



## QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF KANPUR

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During the critical early months of 1942 when the fascist powers were at their peak and Japan was swiftly advancing through south East Asia, the British government dispatched Sir Stafford Cripps a labour member of the cabinet to India to resolve the political deadlock.<sup>9</sup>

Stafford Cripps was believed in some congress circles, as a man who had conscience as he was a friend of Jawaharlal Nehru. On his arrival in Delhi on 23 March 1942 he invited congress president Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to discuss the package deal. Yet what Cripps offered was paltry. There was an assurance of setting up of National government during the war period but the modest demand of the congress that Defense portfolio be given in Indian hands as the congress working committee (CWC) observed that in the absence of control over Defense by Indians, the degree of independence offered did not even approximate to Dominion status. There could be no real power without control over the army, particularly during the world war. Japan was swiftly advancing towards other Eastern India and it was inevitable that if Japan gained control over India how will Indians fight against them? There was also a speculation that If Indians in Subhash Chandra Bose's India national Army INA (and there were 50,000 Indian prisoners of war in Japan conquered territories) invaded India, how could congress ask Indians oppose them when they were infected coming only to drive away the British?<sup>10</sup> Gandhi was keenly watching the events going on and he had realized that the Cripps proposals is a futile exercise and although he had went to Delhi to meet Cripps he had declared that the offer was a post dated cheque to which someone later added the words on a

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<sup>9</sup> B.R. Nanda, *The Making of a Nation: India's Road to Independence*, Delhi, 1998, pp. 286-287

<sup>10</sup> K.K. Chaudhari, *Quit India Revolution: The Ethos of Its central Direction*, Bombay, 1996, pp. 3-4



crashing bank? and Cripps announced at a press conference that the British Government's draft proposals were withdrawn.<sup>11</sup>

The All India Congress committee which met on 8 August at Bombay for its last historic session put its seal of approval to the 'Quit India' resolution. It said. 'The committee feels that it is no longer justified in holding the nation back from endeavoring to arrest its will against an imperialist and authoritarian government which dominator over it and prevents it from functioning in its own interest and in the interest of humanity. The committee resolves therefore to sanction, for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines and on the widest possible seale so that the country might utilize all the non-violent strength it had gathered during the last twenty two years of peaceful struggle such a struggle must inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhi ji and the committee request him to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken. In the event of arrests of leaders the committee authorized' every Indian to be his awn guide.<sup>12</sup>

Finally Gandhi gave his famous mantra and said: Here is a mantra, a short one, I give you. You may imprint it in your hearts and let every breaths of yours give expression to it. The mantra is: "Do ro Die" we shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live do see the perpetuation of our slavery. In the attempt; we shall not live do see the perpetuation of our slavery.

Enthusiasm was very much there in Kanpur as the news of the passing of the quit India resolution reached city. Leaders of the city had already geared themselves for the upcoming struggle much in advance.<sup>13</sup> It was abundantly clear to them that ever since the outbreak of the war something new was to come from the dop congress leadership as India had been made an unwilling participant in this imperialist adventure.

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<sup>11</sup> Ram Gopal How India Straggled for Freedom: A political History, Bombay, 1967, p. 425

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Ram Gopal of. cit., pp. 427-428

<sup>13</sup> Home political department, file No. 18/7/1942, NAI.



The quit India movement created and generated new frame of resistance and struggle. People of Kanpur embraced its programme in toto. The movement was not to be confined to fusty filling up of the jails but also included refusal to pay taxes refusal to obey orders and refusal to work and these were to be carried out by the entire strata of the population including peasants workers and other citizens. Uprooting of the symbols of the British authority was another novel feature of the programme.

Chhail Bihari Dixit 'Kantak' always longing for a should own with the British government said, "Is sarkar ko dan man dhan se madad dena haraam hai"> (It is a sin to offer support to this government with either body heart or money) he was immediately arrested. Kishori Devi wife of Kantak was arrested for preaching his husband's doctrines. Jawaharlal Rohatgi who had already been arrested on 1 August used to look after the well being of ladies in jail. In fact Kantak had been in jail for a continuous spell of six years from 1939. During this period only Kantak wrote: Samay Aa Gaya Kaanp Raha Jag. Nabh Goonja Prasthan Karo; Chalo veer Bharat Vedi Par Proono ka Balidaan Karo. (The time has arrived and the world is crying. The sky too is thundering and we now have to march, O brave let us now sacrifice ourselves at the alter of our motherland).<sup>14</sup>

Ramesh Dixit, son of Kantak Hoisted the notional flag on the roof of his house. The police asked him to bring down the flag but he refused and was therefore arrested and remained in jail for three months.

