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Quit India Movement Completed 84 Years, Highlighting Mass Nationalism, Underground Resistance and the Final Crisis of British Colonial Rule

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Recent Developments:

- **84th Anniversary:** The **Quit India Movement** was commemorated in Parliament in August 2026, with the **Chairman of the Rajya Sabha** making a solemn reference to remember the historic movement and its freedom fighters.
- **Historical Significance:** The movement was launched on **8 August 1942** at the **Bombay session of the All India Congress Committee**, demanding an immediate end to British colonial rule.
- **Gandhian Call:** **Mahatma Gandhi** gave the historic **"Do or Die"** call at **Gowalia Tank Maidan**, now known as **August Kranti Maidan**, in Mumbai.
- **Leadership Arrests:** The British administration arrested Gandhi and almost the entire top Congress leadership during the early hours of **9 August 1942**, turning the movement into a largely decentralised and spontaneous mass uprising.
- **Historical Legacy:** The movement demonstrated the depth of popular opposition to colonial rule and became one of the final major mass upsurges before India achieved independence in **1947**.

What Was the Quit India Movement?

Basic Features:

- The **Quit India Movement**, also called the **August Kranti**, was a mass anti-colonial movement launched by the **Indian National Congress** in **1942** to demand the immediate withdrawal of British rule from India.
- The movement emerged during the **Second World War**, when Britain expected Indian cooperation in the war without granting immediate independence.
- The **All India Congress Committee** formally adopted the **Quit India Resolution** at Bombay on **8 August 1942**.
- Gandhi called for a determined but essentially **mass-based struggle** and gave the historic message of **"Do or Die"**.
- The Congress demand was for an **orderly British withdrawal** and the establishment of an independent Indian government.

Important Personalities:

- **Mahatma Gandhi:** Provided the central ideological and political leadership and gave the **"Do or Die"** call.
- **Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad:** Represented the major Congress leadership arrested at the beginning of the movement.

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Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

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- **Aruna Asaf Ali:** Hoisted the national flag at **Gowalia Tank Maidan** after the arrest of the Congress leadership and became an important symbol of resistance.
- **Usha Mehta:** Operated the underground **Congress Radio**, which helped circulate nationalist messages despite colonial censorship.
- **Jayaprakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia:** Played important roles in the **underground resistance** after the arrest of senior Congress leaders.
- **Yusuf Meherally:** Is associated with the popularisation of the slogan “**Quit India**” and had earlier coined “**Simon Go Back**”.

Background and Causes:

Failure of the Cripps Mission:

- The immediate political background was the failure of the **Cripps Mission**, which arrived in India in **March 1942** under **Sir Stafford Cripps**.
- The mission sought Indian cooperation in the British war effort by proposing constitutional arrangements for the post-war period.
- The proposal offered **Dominion Status after the war** rather than immediate independence, which failed to satisfy the Congress demand for immediate transfer of effective political power.
- The proposal also allowed provinces to remain outside the proposed Indian Union, creating concerns regarding **political fragmentation**.
- Gandhi famously criticised the proposal as a **post-dated cheque on a failing bank**, reflecting the Congress view that wartime promises could not substitute for immediate freedom.

India's Unilateral Involvement in the Second World War:

- The British government declared India a belligerent in the **Second World War in 1939** without consulting Indian political leadership.
- The Congress regarded this decision as evidence of the absence of genuine Indian sovereignty.
- The continuation of colonial rule during a global war intensified the demand for **immediate Indian participation in decisions affecting the country**.

Wartime Economic and Social Distress:

- The Second World War generated **inflation, shortages and economic pressure**, increasing public dissatisfaction with colonial policies.
- Shortages of essential commodities and wartime controls affected ordinary people and contributed to the wider social basis of anti-colonial mobilisation.
- The wartime advance of Japan towards Southeast Asia also created a perception that India had become directly exposed to the consequences of imperial military policy.

Growth of Anti-Colonial Nationalism:

- Earlier movements, including the **Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement and individual satyagraha**, had already created a broad political consciousness against colonial rule.
- Organisations and groups associated with the wider nationalist movement had mobilised **peasants, workers, students and youth**, creating social networks that could sustain resistance even after the arrest of national leaders.
- The demand had increasingly shifted from constitutional concessions towards **complete independence**.

Launch and Chronology:

Wardha Resolution:

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- The **Congress Working Committee** met at **Wardha on 14 July 1942** and adopted a resolution demanding British withdrawal and authorising preparation for a mass struggle.
- The resolution became the basis for the final **Quit India Resolution** adopted at Bombay.

Bombay Session:

- On **8 August 1942**, the **All India Congress Committee** approved the Quit India Resolution at Bombay.
- Gandhi delivered his historic speech at **Gowalia Tank Maidan**, giving the nation the call of “**Do or Die**”.
- The ground later came to be known as **August Kranti Maidan** in recognition of the movement launched there.

Arrests of Congress Leaders:

- During the early hours of **9 August 1942**, the British administration arrested Gandhi and other major Congress leaders before they could organise the movement at the national level.
- The leadership arrests created a **political vacuum**, but instead of ending the movement, they encouraged local leaders, students, workers and ordinary citizens to continue the struggle.
- The movement therefore became significantly more **decentralised, spontaneous and militant** than the Congress leadership had originally planned.

Major Phases of the Movement:

First Phase: Urban Mass Protest:

- The initial phase was concentrated mainly in **urban centres** and involved strikes, demonstrations, hartals, boycotts and picketing.
- Students, workers and ordinary citizens participated in protests against colonial institutions.
- The British administration responded with **mass arrests, censorship, police action and restrictions on public assembly**.

