CHAPTER V

IMPACT OF THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

After the failure of the Cripps Mission, Gandhi's faith was reaffirmed that the national unity could not be achieved so long as the third party was there. He carried the conviction that the only solution of Indian tangle lay in the withdrawal of the British. This is evidenced by the letter which he wrote to Horace Alexander after Cripps' departure from India:

"The whole thing has left a bad taste in the mouth. My firm opinion is that the British should leave India now in an orderly manner and not run the risk that they did in Singapore, Malaya and Burma. That act would mean courage of a high order, confession of human limitations and right doings by India."  

The idea gripped him completely and he planned to throw a provocative challenge to the British either to leave India peacefully or to face the consequences of mass civil disobedience.

Initially, many members of the Working Committee including Nehru, Azad, Pant, Syed Mahmud and Asaf Ali were against any such move but subsequently they surrendered

to Gandhi when he threatened to leave the Congress and
"Out of the sands of India create a movement which would
be larger than the Congress itself ... " The Congress
Working Committee in its meeting held from July 7 to July
14, 1942, unanimously passed the resolution:

"Events happening from day-to-day and the
experience that the people of India are passing
through confirm the opinion of Congressmen that
British rule in India must end immediately ... The freedom of India is thus necessary not
only in the interest of India but also for the
safety of the world and for the ending of
Nazism, fascism, militarism and other forms
of imperialism ... The Congress will then be
reluctantly compelled to utilize all the
non-violent strength it might have gathered
since 1920 ... "

The resolution was duly ratified by the All-India Congress
Committee in its meeting held on August 8, 1942.

Gandhi thought of conducting the movement on the
following lines:

a) There should be an all-India hartal.
b) All freedom loving Indians should join the
struggle.
c) Students should leave Government controlled
institutions.
d) People should break the salt laws and refuse
to pay the land taxes.

5. Selected Works, op.cit., vol. 12, pp. 398-400. also


* According to J.B.Kripalani, certain members had mental
reservations. The controversy was not about violence or
non-violence, but about how the movement would be inter-
preted by America, China, and Russia which were advocating
India's claim for freedom. (J.B.Kripalani, op.cit.,
pp. 202-204).
e) At a later stage Government employees should also participate.

f) Members of central and provincial Assemblies and municipalities should vacate their seats.

g) As a last resort every Congressman would be his own leader and a servant of the whole nation. Every Satyagrahi should vow that he would either be free or would die in the attempt to make himself so.

However, the Working Committee could not reach a final decision as the discussions remained inconclusive.

To dispel British and American doubts, Gandhi clarified that the 'Quit India' demand stood only for transfer of power. Making an appeal to them to declare India free and to prove their bonafides, he reminded them that it was the opportunity of a lifetime "which never comes twice in the same generation and history will say that they did not discharge their overdue debt to India."  

Some prominent leaders tried to dissuade Gandhi from taking such a drastic step at the delicate moment. T.B. Sapru, the Liberal leader, put a suggestion for convening a conference of the leaders of all political parties to solve the tangle.  But Gandhi turned down the suggestion as he was firm in his resolve.

7. The Hindu, August 10, 1942.

Nevertheless, Gandhi was still entertaining a hope for a positive action and response from the Government. He, therefore, wanted to have a meeting with the Viceroy before putting his plan into practice. The Congress President was to inform the heads of the Allied Powers about the Congress decision to launch the movement. 9

The Government regarded the Quit India demand wholly incompatible with their responsibilities as its acceptance would plunge India into confusion and anarchy internally and paralyse their war efforts. 10 It, therefore, took all possible measures to handle the situation firmly. Government of India, Home Department informed Amery on June 7, 1942:

"Present indications are that Gandhi will throw off all pretensions of non-embarrassment, declare himself openly anti-British ..." 11

The Secretary of State and Governors of some provinces were pressurising Linlithgow to smash the Congress organisation. 12 The Secretary of State pleaded for adopting a tough line to meet the challenge of the Congress. He advised the Viceroy

11. Nicholas Mansergh, op.cit., vol. II, p. 188.
12. Ibid., p. 88, p. 222.
to arrest Gandhi and other Congress leaders immediately without even referring the matter to him. He was in favour of sending Gandhi to Uganda. Gradually, Linlithgow also started thinking on similar lines.

While the Congress Working Committee at Wardha was discussing the programme of the Quit India movement, the War Cabinet authorised the Viceroy to take strong measures against the Congress, if necessary, including the arrest of Gandhi and members of the Working Committee. Besides, the provincial and All-India Congress Committees were to be declared unlawful and their funds were to be seized. The Home Department sent letters to the provincial Governors to this effect. The British Government had even thought of taking suitable measures to meet the situation arising out of Gandhi's fast (should he decided to undertake one) and death. Accordingly, soon after the ratification of the resolution by the All-India Congress Committee, the Government arrested all the important Congress leaders including Gandhi on August 8, 1942. A special train carried the members of Congress Working Committee and about fifty Congress leaders to Ahmadnagar Fort leaving Gandhi at Aga Khan Palace at Poona.

