

## UNIT 8 – UPSC - 1942: Quit India Resolution

**India's History : Modern India : Cripps Mission to India, Congress adopts Quit India Resolution, Congress leaders arrested, Subhash Chandra Bose forms Indian National Army : 1942**

### Cripps Mission



Cripps Mission was deputed by British parliament in early 1942 to contain the political crisis obtained in India. The mission was headed by Sir Stafford Cripps, a Cabinet Minister. Cripps, a radical member of the Labour Party and the then Leader of the House of Commons, was known as a strong supporter of Indian national movement. Cripps Mission was prompted by two considerations. First, Gandhi's call for the Satyagraha (literally 'insistence on truth', generally rendered 'soul force') movement in October 1940 was designed to embarrass Britain's war efforts by a mass upheaval in India and needed to be ended in the British interest. Secondly, the fall of Singapore (15 February 1942), Rangoon (8 March), and the Andamans (23 March) to the Japanese was threatening the entire fabric of British colonial empire. In the face of these crises, the British felt obliged to make some gestures to win over Indian public support.



The Cripps offer reiterated the intention of the British government to set up an Indian Union within the British Commonwealth as soon as possible after the war, and proposed specific steps towards that end. A constituent assembly would be elected by the provincial legislatures acting as an Electoral College. This body would then negotiate a treaty with the British government. The future right of secession from the Commonwealth was explicitly stated. The Indian states would be free to join, and in any case their treaty arrangements would be revised to meet the new situation.

The offer dominated Indian politics for the rest of the war. Although the British official circles claimed that the Cripps offer marked a great advance for its frankness and precision, it was plagued throughout, and ultimately torpedoed, by numerous ambiguities and misunderstandings. The Congress was very critical of the clauses regarding nomination of the states' representatives by the rulers and the provincial option Jawaharlal Nehru had desperately sought a settlement largely because of his desire to mobilise Indian support in the anti-fascist war, while most Congress working Committee members and Gandhi himself had been apathetic. This embittered Congress-British relations, and things were then rapidly moving towards a total confrontation in the form of quit india movement. But Cripps blamed the Congress for the failure of the Plan, while the Congress held the British government responsible for it. A chance of establishing a united independent India was thus lost.

## Quit India Movement



Quit India Movement, 1942 an important event of the Indian freedom struggle, was the outcome of a compound of anti-white fury. The Cripps mission, with its vague proposals of a post-war Dominion Status for India, a constitution making body elected by provincial legislatures and the native states, provincial opt out clause, the immediate participation of Indian leaders in war effort but the retention of the control of Indian defence by the British, satisfied none and threatened to Balkanise the Indian subcontinent.

The retreat of the British from Malay, Burma and Singapore, leaving their dependants to fend for themselves, the indescribable plight of the Indians trekking back home from these places, the racial ill-treatment meted out to Indians by white soldiers stationed here and there in India, the 'scorched earth' policy pursued by the British in Bengal to resist probable Japanese invasion which resulted in the commandeering of all means of communicating, war-time price rise, black-marketeering and profiteering - all these contributed to the creation of an anti-white fury. Above all, there was the attempt of the British bureaucracy right from the outbreak of the war for a wholesale crackdown on the Congress on the pattern of 1932.

The early morning round up of Congress leaders on 9 August 'unleashed an unprecedented and country-wide wave of mass fury'. And the wave engulfed the Bengal cities, particularly the bigger ones. There were three broad phases of the movement. The first was predominantly urban and included hartals, strikes and clashes with the police and army in most major cities. All these were massive and violent but quickly suppressed.

The second phase of the movement started from the middle of August. Militant students fanned out from different centres, destroying communications and leading peasant rebellion in Northern and Western Bihar, Eastern UP, Midnapore in Bengal, and pockets in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Orissa. A number of short-lived local 'national governments' were also set up.

