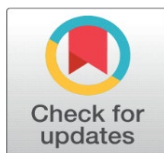
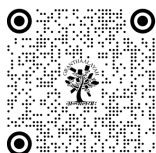


CONTESTED MEMORIES: NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY AND QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the works of nationalist historians who have written about the Quit India movement. It focuses on the movement's origin, aims, and significance from their perspectives. The Quit India movement holds great significance in the Indian National movement as it aimed for the immediate end of British rule in India as highlighted by Gandhi's clarion call. This article analyzes how nationalist historians have interpreted the movement's inception and Objectives, emphasizing the motivations behind its origin and the strategic aims it desired to achieve. By analyzing nationalist accounts of the event, it explores how these nationalist narratives have highlighted the movement's emphasis on mass civil disobedience and its role in galvanizing widespread participation across different strata of the Indian state. Additionally, this article examines how nationalist historians have portrayed the impact of the movement on the course of the Indian freedom struggle.

Keywords: Freedom Struggle, Historiography, Quit India Movement

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian freedom struggle encompasses a series of political and social movements led by nationalist leaders. One of the notable movements was the Quit India movement, organized by the Indian National Congress and spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi ji emerged on the freedom struggle platform in 1920 and actively led various movements such as the Non-Cooperation movement, Civil disobedience Movement, and many more. Unlike the other movements, Gandhi Ji never demanded an immediate departure of the British Raj from India, preferring a peaceful transition of power. Nevertheless, this movement remains a significant event in Indian history. Mahatma Gandhi's call for the British to leave India immediately galvanized millions of Indian people, leading to widespread instances

of civil disobedience and an assertion of the demand for complete independence of India .

Contemporary scholars and writers have undertaken thorough analyses of the Quit India movement, delving into its historical, social, and political significance. Additionally, Nationalist historians have meticulously examined the movement's impact and its various interpretations to gain a deeper understanding of this critical phase of the Indian nationalist movement. This research article aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the specific nationalist historiography that has meticulously chronicled and thoroughly evaluated the origins and aims of the Quit India movement. Through a detailed examination of the movement's inception, strategic objectives, and the broader socio-political context in which it unfolded, this article seeks to rigorously analyze the narratives formulated by nationalist historiographers such as R.C. Majumdar, B.R. Nanda, and Patabhi Sitaramayya. The goal is to illuminate the complex motivations and catalysts that precipitated such a widespread and influential mass uprising. Further, it delves into nationalist narratives regarding the challenges faced by the movement and the British crackdown on the Satyagrahis. By scrutinizing the nationalist accounts, this article seeks to explain how nationalist historiography has interpreted the movement's origin, aims, and legacy.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Before the launch of the Quit India movement, the political landscape in India was full of turmoil and uncertainty. India National Congress was recuperating from the internal schism caused by the fallout of Mahatma Gandhi and Subhash Chandra Bose . On the world stage, a great danger was looming around the corner in the form of the Second World War. In 1939 second World War broke out and England needs all the help to stop the menace of Fascism and Nazism from taking over the liberal world. England had garnered support from the liberal democratic world and as a result, the world was divided into two blocs of Allied and Axis powers.

The British government made India a belligerent state in the Second World War without consulting or asking for the help of the Indian people or its leaders . All the political parties irrespective of their ideological orientation criticized this decision and declared this decision of the British government authoritarian and unilateral . However British government didn't heed the opinion of Indian leaders and initially made no efforts to reconcile with them. Indian National Congress dissociated itself from that decision and released a manifesto on September 14, 1939, declaring that "India could not associate herself in a war under any force and without her consent which she could give only after she was assured her freedom. Congress Working Committee (CWC) declared that cooperation must be between equals by mutual consent for a cause which both consider to worthy" . Later in October 1939, the Indian National Congress passed a resolution in the same spirit and reiterated the CWC demand.

The British government in London realized the need of the hour and asked the then Viceroy Lord Linlithgow to find an amicable solution and placate the Indian leaders . Lord Linlithgow promised dominion status to the Indian leaders after the war. However, Indian leaders didn't compromise and rendered their resignation from the government . During the initial days of the war, Britain was in bad shape and they were looking to join forces with India and its leaders. After a series of proposals and counter-proposals, no favorable outcome was possible. Finally, In 1942, the British parliament sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India to find the solution to the Indian problem .

