

QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT**Dr. Reenu Jain**

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The individual civil disobedience movement petered out by the end of the year 1941. It died its natural death despite Gandhi's effort to provide "a safety – valve for the pent up frustration" through this movement¹. Meanwhile the world war was staking a menacing turn for the Allies. Many demanded in England to adopt a conciliating policy towards India. America, China and Australia were keen to see that England secures the cooperation of the congress in the war efforts. Japan's lightning success in the war called for a serious thinking on the part of congress. This formed the backdrop of the meeting of the congress working committee, held at Bardoli during 28-30 December 1941. As the war situation increasingly worsened, the British Government announced that soon Cripps mission will visit India to meet the aspiration of the Indian people. However, it failed to deliver.

The general discontentment at the failure of the Cripps Mission was unmistakable. Gandhi ji was driven to the conclusion that some concrete steps should be taken to save India from going the way of Malaya and Burma, by giving to the India people a stake in the defense of the country. He presented a draft resolution for the consideration of Congress Working Committee which was carried in its essential form without any opposition in the All India Congress Committee.² The Congress looked to Gandhi ji for leadership once again and sought guidance from him.³

Mahatma Gandhi called for "complete and immediate withdrawal from India".⁴

In an article entitled "To every Briton", he urged the British "to retire from every Asiatic and African possession and at least from India"⁵ The All India Congress Committee met in Bombay on 8 August, 1942 and endorsed the Quit India Resolution.⁶ The British government gave carte blanche to the Viceroy, asking him to act 'firmly and swiftly' to deal with the situation.⁷ The Viceroy arrested all the leaders before the movement could be launched. The Congress was banned and declared illegal. The news of the arrest of their leaders aroused anger among the masses. Without definite programme of action and a leader, their fury found expression in different forms, specially in attacks on Government property which to them appeared to be the symbol of imperialism and colonization.

The news of the arrest of the Congress leaders reached Meerut on 9th August 1942. The people were surprised beyond limits. The city police, in conjunction with civic guards and C.I. D. carried out raids in the morning at the Congress office, the Gandhi Ashram and the residences of several Congress worker.⁸ It is understood that the police took away several registers and other papers from the Congress office and Gandhi Ashram.⁹ Ten local leaders including Vishnu Saran Dublsh, Raghukul Tilak, Gauri Shankar, Master Jagannath Prasad, Sarju Prasad and Laxmi Narain were arrested in the morning of 9th August.¹⁰ These minarets are topped by a structure which is in the shape of a lotus in full

A public meeting was held in the evening at the Town Hall as a mark of protest against the arrest made in the morning.¹¹ This meeting was addressed by Prakashwait Sood and Kamla Chaudhary. The crowd become so restive that it manhandled the Additional District Magistrate and the City Magistrate. The young Assistant superintendent of Police, an Englishman, received a brick in his ribs and was thrown off from his horse.¹² The crowd also broke the window panes of the Town Hall.¹³ Smt. Prakashwait Sood and Smt. Kamla Chaudhary were arrested on the morning of 11th August promptly. On 10th Aug., the students of Meerut College and other young men took out a procession which was lathi charged by the police. Many students were arrested.¹⁴ There after the

arrest continued throughout the weekend by 13th August, approximately 130 arrests were officially declared.¹⁵

From 9th to 17th of August, in many villages of the Meerut Tehsil, papers of Patwaries and local primary schools were burnt down by mobs. At some places, belts of the Chowkidars were also taken away. Subsequently, these villages were fined heavily by the District Magistrate.¹⁶ There were villages where only an insignificant damage was done to the Government property, but the fine was very excessive, e.g., in one village only an iron nail was taken out from a tube well. This hardly cost the Government of few annas but the fine imposed on the village was Rs. 3,200.00. It will not be out of place to mention that Muslims were exempted from the fine everywhere.¹⁷ The Quit India movement burnt almost all the parts of the district. Here are some important parts of the district which created headache for the administrative set up.

Hapur Massacre : The events of Hapur had, surpassed all the preceding events of the districts. On 11th morning, Parmanand, Amolak Chand, Ratanlal Garg, Babu Murari Lal, Khalifa Manzoor Hasan were arrested, and a large number of people followed them up to the Police station. The students called for Hartal at Hapur, which was successful.¹⁸ At about mid-day, the students took out a procession on the streets at random. About a dozen of them were arrested and all sorts of rumour spread in the town. A huge gathering was there under the 'neem' tree in the cloth market and it started marching towards the Town-Hall in the form of a peaceful procession.¹⁹ Mahesh, Kailash Chadra and Parmanand were leading the procession. When the procession reached its destination, the police made brutal Lathi-charge and people ran helter-skelter to save their lives. When a part of the crowd refused to disperse, despite of lathi-charge, the police opened fire²⁰ causing the deaths of 4, and many other seriously injured.²¹ In face of serious famine, forcible seizure of grain stocks and its removal by authorities led to worsening of the whole situation, 59 persons were tried for rioting and other charges, 13 were sentenced to 2 years' rigorous imprisonment, while others were acquitted or discharged.²²