The vacuum created by the arrest of the Congress leaders provided an opportunity to the Muslims League to

13. Ibid., p. 141.
16. Ibid., p. 443.
consolidate the Muslims under its banner. Jinnah and the Muslim League regarded the Quit India move a "reckless and thoughtless act" and accused the Congress for taking such a revolutionary step without first coming to an agreement with the Muslim League and other political parties. Jinnah projected 'Quit India Movement' as an attempt to establish Congress Hindu domination over the League by coercing the British into surrendering power to the Congress and forcing the Muslims to submit to the Congress terms. The League Committee called upon the Mussalmans to abstain from any participation in the movement.

The strained relations between the Congress and the British and the decline of hold of the former over the national affairs can be traced back to 1939 when the Congress resigned from ministries in the various provinces. The Congress, it seems, was left with no other alternative but to choose the path of confrontation. According to the calculation of its leadership, if it had remained in office and extended its support to the war efforts, it would have acted only as an executive agency of the British and would have lost the popular support of the masses. Menon, however, opined that resignation of the Congress ministries 'weakened their bargaining power'. It proved a turning point in Indian history as it ended the tacit alliance between the British and the Nationalists.

18. Ibid. also Dawn, January 3, 1944.
19. V.P. Menon, op.cit., p. 66.
Viceroy's attitude became more stiff towards the Congress after it threw the Quit India challenge. He even derived pleasure in arresting the Congress leaders. His successor, Lord Wavell, who was earlier Commander-in-Chief in India, was equally averse to the Congress and its leaders especially Gandhi. He could not forget that when he was putting all his energies to secure India against Japanese invasion, the Congress' call of Quit India paralysed communication in the eastern front. According to Mosley:

"... the mere idea that the Hindu would be prepared to accept Japanese occupation out of sheer resentment of British was more than most British officials could stomach."

In the face of the non-cooperative attitude of the Congress, Linlithgow sought the help of the Muslim League as it was the next important political organisation in the country. During the course of an interview on June 12, 1942, Linlithgow told Munshi, "Public in England has got a feeling that the Hindus as a community are against British interests." The attitude of some of the Governors of British Indian provinces also revealed that they were more favourably inclined towards the Muslims and Jinnah. This is supported

by the incident when K.M. Munshi requested the Governor of Bombay to contradict the false charges of the League against the Congress, the latter asked him whether the Congress were going to be the friends of the British any longer. Linlithgow even took care to see that the position of the League leader Jinnah was not undermined. He even asked Sikander and Fazl-ul-Haq, who could pose a serious challenge to Jinnah's authority, not to undermine his position as leader of the Muslim community. The Viceroy and the India Office wanted to build up Jinnah as their "Crescent Card to neutralise the Congress challenge." Linlithgow communicated to Amery:

"It was particularly important not to antagonise Mr. Jinnah at a time when Muslim League were in fact unofficially cooperating in the war effort ... Any reconstruction would tend to bring Congress into power ..."

Jinnah, who was already waiting for such an opportunity, utilised the situation to the fullest possible extent and built up the League into a strong party. He claimed:

"The Muslim India was never so well organised, nor so alive and politically conscious as today. The League has established a flag and a platform displaying and demonstrating the complete unity of the entire body of the Muslims and has defined its goal."  

24. Ibid., p. 61.
The Muslim League which could not muster enough support even in the Muslim majority provinces like the Punjab, Sind and North-West Frontier Province in 1937, was able to form ministries in the subsequent years in Assam, Bengal, Sind and North-West Frontier Provinces.\textsuperscript{28}

In Assam, after the resignation of Congress ministry under the direction of Congress Working Committee immediately after the commencement of war, a coalition ministry under Sir Mohamed Saadullah was formed. The ministry lost its majority in December, 1941. Chaudhry Rohini Kumar, a former Education Minister, wanted to form a ministry with the support of the Congress but the move was scuttled by the Governor mainly because of the non-cooperative attitude of the Congress during the war. Even the two successive Governors discouraged any such move. On the other hand, Sir Mohamed Saadullah was encouraged by the British to reconstitute a League ministry with the support of the European members in the Assembly.

In Bengal, a Muslim League ministry headed by Nazim-ud-din, a loyal supporter of Jinnah, came into power with the help of the European group in April-May, 1943 after the resignation of Fazl-ul-Huq, who had been the Premier of the province since 1937. Here also, the actions of the Governor, Sir John Hubert, brought an early downfall of Fazl-ul-Huq's ministry.

\textsuperscript{28} V.P. Menon, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 148-151.
Sind Premier Allah Baksh, who had renounced his title because of his sympathy with the Congress, was forced to resign the premiership though he still commanded a majority in the Legislature. Whether the Governor could go to the length of dismissing him because he had renounced his title, was a moot point. However, after his resignation, Sir Ghulam Hidayatullah formed the ministry with the support of the League.

In North-West Frontier Province also a Muslim League ministry was formed after May, 1943. Aurangzeb Khan, the local Muslim League leader formed the ministry with the tacit approval of the Governor.

