# Quit India Movement: Changing Nature of Indian Freedom Struggle

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## Abstract

*Non-violence had been a trademark of the Indian freedom struggle movement. The entire credit for creating a marvelous peaceful movement goes to Mahatma Gandhi ji. After coming to India in 1914, Mahatma Gandhi traversed across India and identified its strengths and weaknesses. The struggle for independence was not new for the masses but there was a lack of affinity among the people toward the objective. Gandhi Ji carried the idea of independence to the people and instilled that idea among them. To carry that objective of freedom ahead without giving it a communal and violent tint was a miracle. But somehow in the end that peaceful movement showed the streak of excessive emotions and gave it a radical outlook that was unprecedented till that time.*

**Key Words**: Quit India, Freedom Struggle, Independence, Nature, Movement.

## Introduction

India is an ancient civilization that has gone through various stages of change. Each epoch brings new difficulties and opportunities for a civilization. For the last three millennia, India has been a regular target of attacks and invasions due to its glamorous wealth. Different kinds of people have invaded India across its length and breadth. Some of those invaders came and looted India but some stayed here after seeing the beautiful culture and diversity of this land (The Round Table, 1963). But during the 17th century, a new breed of invaders came to India and those invaders were wearing the skin of a goat. It was the British people who came to India as traders (Griffiths, 1952). India has been known as a source of trade all around the world. Since the ancient silk route days, she has been a key part of that trading nexus. Nations were connected with each other through land routes. These routes were created with the need of time (Bhattacharyay, 2009). Merchandise and ideas got exported from India to other parts of the world. Various items like spices, textiles, etc. were in great demand all over the world (Indian Culture, GOI). Somehow Europe depended to a great extent on the product which was produced in the Asian region.

During the 15th century, great changes took place on the geo-political front and traditional trading routes becomes less profitable and more of a liability for the European people. In 1453 fall of Constantinople happened and a new empire came into existence (Hudson, 2022). Ottoman Empire was less favorable to the European people. Trading routes came under attack because it was the wish of the emperor to levy duties on every trading activity (Hudson, 2022). To avoid that situation European people were keen to find an alternative route to India. Finally, at the end of the 15th century, traders reached India from Europe through the sea. And that event opened a floodgate for European traders. Various national companies reached India and established their trading post (Spodek, 2007). Among those traders, British people were most effective and ruthless in their pursuit. Within no time those traders became a key part of the Indian political system. They played great roles in the wars which were fought by Indian kings (Tharor, 2016). After the Battle of Plassey and Buxer, British traders assumed political power and started ruling Indian people (Tharor, 2016).

For the next few decades, Indian people were apathetic toward these people. But with time they started opposing the European rulers. And in the same spirit, the 1st War of Independence was fought between the Indian people and British rulers in 1857. Due to a lack of coordination and some infrastructural lack India as a nation lost the war (Lahiri, 2003). After losing the 1st war of independence India got its act together and launched a synchronized effort for the independence of India. Various political organizations sprouted all around India. Different eminent personalities joined the initiatives and used their expertise for creating pressure on the British Indian government (Heehs, 1991). A key event during the 19th century was the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. This was a purely political entity for the expression of political ideas and the attainment of freedom. Eminent personalities like W.C. Banerjee, Surendranath Banerjee, Firoj Shah Mehta, Dada Bhai Naroji, and many others joined the organization (Heehs, 1991).

This organization in collaboration with various other political outfits demanded the reforms in Indian political system. The movement was slow in its initial phases but it made steady progress. For the next 3 decades, the nature of movement changed completely. People from different walks of life started engaging with the saga. And Indian national struggle changed from an elite gathering into a mass struggle due to the efforts of leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai (Chaturvedi, 2021).

With the arrival of Gandhi Ji on the scene, the movement got a different level of energy and support from the masses. During his act as a leader of the movement, Gandhi Ji focused on Non-Violence and Satyagraha. Every initiative he launched was non-violent in nature but in the end, Mahatma Gandhi gave the call of "Do or Die". This paper analyzed what changed during that course and how this movement is different from the previous ones he launched.

**Quit India Movement**

During the Age of Freedom movement, various eminent personalities came to the center of the play. Among those leaders, Mahatma Gandhi was very transformative. He changed the course of the Indian national movement. Various key political movements were launched for gaining the independence of India. After coming to India, Gandhi Ji launched various Satyagraha from Champaran to Bardoli. These Satyagraha instilled a feeling of

fighting among the peasants and common men against the Raj. Following the same idea, in 1942 Gandhi Ji gave a call for "Bharat Chodo Andolan". This idea was building for a long time but the final push came with the failure of Cripps's mission. In 1939, 2nd World War took place and the Allied powers need India's support in their fight (Majumdar, 1963). As was seen earlier, to garner India's support British government made some promises like Dominion status to India after the war. With the closing of Japanese and German encirclements, it was a matter of urgency. But the Indian people and its stalwart leader were asking for complete freedom and nothing else. Due to different notions about end goals, Cripps's mission failed in its objective (Prasad, 1976).

