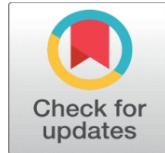


# THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT: REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT OF A NATION

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## DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v3.i2.2022.4101](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v3.i2.2022.4101)

**Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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## ABSTRACT

The Quit India Movement marked an important phase in the Indian freedom struggle. After years of struggle against the Raj, Mahatma Gandhi ji launched a nationwide movement for the freedom of India. Through this movement, Gandhi ji united millions of Indian people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds for a common purpose. This article will explore the ethos, revolutionary spirit, and impact of the movement on Indian people. The British government repressed this movement mercilessly and adopted every available measure to suppress the revolutionary spirit of the people. However, Indian masses reiterated their demands and fought valiantly against the oppression. This study will analyze the revolutionary spirit of the people and the legacy of the movement.

**Keywords:** Quit India, Movement, Legacy, Revolution, Repression, Freedom

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important and final chapters in India's fight for independence from Britain had been the Quit India Movement, launched on August 8, 1942. It had been initiated by Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress under whose leadership a clarion call for immediate and total independence was given, based on the frustrations that had been building up over decades of British exploitation and repression. The launching of the movement marked a turning point in India's freedom struggle—from a patient negotiation to a direct demand that the British should "Quit India," with an urgency which reflected the growing revolutionary spirit of the nation.

Even before the launch of the Quit India Movement, Gandhiji led Indian people against the exploitation of British Raj through mass movements. Several non-violent Satyagraha had been launched by Gandhi ji after his arrival in India in 1915. These movements started with Mahatma Gandhi successfully leading the farmers uprising in Champaran, Bihar in 1917. After that, the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement were the next steps taken by Gandhiji to lead India to independence. However, these movements either withdrew prematurely or failed in achieving big political gains. Finally, in 1939, the Second World War started, and the menace of Japanese aggression was looming large on India. The British Indian Government was unwilling to deal with the Japanese aggression. So, the Indian National Congress, led by Gandhi ji, asked the British people to withdraw from India completely. Government unresponsive

behavior made the zeal of the leaders stronger, and finally, on 8 August 1942, Gandhi ji gave the clarion call of 'Do or Die' that resonated with the feelings of the masses.

## 2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Quit India Movement was the result of numerous civil disobedience movements launched by the Indian National Congress under the visionary leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi ji joined the Indian National Movement in 1915 and began his journey across India. After analyzing ground realities, he launched several mass movements, such as the Indigo Movement, the Non-Cooperation Movement, and the Salt Satyagraha. Gandhi ji used these movements to connect the common Indian masses with the freedom struggle. He generated the spirit of revolution among general masses and made them an integral part of the fight against the Raj. For three decades, Gandhi ji prepared the Indian people to fight a non-violent war against the atrocities of the British government. Finally, in 1939, with the outbreak of the Second World War, Gandhiji saw an opportunity and made the final bid for India's freedom. Gandhi ji issued a clear directive to the British people to either leave India or face the consequences.

### 2.1. ORIGINS AND CATALYSTS: OUTBREAK OF SECOND WORLD WAR

The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 precipitated a qualitative change in the socio-economic and political conditions of British India. From the perspective of these contemporary leaders, World War was a watershed moment that was bound to leave a lasting impact on the nature, substance, and future of British colonialism in India. They saw in this crisis an opportunity to have a meaningful discussion with the British government in the hope of achieving the short-term as well as long-term goals of the Indian national movement. The Indian National Congress passed a resolution on 14th Sept. 1939 drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru. In that resolution, Congress asked the British Government to declare in unequivocal terms their war aims and how those war aims could be applied to India.

During that time Gandhi ji went to Shimla and had a meeting with the Viceroy of India. However, that meeting was unsuccessful and there was no substantial outcome. After that there was disagreement between Gandhi ji and Congress over the issue of how to deal with the situation and which means to use to defend India at the time of war. However, Congress realized that without Gandhi ji it would not be possible to garner mass support and lead a mass movement. Gandhi ji departure from the Congress at this critical point would make the organization weak.