The third phase of the movements started from about the end of September and was characterised by terrorist activities, sabotage and guerrilla warfare by educated youths and peasant squads. Parallel national governments functioned at Tamluk in Midnapore, Satara in Maharashtra, and Talcher in Orissa. All the three phases of the movement were crushed by brutal atrocities including the use of machine guns from the air.

A good deal of controversy exists about the nature of the movement-whether it was a 'spontaneous revolution' or an 'organised rebellion'. The famous 'Quit India' resolution passed by the Bombay session of the AICC on 8 August 42 followed up its call for 'mass struggle on non violent lines on the widest possible scale', 'inevitably' under Gandhi, with the significant rider that if the Congress leadership was removed by arrest, every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide...'. The Wardha working committee resolution of 14 July had also introduced an unusual note of social radicalism-'the princes', 'jagirdars', 'zamindars' and propertied and moneyed classes derive their wealth and property from the workers in the fields and factories and elsewhere, to whom eventually power and authority must belong.

At the crucial working committee session of 27 April - 1 May, Gandhi's hard-line was backed by a combination of Right-wingers like Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Kripalani and the socialists like Achyut Patwardhan and Narendra Dev. Jawaharlal was initially hesitant, but ultimately joined the queue and only the Communists opposed the Quit India resolution.

During and after the Quit India upsurge, the British in documents like 'Tottenhams' Report painted the whole outburst as a 'deliberate fifth columnist conspiracy',

intending to strengthen the Axis powers. This interpretation not only ignored the consistent anti-fascist international stance of the Congress throughout the 1930s, but also made a historical travesty of the facts that being arrested in the early morning of 9 August the Congress leaders could hardly lead the outburst and that the Quit India resolution was also remarkably vague about the details of the coming movement. Far from ruling out further negotiations, the whole thing may conceivably have been an exercise in brinkmanship and a bargaining counter which was followed by an explosion only because the British had decided on a policy of wholesale repression. Despite strenuous efforts, the British failed to establish their case that the Congress before 9 August had really planned a violent rebellion.

The movement was, in reality 'elemental and largely spontaneous'. It was sparked off by a variety of factors and of an expectation that British rule was coming to an end. Bureaucratic high-handedness and provocation worsened the situation. Financial losses incurred in Malay and Burma induced sections of Indian business community to give some covert support to a movement (even if violent) for a short while.

The real picture was that the removal of established leaders left younger and more militant cadres to their own initiative and gave greater scope to pressure from below. Amery's slander that the Congress had planned attacks on communications and sabotage boomeranged with a vengeance, for many believed that this really had been the Working Committee's plan. In any case, in a primary hegemonic struggle as the Indian National Movement was, preparedness for struggle cannot be measured by the volume of immediate organisational activity but by the degree of hegemonic influence that the movement has acquired over the people.

The participation of labour was short-lived and limited but there was certainly considerable covert upper-class and even Indian high official support to secret nationalist activities in 1942. Such support enabled activists to set up a fairly effective illegal apparatus, including even a secret radio station under Usha Mehta for three months in Bombay. Unlike in the Civil Disobedience days, middle class students were very much in the forefront in 1942, whether in urban clashes, as organisers of sabotage, or as motivators of present rebellion. What made the movement so formidable, however, was the massive upsurge of the peasantry in certain areas, particularly in Bihar.

Indeed, that 1942 clearly surpassed all previous Congress led movements in its level of anti-British radicalism possibly reduced internal class tensions and social radiation. The characteristic feature of this movement was that private property was less attacked and even no-revenue was not as comprehensive as in 1930-34.

The paradox why the people turned violent when the Congress insisted on non-violence may be solved in the following manner. In the struggle there were many who refused to use on sanction violent means and confined themselves to the traditional weaponry of the Congress. But many of those, including many staunch Gandhians, who used 'violent means' in 1942 felt that the peculiar circumstances warranted their use. Many maintained that the cutting of telegraph wires and the blowing up of bridges were all right as long as human life was not taken but others admitted that

they could not square the violence they used, with their belief in non-violence, although they did resort to it in most trying circumstances and in self-defence.

