

Quit India Movement

Background:

- The Congress had to decide its course of action in the wake of:
- The failure of Cripps Mission
- The arrival of Japanese armies on Indian borders
- The rising prices and shortages in food supplies
- The different opinion within the congress
- The Congress Working Committee (CWC) adopted a resolution calling for complete non-violent non-cooperation with any foreign forces invading India
- The resolution was rejected, but it showed the intent of Congress
- In May 1942, Gandhi told a gathering of Congressmen at Bombay that he had made up his mind to ask the British to quit India in an orderly fashion
- If they did not agree, he would launch a Civil Disobedience movement.
- Nehru was concerned about the choice between fighting imperialist Britain and letting USSR and China down in the struggle against fascist powers.
- Eventually, he decided in favour of launching the movement.
- Eventually, the CWC adopted the Quit India Resolution which was to be ratified at the Bombay AICC meeting in August.
- On 8th August 1942, the AICC passed the Quit India Resolution

Introduction:

- The Quit India Movement has rightly been described as the most massive anti-imperialist struggle on the eve of Partition and Independence.
- 1942, the year that the movement was launched and the next five years witnessed unparalleled and tumultuous events in the political history of India

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- Sharp increase in popular nationalism, large-scale deprivation and death due to widespread famine conditions particularly the Bengal Famine of 1943, heightened Japanese aggression in Burma and Malaya, hopes of a military deliverance through the onward march of the ‘Azad Hind Fauj’ of Subhas Chandra Bose, and widening of the communal divide leading to the vivisection of the political fabric of the country were some of these developments

The Movement:

- The Congress gave the call for ousting British but it did not give any concrete line of action to be adopted by the people.
- Spread of the Movement
- Before his arrest on 9 August 1942 Gandhi had given the following message to the country:
- Everyone is free to go the fullest length under Ahimisa to complete deadlock by strikes and other non-violent means.
- Satyagrahis must go out to die not to live.
- They must seek and face death. It is only when individuals go out to die that the nation will survive, Kareng Ya/Mareng (do or die).
- The news of his arrest along with other Congress leaders led to unprecedented popular outbursts in different parts of the country.
- There were, hartals, demonstrations and processions in cities and towns. The Congress leadership gave the call, but it was the people who launched the Movement.
- Further, the Congress Working Committee, the All India Congress Committee and the Provincial Congress Committees were declared unlawful associations under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908.
- The assembly of public meetings was prohibited under rule 56 of the Defence of India Rules.

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- Since all the recognised leaders-central, provincial or local-had been arrested, the young and more militant cadres-particularly students with socialist leanings took over as leaders at local levels in their areas.
- Later, it was the repressive policy of the government which provoked the people to violence.
- The Gandhian message of non-violent struggle was pushed into the background and people devised their own methods of struggle. These included:
 - Attacks on government buildings, police stations and post offices,
 - Attacks on railway stations, and sabotaging rail lines,
 - Cutting off the telegraph wires, telephones and electric power lines,
 - Disrupting road traffic by destroying bridges, and
 - Workers going on strike, etc.
- In many areas, the government lost all control and the people established Swaraj.
- In Maharashtra, a parallel government was established in Satara which continued to function for a long time.
- In Bengal, TamukJatiya Sarkar functioned for a long time in Midnapore district.
- This national government had various departments like Law and Order, Health, Education, Agriculture, etc., along with a postal system of its own and arbitration courts.
- People established Swaraj in Talacher in Orissa.
- The movement had initially been strong in urban areas, but soon it was the populace of rural areas which kept the banner of revolt aloft for a longer time
- In this essence, the movement got a massive response from people of Bombay, Andhra, UP, Bihar, Gujarat, Orissa, Karnataka, Bengal, etc.
- But the responses in Punjab, Sindh, NWFP, etc, were weak.
- Underground Activity
- This was another trend in the movement, besides mass action.

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- The participants in these activities were the Socialists, Forward Bloc members, Gandhi ashramites, revolutionary nationalists and local organisations
- The main personalities taking up underground activity were Rammanohar Lohia, Jayaprakash Narayan, Aruna Asaf Ali, Usha Mehta, Biju Patnaik, Chhotubhai Puranik, Achyut Patwardhan, Sucheta Kripalani and R.P. Goenka
- This phase of underground activity was meant to keep up popular morale by continuing to provide a line of command and guidance to distribute arms and ammunition

The British Government's reaction:

- The Government had geared all its forces to suppress the popular upsurge.
- Arrests, detentions, police firings, burning of Congress offices, etc. were the methods adopted by the Government.
- The press was muzzled. The military took over many cities; police and secret service reigned supreme.
- Rebellious villages were fined heavily and in many villages, mass flogging was done.

Significance of Quit India Movement:

- The Quit India Movement failed to end British rule in India. Yet, this was one movement that demonstrated the will and resolve of diverse communities of Indians to withstand both the highhandedness of imperial authorities and the elitism of the Indian Political class.
- The Quit India Movement stands apart from the earlier movements in terms of the spirit and enthusiasm that it infused in ordinary people to support indigenous institutions and structures of power.
- The parallel governments that such efforts produced indicate the basic difference between the 1942 movement and the earlier movements

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- Loyalty to government suffered considerable erosion. This also showed how deep nationalism had reached.
- The movement established the truth that it was no longer possible to rule India without the wishes of Indians.
- The great significance was that the movement placed the demand for independence on the immediate agenda of the national movement. After Quit India, there could be no retreat.
- Also, in this struggle, the common people displayed unparalleled heroism and militancy.
- The repression they faced was the most brutal, and the circumstances under which resistance was offered were most adverse.
- On the whole, the Quit India movement collapsed, but not without demonstrating the determination of the masses to do away with British rule. The Congress leadership did not condemn the deviation by the people from the principle of non-violence, but at the same time disowned any responsibility for the violent acts of the people. Eventually, by 1945 the Congress was moving in the direction of focusing its attention and energies on the 1946 elections.