

QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT (1942-1945)

Origin and Objective

The Indian leaders were concerned about their national interest in case the Allied forces were defeated in World War II. The news of British defeats at the hands of the Japanese was instrumental in making the Indian leaders believe that the British power was fading. There was a acute shortage of foodstuff in India and the rate of inflation to alarming levels. The British who managed their own economy carefully seemed unconcerned about the state of affairs in India. The failure of the Cripps' Mission made the Congress aware that they would have to take some active steps to compel the British to leave India if the Indians were to gain independence. On 8 August 1942, the Congress in its meeting at Mumbai passed a resolution known as the 'Quit India' resolution, whereby Gandhi asked the British to quit India and gave a 'Do or die' call to his countrymen.

Spread of Violence

On 9 August 1942, Gandhi was arrested, but the other leaders continued the revolutionary struggle. Violence spread throughout the country, several government offices were destroyed and damaged, telegraph lines were cut and communications paralysed. The movement was, however, crushed by the government.

Gandhi's Fast

Gandhi undertook a 21-day fast in jail. His condition deteriorated after 13 days and all hopes of his surviving were given up. However, he survived and completed the 21-day fast. This was his answer to the government which had been constantly exhorting him to condemn the violence of the people in the Quit India Movement. Gandhi not only refused to condemn the people resorting to violence but unequivocally held the government responsible for it. The popular response to the news of the fast was immediate and overwhelming. All over the country, there were demonstrations and strikes. The fast had done exactly what it had intended to. Public morale was raised, the anti-British feeling heightened, and an opportunity for the political activity provided.

Significance of the Quit India Movement

The Quit India movement marked a new high in terms of popular participation in the national movement and sympathy with the national cause. As earlier, students were at the forefront of the struggle. Women, especially school girls, played a vital role. Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani and Usha Mehta were among the important members of small groups participating in the agitation. The great significance of this historic movement was that it placed the demand for independence on the immediate agenda of the national movement. After Quit India, there could be no retreat. Any future negotiations with the British government could only be on the matter of transfer of power. Independence was no longer a matter of bargain now.



Usha Mehta

Usha Mehta was a staunch supporter of the Gandhian movement and ideology. She was born on 25 March 1920 in Saras village near Surat in Gujarat. She was the mastermind for organising the Congress Radio during the Quit India Movement in 1942, which was also known as the Secret Congress Radio. The first telecast on this radio was on 14 August 1942. Her associates were Vithalbhai Jhaveri Chandrakant Jhaveri, Babubhai Thakkar, Nanka Motwani who supplied equipments and provided technicians. In 1998 the Government of India conferred on her Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian award of the Indian republic. She died on 11 August 2000.

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