"* (Tendulkar, 1983, 6, 183) [7]. The interpretations of the same were, however, not similar on all levels. The government, being appalled by the levels of movements and protests despite the attempts to stop the movement, began to observe it as a conspiracy theory by the Japanese to destabilise the region; thereby paralysing the British effort to defend India. With a mentality that the protest was not too far from the Revolt of 1857, it was observable that the reaction of the officials came as a surprise. The Viceroy sent a telegram to Churchill on 31st August, stating he was engaged in the meeting by far the most serious rebellion since 1857 (Greenough, 1999, 14-15), justifying the same.

The conspiracy, however, was later proven to be baseless due to a lack of evidence (Greenough, 1999, 15).

The attempt to understand the rationale behind this rebellion, however, remains a contested issue. As Paul R. Greenough states, "Several historians who have examined this question



agree that it was the government's description of the violence and disorder which were anticipated that provided the common plan for the violence and disorder which occurred" (Greenough, 1999, 15). As such; the political mobilization about the Quit India movement can be therefore observed not just as a reaction to the arrests of Congress leaders, but also as a reaction to the plans and observations of the government's idea of where the violence would happen; and thereby laid down a plan based on what the government was thinking. As Bhuyan puts it in his work, **'Quit India Movement'**, "the chief instrument in broadcasting the supposed Congress programme; what he [Leopold Amery, Secretary of State for India] said was avidly believed by the people" (Bhuyan, 1975, 90) [1]. A similar observation is provided by Hutchins, who comments that the menace Amery depicted was what many Indians subsequently sought to create (Greenough, 1999, 16).

VI. CONCLUSION

The connections between the discussions done within the titles of Gandhi's attempt, the situation within and with the Congress; and the subsequent notion of political mobilization of the public in general within the context of the phases of the Quit India movement do attempt to indicate criss-cross of narratives, each bringing forth an argument that tries to establish its version of the story and in doing so, thereby subsequently tries to contradict the already established one. However, if one has to decipher and thereby categorise them in terms of the question that seems to govern and thereby raises to the surface within this document again and again, about if the movement in general, was structured on, or did it portray a spontaneous action towards the issue; one can categorise it in terms of yes and no through the following analysis: In terms of comprehending the perspective that the movement is spontaneous, specific facts and evidence have shown the coming up of the movement as a reactionary attempt towards the actions of the government. As observed through the document; if done chronologically; Gandhi and a significant section of the Congress leaders showed hesitation to attempt another movement; which could jeopardize the war efforts of the British and the Americans; for the rationale of the movements was to attempt to get independence; and not replace the domination of one imperial power to another. This was despite the British's perception of promoting Congress as an Axis-aligned party throughout the war, as observed. This unwillingness to engage in a movement is primarily observed in Gandhi's conversations with Chiang Kai-shek and President Roosevelt, as it was necessary to secure international recognition and pressure the British to grant Swaraj. As such, the sudden provocation of protests, riots, and violence could be observed as a surprise element for both Congress leaders, Gandhi, and the British Indian government. However, limiting the discussion would mean limiting the ability to decipher the other aspect of the story. That being the story, this provocation towards riots and the use of violence, and thereby the Quit India movement, was not a spontaneous movement, but rather a planned attempt by the Congress for another movement. The rationale for this can be observed through two different lenses of observation and interpretation. First, this attempt would

ensure receiving acceptance and sympathy from Chiang Kai-shek, and more prominently, President Roosevelt. It could be observed through the reaction of Congress when Roosevelt declared the **'Atlantic Charter'** to apply to the entire world (thereby attempting to encourage self-government throughout the colonies) (Gupta, 1985, 574) [3]. The consequences of the likewise too were observed when the arrests of Gandhi and other leaders brought about international attention; leading to questions being risen from the ruling circles of America and Britain; to which Leopold Amery (the Secretary of State for India) was obliged to provide a public clarification on 10th August 1942; stating "the success of the proposed campaign [Quit India movement] would paralyze not only the ordinary civil administration of India but her whole war effort" (Greenough, 1999, 15). Second, this attempt would enable the mobilisation process to be more robust, thereby enhancing the entire process of Swaraj. It could be observed in the **'Do-or-Die'** speech of Gandhi, which enhanced the mantra of freeing the nation, or dying in the attempt (*The Quit India Speeches | Famous Speeches by Mahatma Gandhi*, n.d.) [5]. The leaders surely observed the imminence of the arrests and the manner through which the reaction would be perceived; however, not to the extent that it happened. As such, it could be perceived that the lack of a specific strategy and regulations provided by Congress created a base for the movement's proceedings, as these were then replaced by the presence of certain notions and actions undertaken by the British Indian government. In doing so, the British Indian government laid down a particular, though unknowingly, strategic approach and therefore planned how the movement would proceed. Concluding, the question that acted as the genesis for this discussion comes back to the surface once again: What is the Quit India Movement? The answer would be a rather pragmatic one: it is neither a spontaneous rebellion in direct reaction to the government's actions, nor is it a planned movement initiated by Congress. The rationale lies within the lines that were discussed earlier: towards the unknown destination. Gandhi and Congress, in particular, portrayed a hesitation towards launching another movement, which reflected their surprised reaction. On the other hand, Congress expressed a desire to shift its attention towards achieving international recognition, thereby increasing its talks with the United States and China. Therefore, knowing the imminence of the failure of the Civil Disobedience movement, and the revival of the same with a specific objective that was never fulfilled due to the spontaneous reaction of the public, the destination of the unknown comes into being. As such, the movement would rather be termed as an "A movement planned with haste by the Congress, supplemented by the government, executed by the public, thereby acting spontaneously".

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AUTHOR PROFILE



Abhigyan Raktim Duarah is an undergraduate student from Christ (Deemed to be University) Bannerghatta Road Campus, Bangalore. He is currently pursuing a bachelor's course in English, History and Political Science, with a keen interest in subjects including International Relations, History and Philosophy. His primary research focuses particularly on International geopolitics and has worked as a research intern with UNESCO, Guwahati, in promoting the Sustainable Development Goals through research and policy analysis. As such, he is looking forward to expanding his research focus and gaining a deeper understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of international politics and diplomacy.

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