Gandhi refused to condemn the violence of the people because he saw it as a reaction to the much bigger violence being perpetrated on the state. It is held that Gandhi's major objection to violence was that its use prevented mass participation in a movement. For in 1942, Gandhi had come round to the view that mass participation would not be restricted as a result of isolated violence. Gandhi had come to realise that the kind of non-violence he had wanted his country men to inculcate and practise, could not be achieved and so towards the end of his career he had kept some amount of space for the participants to follow their own line of action. His patience had been dragged to such extremes that he felt that even at the cost of some risks, he should ask his people to resist slavery. Although Gandhi was now in an unusually militant mood, at no stage was he prepared to forsake his faith in non-violence. He would have liked the movement to be non-violent but was prepared to run the risk of unrestricted mass action even if that meant civil war. He thus said, 'Let them entrust India to God or, in modern parlance, to anarchy'.

The Quit India movement was thus not a controlled volunteer movement like Gandhi's previous movements of 1920-22 and 1930-34. It was not conceived as a traditional Satyagraha. It was to be a 'fight to the finish', an 'open rebellion', 'short and swift' which could very well plunge the country into a 'conflagration'. Foreign domination was to be ended whatever the cost.

Scholars have analysed the questions of 'spontaneity' and 'preparedness' in terms of action and reaction. The arrest of the leaders made the people aghast and took them completely unaware. Strikes and demonstrations followed and 'the very size of the crowds made the Government nervous'. Tension bred tension and led to confrontation. The people had no guidance, the leaders were either behind the bars or underground. Passions were ranging high. Individuals and groups interpreted the situation to the best of their understanding and acted, as they thought best. The continuing police repression and 'Ordinance Raj' further inflamed the feelings of the people. There had been no Congress call for civil disobedience. 'Therefore what started as individual acts of angry defiance, soon swelled into a movement, and the movement into a revolt'.

The gravity and extent of the Quit India movement by Linlithgow's own admission may be compared to those of the Revolt of 1857. It failed because an unarmed people without leaders and proper organisation could not stand for long before the mighty strength of an imperial government in power. Yet, the significance of the great movement lay in the fact that it placed the demand for independence on the immediate agenda of the national movement. After Quit India, there could be no turning back. Any future negotiations with the British government could only be on the manner of transfer of power. Independence was no longer a matter of bargain and this became amply clear after the war.

## Indian National Army



Indian National Army was formed under the initiative of leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose, Rash Behari Bose and others who, being imbued with the spirit of national independence, sided with the Axis Powers during the Second World War (1939-1945). The Indian National Army (INA) is also called 'Azad Hind Fauz'.

In December 1941 the Japanese defeated the British at Malaya and Captain Mohan Singh together with an Indian and a British officer capitulated to them. Indians residing in Southeast Asia were much inspired at the victory of Japan at the initial stage of the war. A number of associations were formed aiming at the independence of India. Pritam Singh was a leader of such an organisation. He and Major Fujihara, a Japanese officer, requested Mohan Singh to form an Indian Army comprising the captured Indian soldiers. Mohan Singh hesitated but ultimately agreed. Fujihara handed over about 40,000 Indian soldiers, who had surrendered to him, to Mohan Singh. It was actually the first step towards the formation of the INA.

Singapore fell to the Japanese on 15 February 1942. Advancing further north they attacked Burma (Myanmar) and captured Rangoon (Yangon) on 7 March 1942. The famous revolutionary Rash Behari Bose was residing in Japan during this time. He arranged a meeting of the leading Indians residing in Tokyo on 28 March 1942 and there it was decided that an Association of 'Free Indians' would be formed and a National Indian Army constituted under the command of Indian officers. A conference was held at Bangkok on 15 June with this end in view. The conference continued up to 24 June and 35 proposals were adopted. It was agreed that Subhas Chandra Bose would be invited to Southeast Asia. The Bangkok conference approved the army already formed by Mohan Singh. A five member working committee was formed and Rash Behari Bose was made its president. The formation of the INA was formally declared.