The movement had acquired a great tempo speed and ferocity in Kanpur. Political consciousness was very strong in the city. Haslett, the governor had great confidence in the police stationed in Kanpur but it miserably failed to handle the situation. In the beginning peaceful demonstrations were staged hartals were organized and processions were taken out in which thousands of people participated. On 9 August people attacked the city congress office to re-

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<sup>14</sup> Interview Uma Dixit, also see kshem Chandra 'suman'ed), Divangat Hindi Sevi, vol. II, Delhi, 1993, pp. 265-266



conquer it because it had already been taken possession of by the police. Post offices were burnt as also lorries and motor cars piled by Europeans.

For a number of days the people continued attacking government schools and buildings but very soon the tempo of the movement slackened although small batches of people made stray and sporadic attacks on post offices and other government institutions. For fifty days all schools and colleges remained closed. The students took a prominent part in the movement, many of them went to the villages and still others took part in underground activities.

The heroism displayed by girl students of S.N. Sen College in the city was also exemplary. When girls of the college took to the streets, the police resorted to lathi charge. One Roop Kumari Khaitan snatched lathi from an officer and seeing this another girl named Savitri Arora started shouting *Maar bidiya maar* (Beat him). Hearing this the police officer started laughing because he was not an Indian he also would have been son of some freedom loving person and unlike their bases these officers possessed feeling of nationalism and had often displayed a soft corner for freedom activities.<sup>15</sup>

During those days the office of students union was situated in the Tilak hall. Almost all the students of all schools and colleges of the city had started assembling in Tilak hall. Senior students asked the girl students to go and organize hartals in schools and colleges that were left. After this the procession of boys decided to march forward. Thousands of civilians too had joined the students. The police too became active and contingents were formed at different areas to stop the procession. A strong contingent was placed in Chowk near Kunfilal Temple. British horse troopers were running amok in the city to crush the uprising. When the procession reached the temple it was greatly agitated and angry in seeing contingent. Immediately brickbat and stones were hurling towards the police. After all these were the only weapons they had been left with in these days. 25 to 30 rounds were fired. The procession got dispersed

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<sup>15</sup> Article by Shiv Kumar Mishra the famous revolutionary of Kanpur in Sri Prakash Gupta and Manoj Kapoor (ed), *Kanpur kal Aaj aur Kal Kanpur* 1997, p. 21.



and people started running. Police again started lathi charge. Students were shouting 'galiyon mein ghus jab, (Take shelter in narrow lanes), 'eenton so police ka muquabla Karo' (Fight with stones against the police). And so the struggle started.

After three days of storm a committee was formed to steer the movement in the district or well as in the city. The members of the committee included Gajpat Rai Saxena, Ram Dulare Trivedi and Captain Ram Singh. Ram Dulare Trivedi had already spent three years in prison in relation with the kakori conspiracy case. Ram Singh had been a member of the Hindustan socialist Republican Association (HSRA) and had been closely associated with late Chandra Shekhar Azad. Gajpat Rai Saxena had been a member of many revolutionaries. In this way the movement was once again being led by the old guard.

The contribution of the students of the D.A.V. College in disseminating the secret bulleting was also immense. The copies of the bulletin (of the city and district) were carefully placed beneath a cluster of grass and bamboo near the college. After this the students used to carry their bounden duty. The D.A.V. College had always remained in forefront in all nationalist activities taking place in Kanpur. Six of its students had also been convicted in the famous Lahore conspiracy case. In 1942 only a committee had been established by the students of the college and it had connected itself with the students of all other colleges. This committee had also established a bomb factory in Generalganj locality. Revolutionaries like Ramesh Nigam, Govind Narayan Shukla and Munna Lal Saxena were students of D.A.V. College only.