After seeing the unresponsive behavior of the British Government, Congress reached to a settlement with Gandhi ji and provided him an unconditional support to lead the movement. Congress even asked Gandhi ji to launch any movement as he saw fit for India's independence. Gandhi ji also appealed to the British government to forget their old language of Imperialism and open a new chapter for all those who have been held under imperial bondage. However, the Viceroy of India didn't respond to the call positively and in response Congress asked its minister in different provinces to resign from the government. To mollify the situation, British government came up with various offers such as August Offer of 1940, Cripps Mission but all these attempt failed in their purpose and couldn't amend the intention of Indian leadership about the British War efforts and their role in it. Congress Working Committee rejected the Cripps mission on 1 May, 1942. The All India Congress Committee asserted that British Government cannot defend India against the Japanese invasion. There is an eternal conflict between Indian and British interests. So, after the failure of Cripps Mission, Gandhi ji gave a call to Britisher to leave India. He wrote that "British Rule in India in any shape or form must end. And they should leave India to God. If that is too much then leave India here to anarchy".

**Key Figures and Leadership:** The Quit India Movement is a mass movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. However, this movement was not spearheaded by Gandhi ji in every aspect like all previous mass movements since his arrival in the Indian National Struggle. Gandhi ji was arrested immediately after the launch of the movement. Even Gandhi ji could not launch the movement officially because he was arrested in the early hours of 9th August 1942. However, Gandhi ji was not there to lead the masses officially, but every aspect of the movement was discussed the previous night before his arrest. So, Gandhi ji was the ideological progenitor of the movement. Besides Mahatma Gandhi, all the leadership of the Indian National Congress and left parties, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, J.B. Kripalani, Jai Prakash Narayan, and others, were involved during the movement. However, a new generation of leaders later emerged and took over the movement, which became wayward after the arrests of key leadership. Several leaders such as Sucheta Kripalani, Baba Raghav Das (Didi), Aruna Asif Ali (Kusum), Achyut Patyarthan(Kadam), Sadia Ali and Ram Manohar Lohia undertook the leadership of the movement and performed their duties under different roles. They organized and

operated underground broadcast services and propagated nationalistic ideas. So, the Quit India Movement was idealized by Mahatma Gandhi but carried out under the leadership of new generation leaders.

## 2.2. LAUNCH AND SPREAD OF THE MOVEMENT

The Quit India Movement was officially launched in Gwalia Tank Maidan in Bombay on 8th August 1942. After the launch of movement, entire national leadership of the Congress was arrested and this caused a massive unrest in the mind of people. Soon the feeling of disgust and resistance against the British policy spread across India.

After the arrest of Indian leaders, people gathered in the cities of Maharashtra and Gujarat. They offered their resistance against the repressive policies of the British Government. In Maharashtra, cities like Pune, Satara, and Nagpur witnessed violent protests, strikes, and sabotage of government offices. students and freedom fighters led demonstrations in Surat, Ahmedabad, and Vadodara. Underground leaders like Usha Mehta set up a secret radio station to spread the movement's message. Initially, Maharashtra and Gujarat were the first provinces which were affected the most by the movement. Infact they became the epicentre of the Quit India Movement.

However, the movement was not limited to Gujarat and Maharashtra. Soon after the news of arrests of Gandhi ji and other leaders reached to other parts of India. local leaders and provincial Congress leadership took the control of the movement and attracted thousands of people for the freedom of India. Bengal, Bihar, Oddisa, Assam, and United Provinces followed the same path and local leadership ignited the feeling of resistance against the British Raj. Government responded with heavy hands and tried to suppress the movement. They arrested thousands of people and used every brutal measures at their disposal to thwart the movement. Peasants and workers were also arrested to suppress the movement.

## 3. METHODS OF RESISTANCE AND REPRESSIVE MEASURES

R.C. Majumdar has recorded that after the arrest of Gandhi and other Congress leaders' peaceful and non-violent protests in the shape of hartals and processions took over the entire country. However, the government adopted harsh measures to suppress these protests. Under the "Defense of India Act" closing of shops and restaurants was forbidden. The government used lathi charges as well as firing to suppress the protest and disperse the processions. Due to these stern measures, people took matters into their own hands and used every possible way to react accordingly. There was violence and burning of public property as well as the symbol of government authority. Commenting on the adoption of violent means by the participants during the Quit India Movement, Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out with regret the violent behavior of the masses and claimed that "the people forgot the lessons of non-violence which had been dinned into their ears for more than twenty years".

