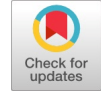


Quit India Movement: An Analysis of Its Nature and Ideas Behind it



Abhigyan R. Duarah

Abstract: *The spontaneity of the Quit India Movement has been discussed throughout the literatures as a sudden reaction, in comparison to other Nationalist movements that preceded before the said event. On the contrary to the same however, certain instances in fact, do proceed to limit this understanding of the movement being a mere reaction, thereby providing an insight towards certain logical planning behind the movement as such. The current writes up focuses to upbring both of the discussions to a singular perspective of analysis, thereby understanding and henceforth, furthering the debate of the said movement.*

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

I. INTRODUCTION

The general consensus towards the understanding of the Quit India movement lies beneath the desire to understand the particular movement and its linkage towards the outburst of nationalist understandings and approaches; thereby becoming a pillar towards what would be considered as “*India*” 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 own 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 the narratives such as the confrontations of and with the national leaders gains the title of “*the great*”; thereby limiting the arguments within the framework of the same. On the limelight of the same; another argument can be brought forward to the manner in which analysis is done in terms of the narratives behind the movements; particularly in the context of Quit India,

which so happens to raise a question as to whether the movement was a tactically planned one; having a certain philosophy just like its predecessors; having a certain planning involved; or did it lack planning and shifted towards a spontaneity in order 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; in order 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 certain 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*’ determines whether the manner through which the idea of ‘*Quit India*’ was promoted: be it as a do-or-die revolt, or do in a strategic manner. The analysis of the same can be done through the following discussions.

III. GANDHI’S ATTEMPT TOWARDS VIOLENCE

Coming up in 1942 oversaw serious concerns in terms of global affairs and the processes that were; to a huge extent, dynamic, thereby creating an imbalance between the old world order and the new world order; particularly due to World War 2. 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 own 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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(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 in order to encourage 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 certain texts and analyzing them; it could be observed that Gandhi's intention for 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 certain 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 too 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 failures of the round table conferences; thereby leading to a need for the certain 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 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 in order to gain popular support during the course of the war (Sarkar, 1989, 389) [6]. The situation for Congress seems to delay further during the onset of the Quit India movement; where the arrests of Gandhi and the top leaders by August 9th, along with more than 1000 arrests within a week. The siege of the press, and censorship of newspapers, and with that came to a sequester

of files and funds towards the AICC (Greenough, 1999, 12) [2]. As such, it brings about a proper comprehension towards the necessity of a certain action to be undertaken towards an action. This action, however; was not intended towards 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 do not know that what I contemplate doing according to my wont can be in any way described as in the nature of the 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 also in a manner commendable that the Congress was not in a hurry to launch another movement for the sake of not causing any hazard towards the situation of the allies; the situation of which, worsened by 1942 due to Japan joining 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 who is participating in this movement must function for himself or herself within the four of the general instructions issued. Every Indian who desires and strives for it must be his own guide..." (Greenough, 1999, 13).

V. POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

The entire reaction towards the arrests of the Congress leaders was observed to be an attempt of the British to suppress and thereby limit the ability of the National Movements 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 a destination of unknown. We should keep in mind this statement, for 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 of stopping the movement, began to observe it as a conspiracy theory by the Japanese to destabilize the region; thereby paralyzing the British attempt to defend India. With a mentality to the protest not being too far from the Revolt of 1857; it was observable that the reaction of the officials came to be with 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 towards understanding the rationale of this rebellion, however; remains contested. As Paul R. Greenough states, "Several historians who have examined this question agree that it was the government's own description of the violence and disorder which were anticipated that provided the common plan for the violence and disorder which actually occurred" (Greenough, 1999, 15). As such; the political mobilization in relation to 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 own idea of where the violence would happen; and thereby laid down a plan based on what the government was thinking. As Bhuyan puts up 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, where he comments that the menace Amery depicted was what many Indians subsequently wanted 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 own 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 categorize them in terms of the question that seems to govern and thereby raises to the surface within this document again and again, pertaining to if the movement in general, was structured on, or did it portray a spontaneous action towards the issue; one can categorize it in terms of yes and no through the following analysis: In terms of comprehending the perspective that the movement is spontaneous, certain 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 in a chronological manner; 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' perception of promoting Congress as an Axis-sided party throughout the course of the war, as observed. This attempt of not being willing to engage in a movement primarily is observed through Gandhi's conversations with Chiang Kai-Shek and President Roosevelt; for it was necessary in order to receive international recognition in order to pressurize the British to provide Swaraj. As such; the sudden provocation of protests; riots and use of violence could be observed as a surprise element for the Congress leaders, Gandhi and the British Indian government on equal measures. However, limiting the discussion would mean limiting the ability to

decipher the other aspect of the story. That story being; this provocation towards riots, and 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 towards this could be observed through two different lenses of observations and interpretations. First, this attempt would provide an assurance towards 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 be applicable 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 allow the process of mobilization more robust; thereby enhancing the entire process of Swaraj such. It could be clearly 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 will be perceived; however; not to the extent as it happened. As such; it could be perceived that the lack of a certain strategy and regulations provided by Congress provided a base towards the proceedings of the movement because the same was then replaced by the presence of certain notions and therefore actions undertaken by the British Indian government. In doing so; the British Indian government laid down a particular, though unknowingly, strategy 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 as a direct reaction towards the actions of the government: neither is it a strategy planned movement initiated by the Congress. The rationale lies within the lines that were discussed earlier: towards the unknown destination. Gandhi and Congress, in particular, portrayed a hesitation towards the launching of another movement; which portrayed their surprised reaction. On the other hand; Congress portrayed desires to shift their attention towards achieving international recognition; thereby increasing their talks with America and China. Therefore; knowing the imminence of the failure of the Civil Disobedience movement; and the revival of the same with a certain objective that was never fulfilled due to the spontaneous reaction of the public; the destination of the unknown comes to being.

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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 spontaneous”.

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