Such indeed was the wave of discontent and popular sentiment so much against the government during quit India that the viceroy Lord Linlithgow wrote to Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister that, "I am engaged here in meeting by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and



extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security.<sup>16</sup>

Many stalwarts of Kanpur city like Pyarelal Agarwal Ganga Sahai Chaubey, Hamid Khan and Chhail Bihari Dixit 'Kantak' had all been arrested by the middle of August a case no different from those of the arrests of national leaders. Bal Krishna Sharma 'Naveen' was put under house arrest for continuous three years from 1947-45.<sup>17</sup>

On 2 October in Kanpur, 101 Students were arrested (37 boys and 64 girls) for distributing pamphlets of Gandhi's Birthday. Pratap Narayan Mishra was arrested in Nariyal Bazar. About 300 students of D.A.V. college took out a procession after saluting the flag at about 10-11 am. when the procession reached ice factory near Kutcheri Road the police surrounded it and lath charged the procession. The city kotwal reached the spot and 37 students were arrested and taken to kotwali.<sup>18</sup>

Congress had already been declared illegal and there was no room for an organized political programme. The government had realized that the quit India Movement saw an unprecedented enthusiasm and popularity on the part of people for congress.

In mid June 1945 all the top leaders of the congress were released. The second world war was on the verge of coming to a classes and the fillies (Britain, the U.S.A. and soviet Union) were making gains. A change of government had taken place in Britain and Labour party had come to power which wanted immediately to settle the Indian problem. The war had shown its effects. Britain no longer commanded the power and glory it had earlier and had grown much weaken. Britain to permanently settle the political deadlock in India.

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<sup>16</sup> P.N. Chopra of cit., p. 1

<sup>17</sup> S.P. Bhattacharya, Swatantra Sangram ke Sainik (Ministry of Information, U.P.) Lucknow, 1968, p. 413

<sup>18</sup> Vartman, 4.10.1942



### **Freedom At last:**

A resolution was passed with the instructions of the secretary of U.P. provincial congress committee which asked the people to celebrate 'Political Prisoners' Day food people still in jails. Accordingly a meeting of citizens of Kanpur was held at Tilak Hall on 18 February to celebrate the same with pyarelal Agarwal in the chair.<sup>19</sup>

The meeting requested the authorities to eliminate invidious classification of the prisons and demanded that all the prisoners convicted of political offences should be treated equally. The resolution was passed by Harihar Nath Shastri and supported by Jawaharlal Rohatgi Ganga Sahai chaubey Rajaram Shastri, Raj Kumar Sinha and balkrishna Sharma 'Naveen'.

The British Government appeared to be listening. On 20 February, Gaya Prasad, a convict in Lahare conspiracy case lodged in Kanpur District Jail was released after 17 years of detention. Shiv Verma and Jaidev Kapoor were also released from Hardoi Central jail. The quit India Movement had galvanized. The Indian Masser and its impact had been tremendous. The fillip it provided to the freedom struggle and Britain's own difficulties in the second world war heralded the process of transfer of power. In this connection a cabinet Mission was announced by the labour party government of Britain which was to arrive in India to discuss with leaders of Indian opinion on framing of an Indian constitution. The commission included three members- Lord Pethick Lawrence, secretary of state, Sir Stafford Cripps, now president of the Board of Trade and Albert Alexander, First lord of the Admiralty. The announcement was made by Pethick Lawrence who said, " The house will recall that in September 1945, on his return to India after discussions with the British Government, the viceroy made a statement of policy in the course of which he outlined the positive steps

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<sup>19</sup> National Herald, 19-02-1946.



to be taken immediately alter the central and provincial election of full self government in India.<sup>20</sup>

The negotiations carried out with the cabinet Mission, the jailing of coming to terms in settling the political and communal problem amicably, the exit of gavel and coming of lard Mountbatten as the new viceroy and his carrying of partition of the country in a steadfast manner which was devoid of any humane and foresighted vision and as result millions of people ( Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs) last thus lives has constituted a blot on the legacy of the freedom movement. Yet on the midnight of 14 August 1947 India became free and a separate state of Pakistan was also born.

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<sup>20</sup> National Herald, 20-02-1946.