With the arrival of Sir Cripps, there was hope that Indian leaders and the British government could find a mutually acceptable solution to the problem. However, Indian leaders rejected all the offers made by Mr. Cripps. Mahatma Gandhi Ji described the “Cripps offer of Dominion status as a post-dated cheque drawn on a crashing bank”. Indian National Congress declared that the Cripps Mission was an old agenda of the Imperial government to divide India. After the failure of the Cripps Mission, Congress decided to take some strong action and they called Gandhi Ji to lead them in those tumultuous times.

3. QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

In 1942 British Prime Minister sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India to garner the support of Indian leaders in the efforts of the Second World War. Mr. Cripps offered dominion status to Indian people in exchange for their support for the war efforts. However, Indian leaders demanded complete freedom. Due to different notions about end goals, Cripps's mission failed in its objective.

After many rounds of negotiations, Congress handed over the rein to Gandhi Ji for further plan of action. Gandhi had been an integral part of the Indian freedom struggle for over two decades. He has employed the technique of Satyagraha during various movements. Over these years, Satyagraha instilled the feeling of fight among the masses and Gandhi Ji considered this an appropriate movement to use all that non-violent strength that India has gathered over these years.

Gandhi ji made a draft regarding handling the situation that originated after the failure of the Cripps Mission. Gandhi ji sent this draft to the All India Congress Committee that took place at Allahabad towards the end of April 1942. In that proposal, Gandhi ji included the following points

- 1) Cripps' proposal had shown up British imperialism in its nakedness.
- 2) Britain was incapable of defending India.
- 3) There is perpetual conflict between Indian and British interests.
- 4) Japan's quarrel is not with India but with the British Empire. So, India is not at war with Japan.
- 5) The British should withdraw from India immediately so that India can defend itself against Japanese attack.

Congress committee considered that draft seriously and passed a resolution in the Allahabad session. In that resolution, Congress outlined that the presence of the British created the danger of foreign invasion here. To avoid the situation, the British should leave India and a free India can design its own policy for its defense and even try to avoid the war. In July 1942, the Congress Working Committee met at Wardha to reassess the political landscape at the national as well as international level. After carefully considering the situation Congress Working Committee passed the Quit India resolution which was to be placed before the All India Congress Committee.

All India Congress Committee meeting took place in Bombay in the month of August 1942. Gandhi ji addressed the meeting on 8th August 1942 and asked the nation to muster their full non-violent strength. After carefully considering the political and social landscape of the country, Gandhi Ji gave the clarion call of “Bharat Chodo Andolan”. Firstly, Gandhi ji asked the British government to leave India peacefully. If the Britishers didn't free India on its own, then they should be compelled to do the same. That was Gandhi Ji's longest speech in a Congress meeting. However, as per Gandhi's and Congress' policy, the doors were still open

for the negotiations. Gandhi ji declared "Before I launch the struggle I will address a letter to the Viceroy and wait for his reply and if agreeable meet him".

However, this letter could not be finished because, in the early hours of August 9, 1942 British Indian government arrested Gandhi ji and other prominent leaders of the Indian National Congress. With the arrests of Indian nationalist leaders, the Quit India movement officially started.

4. COLONIAL AND INTERNATIONAL INTERPRETATION

The Quit India movement was the most serious of all the mass movements of the Indian freedom struggle, as it involved Congress openly defying the British government. It extended across the entire country, affecting both rural and urban areas. It directly confronted British rule, demanding their departure from India. This movement, orchestrated by Gandhi Ji and led by ordinary people, marked the final mass protest against British rule. However, it is noteworthy that British government officials and historians have downplayed the significance of this movement.

Firstly, the British government claimed that the violence during the Quit India movement was caused by the 'secret Pro-axis sympathies' of the Indian leaders. The British government claimed that while the world was facing the menace of Nazism and Fascism, Indian leaders planned a strategy to thwart the British war efforts. This was secretly planned to help the Axis powers during the Second World War. As evidence British government used Gandhi's original draft for the April session of the All India Congress Committee where he talked about the negotiations with the Japanese forces and claimed that India had no enmity with the Japanese. During the same session, Jawaharlal Nehru claimed that this decision of Gandhi ji was influenced by the unconscious feeling that Japan and Germany would win this war.

Secondly, the Quit India movement was claimed as nothing else but a 'fifth columnist conspiracy'. Tottenham in his report 'Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances' blamed Congress and particularly Gandhi Ji for the violence and incidents that happened during the movement. So, the British Indian government held responsible Gandhi and the Indian National Congress for the failure of the Cripps Mission and the launch of the Quit India movement. In the same report, British reports claimed that the Quit India movement was just a spontaneous reaction of the masses. Its impact was limited to certain pockets of the country.