While keeping all these events in sight, Mahatma Gandhi first gave a voluntary call to the Britishers to leave India. This idea was propounded in Gwalia Tank Maidan on 8 August 1942. He gave the call of "Do or Die" to the people for the independence of India. The idea of Quit India was passed by Congress Working Committee. Keeping these events in mind, the British government arrested almost every leader of the Congress party (Munni, 1977). Now it was left to people to heed the call and carry that idea of Quit India to the masses. Indian masses initially had no idea how to tackle the issue. So, they responded in a haphazard manner without any guidance from the leaders. But after an initial anarchy there was some synchronization in the activities of the masses.

**Changing Nature of Freedom Struggle**

Indian freedom struggle is a saga in itself. It has seen ups and down and gone through various changes. Those changes were sometimes incremental and sometimes revolutionary in nature. When INC was founded in 1885, it was just a platform for discussion for the elite gentry. People from different professions came together to reflect on the detrimental situation in India. They discussed ways to reform the existing nature of the Indian state. Matters of discussion were not limited to political issues instead it reflected on socio-economic, cultural, and religious issues also.

Previous political outfits merged into one political entity but it was considered to be an elite organization (Lawyer's outfit). They believed in the good governance of the British people and urged them for some political reform (Mehrotra, 1966). In their annual meeting discussion were held about the poor social and religious conditions of India. Their main focus was on political reform instead of freedom. Early freedom fighters believed in incremental changes instead of revolutionary ones. They believed that revolutionary changes brings anarchy in the state.

But with the coming of second-generation leaders like Tilak, Pal, and Lala, the focus shifted from other issues to political matters only. They considered that political freedom is the first priority and that other changes can be done later. Through various other events like religious festivities and social gatherings, they brought the masses into the fold and gave the Indian freedom struggle a mass outlook (Kaur, 2004).

After the coming of Gandhi Ji to India, he started visiting rural parts of the country. After analyzing the conditions, he gave a mantra of "Non-Violence and Satyagraha" to the Indian people (Nelson, 1957). He explained that we

are not in a condition of direct confrontation with the British government. So, we have to turn our weaknesses into our strengths. He was a very astute politician who brought incredible changes in the way the freedom struggle was carried out.

First, to test the water, initiatives were launched on a small scale and successfully won the cases of indigo farmers. During this phase, Gandhi was testing the ground for large-scale movement. After sometimes he used the same formula and launched a nationwide struggle in the form of the Non-cooperation movement in 1920. That movement was completely non-violent and got successful in the initial stages. People from different walks of life joined the Satyagraha. After a period of 2 years in 1922, he called off the movement very pragmatically because till then the movement was losing its heat (Deshmukh, 2015). He applied the same method in further experiments and successfully launched various initiatives like Salt Satyagraha, Civil disobedience. Gandhi Ji was very careful in espousing and calling for the movement. Movements were never stretched beyond a particular time.

The aura and intensity of the Quit India movement were different and intense from the previous movements. Till now Gandhi Ji and any other leaders haven't given a call of Do or Die. But this time people were aroused and working without any central leadership. All the stalwarts of Indian national movements were arrested on the morning of 9th August 1942. There was no central leadership to guide the people and lead the movements. People were exhausted in their relentless pursuit of freedom. Movements were launched and called off before due to different reasons. But this time there was neither Mahatma Gandhi nor any other leader to call off the movement (Nanda, 1958).

In the previous movements, the entire focus was on non-violence and Satyagraha. People were prohibited from use of any kind of violence whether it was verbal or physical. But in the launch of the Quit India movement, it was Gandhi Ji, the messiah of Non-violence called for the Do or Die situation. It showed the changing nature of the Indian freedom struggle and Gandhi Ji himself (Nanda, 1998).

After the arrest of leaders, it was left to the masses to lead the movement and people showed the necessary strength and zeal to carry that clarion call. Women also participated in that movement. Second rung leaders got underground and carried out their activities secretly (Tendulkar, 1975). It was evident that people were not ready to give up any ground and make that movement successful.

## Conclusion

Changes don't happen in a day but when changes happen they present a saga for the generations to come and cherish. The same is the case with India. We as a nation have gone through various changes but among those changes, revolution for freedom is most eminent. The freedom movement started a long time ago and has gone through various phases. During the 19th century, it started as a political reform initiative and with time metamorphosed into a freedom struggle. First people were demanding reforms in the political system and looking for political rights which were absent till then. But in later stages asked the Britishers to yield their freedom. Freedom is the ultimate goal of every political initiative. Initially, the nature of the movement was non-violent but later extremist elements prevailed in the movement. A new era in the national movement was heralded with

the entry of Gandhi Ji in the struggle. The Quit India movement was the climax of the popular movement in India. After that, there was no popular movement.

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