In the meantime Subhas Bose silently left Calcutta on 17 January 1941 and arrived in Germany. In Berlin he formed an India government in exile and extended support to Germany. He began to broadcast his aims and objectives over Radio Berlin and made contact with Japan. This aroused tremendous enthusiasm in India. Indians in Germany gave him the title of 'Netaji' and the slogan of 'Jai-Hind' was initiated here during this time.



Subhas left for Japan in a German submarine and arrived in Tokyo on 13 June 1943. Hideki Tojo, the Japanese Prime Minister (1941-44), accorded him a cordial reception on his arrival. The Prime Minister declared in their parliament that Japan would advance all sorts of help to India in its fight for independence. A huge crowd gathered at Singapore to receive Subhas when he arrived there on 2 July 1943. On 4 July Rash Behari Bose resigned and Subhas became the president of the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia. He formally took the leadership of INA on 25 August and dedicated himself in bringing discipline within its rank and file. On 21 October 1943 Subhas, popularly called Netaji, declared the formation of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind and on the 23rd declared war on Britain and America.

The INA was being organised in such a way so that they could also take part in the invasion of India together with the soldiers of Japan. But Terauchi, the Japanese commander, gave objection to the plan on three grounds. He considered that the Indians (as war-prisoners) were demoralised, they were not painstaking like the Japanese and they were mainly mercenary soldiers. So he opined that the Japanese would take part in the invasion and the INA would stay in Singapore. Subhas could not accede to the proposal. Ultimately, after much discussion, it was decided that only a regiment of the Indian soldiers would take part in the fight with the Japanese as a detached unit. If they could prove themselves equal to the Japanese, more Indians would be permitted to march to the border. A new brigade named Subhas Brigade was formed with select soldiers from the erstwhile Gandhi, Azad and Nehru Brigades.

The INA Headquarters was shifted to Rangoon in January 1944 and sensation was created with the war cry Chalo Delhi (March on Delhi). The Subhas Brigade reached Rangoon towards the beginning of January 1944. In the mean time it was decided that the Indian detachment would not be smaller than a battalion, its commander would be an Indian, the war would continue under Joint plan of Action and Indians would fight as a separate unit on selected spots. It was also decided that battles would occur at the Kaladan valley of Arakan and Kalam and Haka centre of China hills to the east of Lusai hills.

The Subhas Brigade was divided into three battalions. The first contingent advanced across both the banks of Kaladan and captured Paletoa and Doletmai. It captured Maudak, a British border out-post at a distance of 64 km from Doletmai a few days after. It was very difficult to get supply of arms and ammunitions and foodstuff, so the Japanese wanted to fall back, but the Indians refused. So only one company was left behind under the command of Surajmal and the rest went back. The Japanese commander also left behind a platoon of his contingents under the disposal of Surajmal.

In the mean time the other two detachments of the Subhas Brigade took the responsibility of Haka-Kalan borderline. At the fall of Imphal at Manipur it was decided that INA would take position at Kohima, so that it could enter Bengal across the Brahmaputra. Gandhi and Azad Brigades also advanced towards Imphal. On the 21 March the Japanese PM declared that the Indian territories freed from the British would be brought under the administration of a provisional independent government formed under Netaji. In spite of various hazards and want of food and war materials the INA advanced up to 241 km inside India.

A few days after the declaration of the Japanese PM the Americans and the British reinforced their power in the Pacific and took steps to invade Japan. At such a critical juncture the Japan forces had to give up the plan of invading India. Consequently the INA also had to retreat and was forced to surrender when the allied powers recaptured Burma.

The Government of India gave strenuous punishment to quite a good number of INA officers like Capt. Shah Nawaz, Capt. Rashid and others. But the government was forced to lift the order when it caused widespread commotion among the member of the public. The cause of India's independence was greatly advanced by the spirit of nationalism aroused by the INA.