In the Punjab, which was a Muslim majority province like Bengal, the League could claim only one seat in the legislature in 1937. The Government was under the control of the Unionist Party which formed a composite ministry representing the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs under the leadership of Sikander Hayat Khan. His death in December, 1942 proved harmful to the cause of a United India as the Punjab was the deciding factor in any scheme of partition. It is learnt that Sir Sikander Hayat Khan did not subscribe to the idea of division of the country as conceived by Jinnah and even pressed him "to abandon the provocative catchword of Pakistan." 29 After his death, the moderating influence of

29. Linlithgow Papers, Microfil No. 128, No. 15, Extract from Quarterly Report (February 1, 1941 to April 30, 1941), prepared by office of Secretary to Governor-General, N.A.I., New Delhi. also
Sikander on all-India League politics ceased and it became easier for Jinnah to influence Punjab politics.

Under these circumstances, the Muslim League had an open field to consolidate its position among the Muslims. It acquired a hold over almost the whole area which later comprised Pakistan. Between 1942 and 1945, the League increased its membership tremendously with the result that by the end of war, it was able to put forward a strong claim for Pakistan. Besides, it was able to gain many concessions from the British and thereby secured a point of vantage. It was successful in getting a veto over the constitutional advance. Being conscious of its newly acquired prestige and power, it started insisting that partition of India must, in principle, be accepted by all political parties whereas prior to this it had only insisted on its acceptance by the Congress.

Moreover, from now onward, Jinnah was invited alongwith Gandhi by the Viceroy which meant granting him an equality of status with that of Gandhi. This lent support to Jinnah's assertion that there were not two parties in India as claimed by Nehru, but many contenders. This

made Michael Edwardes comment:

"When the time came for Britain actually to quit India, there were no longer just two parties - the English and the Congress - who had to agree upon the terms."33

No doubt, the political vacuum resulting from the mass arrest of Congress leaders and workers following the Quit India movement raised the importance of the Muslim League. Michael Brecher and Majumdar went to the extent of saying that the Quit India movement paved the way for the creation of Pakistan. Besides, it accentuated the differences between the Congress and the British, an aspect about which Gandhi was cautioned well in advance. Sapru, the Liberal leader, wrote to Rajagopalachari on July 25, 1942:

"... the Mahatma's proposals are fraught with the greatest mischief. It will have a legacy of the great bitterness behind ... self-government which he (Sapru) also desired cannot be had in the manner in which the Mahatma desired to achieve it particularly at this juncture."34

Radhakrishnan was also of the view that launching of the movement would accentuate the antagonism between the Indian people and the British Government and would certainly worsen the present situation.35 Initially, Maulana Azad was also reluctant to support any such move on account of his apprehension that the British Government would not tolerate any


35. Ibid., Letter No. R 4 from S. Radhakrishnan to Linlithgow dated August 8, 1942.
mass movement in the critical stage of war as it was a question of life and death for them and they would, therefore, act swiftly and arrest all Congress leaders.36

But looking from the larger issue of the freedom of the country, it seems that the Congress had no choice but to take some drastic measures to shake the people out of their slumber in the face of the Japanese invasion and their sagging spirits following the failure of the symbolic acts of protest to move the Government. Even fourteen years after the Quit India movement, Nehru felt that the avoidance of the struggle would have had bad repercussions on India's fight for freedom. Recalling the events of August struggle, he said,

"I do not think that the action we took in 1942 could have been avoided or ought to have been avoided. It might have been in slight different terms, that is a different matter. Circumstances drove us in a particular direction. If we had been passive then, I think, we would have lost all our strength."37

Similarly K.M. Munshi, in spite of supporting the idea of extending cooperation to the British in the war efforts, felt that the stand taken by Gandhi was correct in the light of the position into which the Congress Working Committee had been placed. Had the Congress extended support to the British in the war efforts without bringing


the national interest in the forefront, it would have lost its popular support. Its prestige was already going down as the individual civil disobedience movement did not achieve much success. If it had not taken any such action at that time, the edge that the Congress had acquired over other parties would have been lost. Any inaction or delay on the part of the Congress might not have been a viable alternative as the Quit India movement posed a challenge to the British which the latter could not ignore. Munshi recorded that the 1942 movement "aroused such patriotic fervour among the people that the prospect of Britain's retaining her hold over India was for ever destroyed." 

It was this struggle that convinced even Churchill, one of the greatest opponents of India's independence, that the British could not keep their hold over India for long. He confessed before the King only a few days before the commencement of the movement:

"... the idea of the transfer of power in India had become an admitted inevitability in the minds of the British party leaders." 

The British conviction was only strengthened by the Quit India movement which according to Linlithgow:

"... was 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." 

39. Ibid., p. 83.
41. Ibid.
The violent upsurge of the masses and their burning desire for independence revealed to the British that they were no more welcomed in India. The King also noted in his diary on July 28, 1942, "He (Churchill) amazed me by saying that his colleagues and both or all the three parties in Parliament were quite prepared to give up India to the Indians after the war."42

Thus, the Quit India movement, while on the one hand was instrumental in loosening the grip of the British and ultimately compelling them to leave India, on the other hand provided an opportunity to the Muslims to consolidate their position which in turn was exploited to achieve the goal embodied in the Lahore Resolution.

42. Ibid.