Thirdly, a Cambridge historian named Judith Brown claimed that the Quit India movement was nothing more than "a flotilla of rafts colliding with the battleship". Brown characterized this movement like that because of the sudden collapse of the movement. She compared the British Empire with the battleship that crushed the movement like rafts in an open ocean. Although the Quit India movement dissipated earlier than the previous mass movement, its psychological and political impact was greater in quality and quantity. The British government was prepared in advance to crush the movement and they arrested the upper echelon of Congress leadership.

Analysis of these writings and reports clarified that the British government held Congress and Gandhi ji responsible for everything that transpired during the Quit India movement. Viceroy Linlithgow claimed that it was a plot designed by Gandhi in cahoot with Congress. He wrote, "You and your friend expected this policy to lead to violence and you were prepared to condone it and that the violence ensued formed part of a concrete plan, conceived long before the arrest of Congress leaders".

From a colonial perspective besides Congress, no major political parties participated in the movement. The British government also believes that they did

everything to incorporate the demands of the Indian people but it was the adamant attitude of Indian leaders that led to the origin of the Quit India movement.

5. NATIONALIST INTERPRETATIONS

The Quit India movement stands as a crucial milestone in the history of Indian freedom struggle. This movement is celebrated for inspiring the common people to strive for absolute freedom from the British Raj. The writings of nationalist historians, including R.C. Majumdar, P.N. Chopra, A.M. Zaidi, and Tarachand, have shed valuable light on the movement. Additionally, historians such as B.R. Nanda and D.G. Tendulkar have delved into the movement from a biographical perspective, offering unique insights. Apart from these seasoned historians, nationalist leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, and J.P. Narayan have also written about the movement in their accounts. They bore witness to the events during different phases of the movement and thus had first-hand knowledge of the movement. So, to have a comprehensive understanding of the movement, the writings of R.C. Majumdar, J.B. Kriplani, and B.R. Nanda have been evaluated.

About the genesis of the Quit India movement, nationalist historians blame the British government and their inefficient attitude towards the protection of India from the Japanese invasion that was looming large during the Second World War. J.B. Kriplani wrote that the Japanese occupation of the Malaya peninsula caused a tragic situation in the country. People were confused and feeling helpless in that situation because the possibility of Japanese occupation of India was inevitable. India refugees who were fleeing the border areas were treated differently than white people. The British government in Bengal and the Eastern border of India employed the 'Scorched Earth Policy'. They destroyed the property of the Indian people due to the fear of Japanese aggression. There was no desire to fight the enemy. Further plans were made for the evacuation of Madras, Calcutta, and even Delhi. The Deputy Chief of the General Staff was reported to have said that in the event of the Japanese invasion of India, the British forces would not be able to defend the whole of India and might have to retire to a remote line of defense beyond Allahabad".

It shows the government's unwillingness to fight the Japanese invasion and distrust of the native people. They were ready to hand over India to the aggressor instead of the Indians. Leaders didn't know how to respond in that situation but Gandhi ji was never resourceless in such dire situations. Gandhi explained that in this situation only viable solution for the Britishers was "orderly withdrawal from India, leaving it to its people or in the alternative to anarchy or God". Kriplani explained that because Gandhi ji believed that only free India may be able to garner enough strength and mobilize people to fight this Japanese menace.

B.R. Nanda also wrote that during the Japanese aggression on Malay and Burma, only Gandhi ji understood the gravity of the situation and believed that only the complete withdrawal of Britons from India could encourage the Indian people to protect themselves from Japanese aggression. B.R. Nanda quoted Gandhi ji "I know that the novelty of this idea and that too at this juncture has caused a shock to many people. Even at the risk of being called mad, I had to tell the truth if I was to be true to myself. I regard it as my solid contribution to the war and India's deliverance from the peril".

R.C. Majumdar wrote that the failure of the Cripps Mission prompted Gandhi Ji to suggest such extreme demand to leave India. Gandhi Ji wrote several articles in April and May in which the Idea of the 'Quit India Movement' was crystallized.

However, R.C. Majumdar believed that “no sober statesman would perhaps endorse these idealistic views of Gandhi who, as usual, ignored the realities of the situation and was ready to play with a nation’s fate as a child play with his dolls”.