R.C. Majumdar wrote that throughout India people engaged in a revolutionary upsurge. Their main target of attack were the means of communication of every kind and government establishment, especially police stations and other office buildings. Masses were mostly unarmed but due to the sheer numbers, broke through the police cordon and seized the official buildings. However, the masses succeed in their motive mainly in rural areas because of less number of police personnel. In the urban areas, they suffered a great number of casualties due to the presence of armed policemen and military personnel. Police shot down the masses and people got enraged because of the death of their comrades. So, in response, people committed excesses like burning buildings.

To control the situation government used every repressive measure at its disposal. Government data shows that during the 1942 disturbances, 1028 people were killed and 3200 wounded. However, these figures are incorrect and don't represent the true nature of government brutalities. Popular estimates place the number of deaths at 25000. So, it is possible that the number of deaths during this movement was 10000 approximately.

## 3.1. INTERNATIONAL REPERCUSSION AND SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPACT OF THE MOVEMENT

The impact of the Quit India Movement was not limited to India and big cities. Once the Indian leadership denied participating in the Second World War, there was mounting pressure on the British government to amend its attitude and placate the demands of Indian nationalist leaders. The British government made some half-hearted gestures in the form of the August Offer and the Cripps Mission. However, these attempts were categorically denied by the Indian leaders, and they made the call to the British people to Quit India. After seeing this deadlock between Indian leaders and

the British Indian government, the world leaders, specifically the presidents of China and the USA, urged the British government to improve their relationship .

The Quit India Movement had impacted the socio-political environment of the country by bringing the every class of people together for the common purpose. For the first time, people from all sections of society, including peasants, women, students, laborers, and tribals, participated in large numbers. The movement was not restricted to urban areas; it spread to villages and rural communities, making it a truly national movement. The slogan "Do or Die" inspired Indians to engage in both nonviolent and militant resistance. The movement united people across religions, castes, and regions, creating a stronger sense of nationalism .

Besides social implication, the movement changed the political fervour also of the country. It was the last nation-wide revolt of the country and people gave everything to make it successful. After the movement it became clear to the British government that it is no longer possible to hold India under its subjugation. It also gave birth to the underground movement which were absent for a decade after the hanging of Bhagat Singh and other nationalist. There were attempts in some areas like Ballia (Uttar Pradesh) and Tamluk (Bengal), to set up their own independent governments, showing India's ability to govern itself .

Besides impacting the socio-political culture of India, the Quit India Movement also inspired the other subjugated countries in the region to seek independence from the British rule. The movement inspired anti-colonial struggles in Africa and Southeast Asia. Leaders from Kenya, South Africa, and Indonesia cited Quit India as an inspiration for their own independence movements.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The Quit India Movement of 1942 was not just another protest against British colonial rule—it was the culmination of decades of struggle, a powerful assertion of India's national identity, and a defining moment in the country's quest for independence. Unlike previous movements that focused on specific demands, Quit India was a direct call for the British to leave India immediately, making it the most uncompromising and revolutionary phase of the freedom struggle. The movement unified millions of Indians across regions, classes, and backgrounds, demonstrating an unprecedented national solidarity and determination that shook the very foundations of British rule in India.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Quit India Movement was its spontaneous and widespread participation. Although top leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Patel, were arrested within hours of launching the movement, their message of "Do or Die" had already ignited a fire across the nation. This time, the struggle was not just led by political leaders but by ordinary citizens, students, women, workers, and even rural peasants, who took up the mantle of resistance in creative and bold ways. Strikes, boycotts, attacks on government institutions, and underground networks became the weapons of the people, proving that the Indian masses were fully prepared to govern themselves.

While the British managed to suppress the movement with brutal force, the spirit of Quit India could not be extinguished. Over 100,000 arrests, public floggings, and mass shootings were used to silence the revolutionaries, but even in prisons, nationalist leaders continued their fight through secret communications and underground movements. The British Raj might have crushed the immediate flames of rebellion, but the embers continued to burn, forcing the British to acknowledge that their rule in India was no longer sustainable.

#### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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