The most dreadful incident took place on the 12th, when a large crowd burst into the Muradnagar railway station and caused extensive damage to railway property. The station was ablaze and the cash box was looted.²³ The post office also fell under the mass fury, but damage to it was not so serious as in the case of railway station. The police arrested 18 persons for setting fire to the station under section 395, 145 I.P.C. and 35 D.I.R. Out of the 18 accused Mangal Sen, Mangal and Radhey Lal were prosecuted and the rest were released as they could not be identified in their identification parade.²⁴

The situation was so serious in the district that the D.M. had to promulgate an order under section 144 Cr. P.C. for a period of six months.²⁵ Meetings and taking out procession in the city and cantonment within a radius of five miles were banned. A curfew order had also been promulgated for a period of one month in the city and cantonment between 10 p.m. to 5 a.m.²⁶ But despite all these precautionary measures by the government the situation could not be brought under control. On 15th morning, the court of First Additional Munsif of Meerut was set on fire, but the timely arrival of a manual pump partly prevented serious loss.²⁷

On the same evening, women Congress workers defied the prohibitory order under section 144 Cr. P.C. and organized a procession.²⁸ According to a Press Release on 16th August, "Eleven Congressmen have been arrested so far for detention in Meerut city and Cantonment and almost all the leading Congressmen in the district, so far 154 men have been arrested in Meerut district for rioting and breach of curfew orders."²⁹

Baghpat, Sardhaa, Mawana, Ghaziabad, Hapur and numerous villages of the district were the scene of peoples' anger who caused harm to government properties and violated law and order. Several Jat villagers refused to pay government taxes. The students played a vital role in the revolution of 1942. The commission reported : "Practically everywhere the students of the main

colleges after doing what damage they could locally, have gone off in parties to see what damage they can do in neighbouring towns and in the rural areas".

Bhamori is a small village near Sardhana. On 18th August, at 1 pm, Pt. Ram Swaroop Sharma, a worker of Gandhi Ashram, Meerut was sitting on a stool of the village Chaupal and explaining the principles of Mahatma Gandhi to illiterate gathering. Raghunandan and Bhanwari Lal were also with Pt. Ram Swaroop Sharma. Suddenly the circle Inspector Mohammad Yaquib arrived with a special force and abused the audience in a most foul language.³⁰ And then the police party attacked this gathering of people who were absolutely peaceful. When some people retaliated against police action, police opened fire,³¹ without giving any statutory warning, in which four persons were killed and many injured. The police found that the incharge of Gandhi Ashram, Ram Swaroop Sharma, was neither among the killed nor the injured. The police then spotted him and shot him.³² After he died, the police dragged his body away and buried him at some clandestine spot. Ch. Lajja Ram, secretary of Gandhi Ashram Meerut came to know the incident through an eye witness, who was a Muslim weaver. Eventually Ch. Lajja Ram lodged a complaint against this sordid affair with the higher authorities. When the workers of Gandhi Ashram Meerut viz. Som Dutt Sharma, Sankatha Prasad Sharma, Bhanwar Lal, Durga Prasad, Ram Dutt Sharma and Ch. Lajja Ram went to trace the corpse of their colleague at Sardhana, the police readily arrested them. Later on the grave of Pt. Ram Swaroop Sharma was dug up and the corpse was consigned to flames as per Hindu rites.³³ Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru visited Bhamori much later in 1945 and paid his homage to the martyrs.³⁴ A memorial school has been founded in Bhamori. Names of the person died in police firing at Bhamori were as under :

1. Shri Ram Swaroop Sharma
2. Thakur Prahlad Singh
3. Shri Latoor Singh
4. Shri Fateh Singh
5. Shri Bobal³⁵

On 23rd Aug., 1942 the women of Meerut took out a procession when the attempts to disperse them failed, the police arrested 61 women.³⁶

Throughout the month of August and September 1942 the movement remained very lively. Gradually violence was overpowering the concept of non-violence. Many post offices were looted or burnt. Railway lines, telephone and telegraph lines were tampered with, damaging the communication system.³⁷ Hundreds of people were arrested. Almost all jails were overcrowded.³⁸ Another most widespread activity was pamphleteering.³⁹

On 21st Sept., 1942, students of Meerut observed a flag salutation ceremony in the college and thereafter moved in a form of procession which was lathi charged near Kutchery.⁴⁰ On 23rd September, 1942, K.D. Malviya visited Meerut and addressed a meeting of underground workers.⁴¹ The following persons attended the meeting : Professor Ram Saran of Moradabad, Sunder Lal, a student of Allahabad University, Kailash Prakash an underground student leader (Said to be the director in Meerut Division) and Jagdish Prasad of Chandpur, District Bijnor.⁴² At this meeting Keshav Dev Malaviya stressed the fact that the Congress organization now consisted of both violent and non-violent sections and that it was his desire that the revolutionary wing would be supplied with all necessary material and implements for carrying out their programme.⁴³

In fourteen villages of Meerut District, records with Patwaris and offices were completely destroyed.⁴⁴ Disturbance continued unabated in October and November. A Patwari was attacked in a rural area and a Havaldar was murdered.