While analyzing the events during the Quit India movement, nationalist historians held the British Indian government responsible for the events that transpired during the Quit India movement. They expounded that the British government used violent repressive measures to suppress the movement which conflated the masses and led to further violence.

R.C. Majumdar wrote 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. In defense of the violent behavior of the masses, Majumdar wrote that the lesson of non-violence entered the ears of people but couldn’t reach their hearts. For the time being “under the magic spell of Gandhi or out of frenzied devotion to him as to religious Guru, people behaved in a manner which mislead many to believe that their personality and character has changed...exit of Gandhi practically synchronized with the exit of almost all restraint to violence...it is now a sacred memory at best”.

J.B. Kripalani was arrested along with other Indian leaders. About these midnight arrests Kripalani claims that These arrangements could not have been made between the time the All India Congress Committee resolution was passed and our arrests. The fact is that preparations for wholesale arrests and severe repression to put down any movement that might be started had been made much earlier. Detention camps had been set up beforehand and even lists of people who were to be arrested had been drawn up. It is, therefore, no wonder that the Viceroy refused to give an interview to Gandhi ji even when he had said in the All India Congress Committee meeting that he would seek guidance from the Viceroy before launching any movement”. J.B. Kripalani wrote about the events that followed the arrest of Congress leaders. He said “For a week all business was paralyzed in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Bangalore, Calcutta, and many other places. The authorities reacted with savage repression which in turn led to further desperate action by the people”. Underground cells and offices were established to run the movement.

In defense of Gandhi ji, B.R. Nanda wrote that It was the British government that was responsible for all the violence that had ensued. They arrested Gandhi before he could have laid out his plan in its entirety. But even before his arrest, he provided a “draft of instructions” that would guide them in their struggle. In that draft, Gandhi didn’t support violence. He talked about Hartals and meeting only in rural areas. Government employees should resign from their posts. He said, “Our objective is to make it clear that we will never tolerate Japanese, Nazi or fascist invasion, nor British rule”. In that entire draft, there were no talks about violence or a secret plan to condone violent activities.

While analyzing the impact of the Quit India movement, nationalist historians have mixed claims about the success and failure of the movement. However, it failed in achieving its immediate goal of complete freedom but succeeded in achieving its long-term goal of arousing national consciousness among the ordinary masses.

R.C. Majumdar claims that the Quit India movement was a failure. He claimed that “the movement lost its vigor even before the end of 1942 and no trace of it remained after 1944. The government was successful in suppressing the movement within two or three months in most areas. The movement failed to achieve any solid

or tangible result, not to speak of the end for which it was launched. Even the All India Congress Committee accepted this towards the end of November 1942 in an appeal to the masses to carry the struggle forward. However, “this appeal fell flat on the people. The movement had lost its momentum. The Congress had misfired its last shot and the battle was lost. Valour, courage, and heroic self-sacrifice could not make up for the lack of leadership and necessary equipment” .

B.R. Nanda compared the events of 1942 with the events of 1919. Gandhi realized that the passivity of the common people could be removed through self-respect and freedom. However, he wrote that “the events of 1942 were to prove an embarrassing legacy. It was almost the first large-scale outbreak in which wrecking and burning were indulged in a spirit of misconceived nationalism. It lowered the standards of mass behavior and set a dangerous precedent” . In his writings, B.R. Nanda absolved Gandhi Ji from all the liabilities and responsibilities of the events that transpired during the movement.

J.B. Kripalani wrote that the Quit India movement was not successful in achieving its aim of British withdrawal from India. J.B. Kripalani explained that after a few months of our arrest, the Quit India Movement was losing its heat. In a meeting before their release, Maulana made some reference to the August movement, but this irked Sardar Patel. It was realized that a meeting of this sort might create unnecessary friction. So, “It was decided that the question of the future program which could not be made without reference to the past may be left to the time when we met outside as free men” .

6. CONCLUSION

Nationalist historians in their writings thwarted the colonial claims that the Quit India movement was the conspiracy of Congress and Gandhi Ji during the hour of crisis. They held the British Indian government responsible for the movement and the entire chain of events that transpired during that phase. These historians expounded that the British government and its repressive measures were responsible for the violent behavior of the masses. According to them, the arrest of Indian leaders left the movement without leadership which caused the waywardness of the movement. If the British government had engaged the Indian leadership in meaningful discussion then an amicable solution to the problem would have been possible. So, this movement may have failed in its original aim but succeeded in changing the mood of the nation.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None .

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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