

Essay on The Quit India Movement-1942

During the forties, the International situation was becoming extremely serious. Japan had already declared war against England and had obtained several resonating victories. British needed a united war front against the Japanese but it was a difficult task, as Indians had lost their trust in British sincerity. Realizing the seriousness of the situation the British Government sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India to resolve the deadlock and to mobilize all the forces of India's life against the Japanese menace. Mr. Cripps gave a draft declaration, according to which India was to enjoy a dominion status and British Government was to retain control of the Defence of India as part of their world war efforts with the cooperation of the Indian People.

The proposal was rejected by every single party and group and Mahatma Gandhi characterized the pledge about the future settlement of the constitution as a "post-dated cheque on a bank that was obviously failing." The negotiation thus broke down, the failure of the Cripps Mission disheartened the people. The day Cripps left was Sunday. Monday was Gandhiji's day of silence. He pondered over the difficult situation as to what could be the solution? His inner voice spoke two words "Quit India". The British should leave India to its fate. In his paper, Harijan, wrote on April 26, 1942, "Whatever the consequences, therefore, to India, it's real safety and Britain too, lies in orderly and timely British withdrawal from India." He reiterated again on May 24, 1942, "Leave India in God's hands; or in modern parlance to anarchy".

The Working Committee of the Congress met at Wardha. It continued its deliberations for many days over Gandhiji's new slogan to the nation. On July 14, 1942, the Committee passed a long resolution known as the "Quit India" resolution. It demanded that the British rule in India

must end immediately and power should be transferred to the Indians to enable them to defend their country as well as save the world from the perils of Nazism, Fascism, and Militarism. If this just and reasonable demand was not accepted, Congress would be reluctantly compelled to start a nonviolent agitation of direct action. A meeting of All-India Congress Committee was accordingly convened at Bombay to endorse this resolution.

The government paid no heed to the resolution of the Working Committee. The Viceroy refused to meet Mira Ben whom Congress had sent to him for explaining the Working Committee's resolution. It was clear that the government would not yield. The All-India Congress Committee, which assembled at Bombay on August 7, 1942, therefore, endorsed the resolution of the Working Committee by an overwhelming majority and proposed the starting of a mass, nonviolence struggle under the leadership of Gandhiji. Addressing the delegates on the night of August 8, 1942, Gandhiji said, "I want freedom immediately this very night before dawn if it can be had. Freedom cannot wait for the realization of communal unity. Congress must win freedom or be wiped out in the effort. Here is a mantra, a short one that I give. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is: "Do or Die". We shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery." Early in the morning on August 9, 1942, Gandhiji and other Congress leaders were arrested. The All-India Congress Committee and all the Provincial Congress Committees were declared unlawful. Thousands of Congress workers were thrown into jails. The headquarters of the Congress at Allahabad was sealed and Congress funds confiscated. Gandhiji was lodged at Poona in Agha Khan Palace and the other leaders were detained in Ahmednagar fort. The next day Kasturba Gandhi got herself arrested by attempting to address a meeting at Bombay in which Gandhiji was scheduled to speak before his arrest.

The news of the arrest of the nationalist leaders caused a wave of indignation among the people. If the government had thought that they would be able to suppress them, it proved to be wrong. There were demonstrations, meetings, and hartals all over the country. National songs and slogans demanding the release of the leaders filled the air. In the beginning, the crowds were peaceful but when the police tried to control them by force they became violent. In Delhi alone, the police opened fire forty-seven times upon peaceful demonstrators in which 76 persons were killed and 114 were injured during the two days, i.e. August 11 and 12, 1942. Similar incidents took place in other cities like Bombay, Ahmedabad, and Poona. The workers and students organized strikes in factories, colleges, and schools. At places, the mobs destroyed the police posts, post offices, and railway stations considered to be the symbols of the foreign rule. The revolutionary groups also attempted to cut telephone wires and damage railway tracks.

In rural areas, the peasants refused to pay taxes to the government. At many places, they were able to paralyze the local administrative machinery completely and set up their own governments. Prominent among them were Ballia in Uttar Pradesh, Midnapore in Bengal, and Satara in Maharashtra. At Ballia, the people opened the jail. One of the prisoners installed himself as "Swaraj Tehsildar" and set up the Panchayati Raj. At Tamluk in the Midnapore district, a national government was established. At Satara, the people set up a parallel government known as the 'Patri Sarkar'. In the then Madras Presidency, the railway line between Ranigunta and Bezwada (now Vijayawada) was uprooted. In many other areas, the peasantry resorted to guerrilla, resistance to the British rule which continued for quite a long time. The leaders of the underground movement were Jayaprakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia. The Government arrested 60000 people, detained 18000 without trial, resorted to firing at about 538 places, thus killing approximately 1000 persons and injured

1600 people thereby claimed to have suppressed the movement within a month. The sacrifices and sufferings did not go in vain as they were able to get India free within a span of five years.