Before the movement could take any other turn, Gandhi ji commenced a fast on 10 February 1943 which lasted for 21 days. The fast of Gandhi ji had great impact on the movement. Many of the underground workers abandoned their violent activities and followed 'Gandhian path'.

All over India prayers were held for the well being of Gandhi ji. Many satyagrahis observed fast for days together in sympathy with Gandhi ji. Puran Chandra Vidhyasankar fasted for 10 days in Meerut Jail.⁴⁵

Under the inspiration of Prof. D.N. Shastri, the students of Meerut College performed a 194 hours long 'havan' and prayed for the life of 'Gandhi ji'. Later on the students decided to install a stone in memory of the havan. They got it inscribed and installed it at the venue of the havan in the dark of the night. When the police and local authorities learnt about it, they insisted on removal of the stone, but the students resolved that it could only be removed after trampling upon their dead bodies.⁴⁶

There was serious confrontation between the students and the District authorities on this issue. The Principal Dr. B.R. Chatarjee held up the feeling of the students and advised the government officials not to aggravate the issue, Dr. Sita Ram, the then President of U.P. legislative council also concurred with the principal. Finally government authorities had to give in to the students' demand.⁴⁷

The square inscription with a crowning spire is 4 feet long. On the sides of the spire are inscribed, an outline portrait of Mahatma Gandhi, a tricolor flag, Charkha and the map of India. The four sides of the inscription read in Hindi, Urdu, English and Sanskrit as follows :

To Commemorate

Mahatma Gandhi's

Historic

Fast of 21 days

Which ended on March, 3, 1943.

This Banyan Tree was planted by

SHRI Narayan Swamiji

*Akhand Haven for 194 hours was also performed at the Meerut College, Meerut.*⁴⁸

This inscription still stands in the Meerut College Campus, reminding of the resolution of the freedom loving students of Meerut.

By the spring of 1943 the movement seemed to be dying out rapidly.⁴⁹ After the death of Smt. Kasturba Gandhi on 22 February 1944, "Kasturba Memorial Fund" was raised in order to promote women education and their general welfare in India. A Committee for U.P. was also formed and Dr. Sita Ram was made the Vice-President of the same. A local Committee in Meerut was also formed. Following were the members of the Committee : Baij Nath, Suraj Bal Dikshit, Charan Singh, K.N. Banerjee,⁵⁰ Atma Sharan Rastogi, Dr. Dori Lal Dube and Laxmi Narain Premi. A total sum of Rs. 58,000,000 was collected from the people and was remitted to Allahabad, Bombay and Wardha accordingly.⁵¹

The revolutionary nature of the 'Quit India Movement' died out almost completely by the second half of 1944. 9th Aug, 1944 was celebrated but without much fan fare. Gandhi ji had already been released from Jail on 6 May 1944 on medical grounds. By the end of 1944 most of the persons arrested in connection with Quit India Movement, were released by the government.

In connection with the Quit India Movement of 1942 in Meerut, 248 persons were arrested and 245 were convicted. The authorities realized a collective fine of Rs. 1, 67, 43, 252.⁵² Jails all over U.P., including Meerut Jail were highly overcrowded. A large number of camp jails had to be opened.⁵³ The provincial percentage of overcrowding was 33% and some of the jails did face serious problems of paucity of staff and rations.⁵⁴

"Meerut is outstanding as the only district in which anything like a real procession managed to form and there trouble appears to be entirely attributable to school boys and school girls. It is interesting to note that with the exception of Meerut which has been constantly troubled by students' activity, the district which were formerly most disturbed are now the most quiet....."⁵⁵

It would thus be seen that the activities during Quit India movement proceeded on familiar lines in Meerut on the one hand while it differed in one respect on the other. The Quit India movement was not so spectacular in Meerut as it had been in the eastern districts of U.P., but it was much more sustained and protracted than in any other part of India. The people defied curfew orders and held public meetings and processions. The police had to firing five times, besides lathi-charges a number of times, to suppress the movement. Nearly 500 persons were arrested and convicted during the movement while a collective fine of Rs. 1,67,432 was realized by the authorities.⁵⁶ The Quit India movement knocked the bottom out of the British will to stay in India.

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30. Based on interview with many of the eyes witnesses village Bhambori in Sardhana.
31. Meerut District Gazetteer, op. cit, p-60s
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33. Records of the District Congress Committee, vide letter of Ch. Lajja Ram, dated 17 May, 1957.
34. Tyagi Richhpal Singh, "Hapur Ka Swatantrata Sangharsh Ka Ithash" (Hapur, 1976), p. 82
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46. Rastogi, J.N., op. cit. p. 258.
47. Ibid.
48. It can be seen in the Meerut College Campus.
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