Second Phase: Rural Mobilisation and Disruption:

- As repression intensified, the movement spread into several **rural regions**.
- Protesters targeted symbols of colonial authority, including **railway lines, telegraph systems, police stations and government buildings**.
- The disruption of communication networks attempted to weaken the administrative capacity of the colonial state.
- Violence occurred in some areas despite Gandhi's emphasis on non-violence, making the movement more heterogeneous than earlier Congress-led campaigns.

Third Phase: Underground Resistance and Parallel Governments:

- With the national leadership imprisoned, underground networks became increasingly important.
- Activists operated secretly, circulated political literature and maintained communication networks.
- **Parallel governments** emerged in selected regions, demonstrating attempts to replace colonial authority with indigenous administrative structures.

Underground Movement and Alternative Communication:

Underground Leadership:

- **Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani and other activists** contributed to underground resistance.

- Underground activists attempted to maintain political communication after the colonial administration suppressed open Congress activity.
- Their activities demonstrated the ability of the nationalist movement to continue despite the imprisonment of its formal leadership.

Congress Radio:

- **Usha Mehta** and her associates operated an underground radio network that broadcast nationalist messages.
- The radio became an important instrument for **information dissemination and psychological resistance** against colonial censorship.
- The episode highlights the importance of alternative communication networks in sustaining mass movements under authoritarian conditions.

Parallel Governments:

Ballia:

- **Ballia in Uttar Pradesh** witnessed the emergence of a temporary national government under **ChittPandey** in August 1942.
- The local administration was challenged and imprisoned Congress leaders were released temporarily.
- The parallel government was suppressed by British forces within a short period.

Tamluk:

- **Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar** emerged in the Tamluk region of Midnapore in Bengal in **December 1942**.
- It attempted to perform functions associated with governance, including maintaining order, dispensing justice and providing assistance to affected people.
- The parallel administration continued for a considerably longer period than the short-lived government in Ballia and was eventually dissolved in **1944**.

Satara:

- The **Prati Sarkar** emerged in Satara in Maharashtra under the leadership of **Nana Patil**.
- It challenged colonial authority through underground organisation and alternative local administration.
- Satara therefore became one of the most prominent examples of sustained parallel authority during the movement.

Role of Women:

Mass Participation:

- Women participated in demonstrations, underground activities, political communication and organisational work.
- Their participation demonstrated that the nationalist movement had expanded beyond formal male political leadership.
- **Aruna Asaf Ali and Usha Mehta** became particularly prominent symbols of women's participation during the movement.

Significance:

- Women's participation strengthened the **mass character of the movement** and expanded the social base of anti-colonial nationalism.

- The movement also demonstrated the growing political agency of women in the final phase of India's freedom struggle.

Regional Spread and Popular Participation:

Uttar Pradesh:

- Several districts of **Uttar Pradesh** witnessed intense mobilisation after the arrest of Congress leaders.
- **Ballia, Ghazipur, Varanasi and Azamgarh** became important centres of local resistance.
- In Varanasi, processions and attempts to hoist the national flag demonstrated the strong popular response to the movement.

Bengal:

- **Midnapore and Tamluk** became important centres of resistance and parallel administration.
- The emergence of **Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar** reflected the organisational depth achieved by the movement in parts of Bengal.

Maharashtra:

- **Satara** emerged as a major centre of underground resistance through the **Prati Sarkar**.
- Maharashtra also witnessed significant participation in sabotage and disruption of colonial communication systems.

Other Regions:

- Resistance and protests occurred across several parts of **Bihar, Bombay Presidency, Karnataka, Delhi, Assam and other regions**.
- The intensity and character of resistance varied considerably between regions, demonstrating that the Quit India Movement was not a uniform national uprising but a **network of interconnected local struggles**.

British Repression:

Nature of Repression:

- The British government responded through **mass arrests, police firing, censorship, collective fines, detention and restrictions on political activity**.
- Congress organisations were suppressed and political leaders were detained without normal political freedom.
- Government forces targeted both organised resistance and local manifestations of the movement.

Consequences:

- More than **100,000 people were arrested**, according to historical accounts cited in official commemorative material.
- The severe repression temporarily suppressed open political activity but could not eliminate anti-colonial sentiment.
- The repression also exposed the extent to which colonial governance depended on **coercive state power** rather than democratic consent.

Why Did the Movement Become Violent in Some Areas?

Gandhi's Position:

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- Gandhi's political philosophy remained fundamentally committed to **non-violence and mass satyagraha**.
- The official Congress call was intended to mobilise Indians through determined mass action rather than a centrally organised armed rebellion.

Localised Violence:

- The arrest of the national leadership immediately after the movement was launched created a **leadership vacuum**.
- In several regions, spontaneous protests escalated into attacks on communication infrastructure, police stations and government buildings.
- Therefore, the actual movement displayed a mixture of **non-violent protest, civil resistance, sabotage and localised violence**.

Why Did Some Political Groups Not Support the Movement?

Muslim League:

- The **All India Muslim League** did not support the Quit India Movement.
- The League's political strategy focused on securing safeguards for Muslims and advancing the demand for **Pakistan**, rather than joining the Congress-led movement for immediate British withdrawal.

Communist Party of India:

- The **Communist Party of India** initially opposed the war after Germany attacked the Soviet Union.
- After the Soviet Union joined the Allied side in **1941**, the CPI supported the Allied war effort and opposed the Quit India Movement.
- This position reflected the changing international context of the **Second World War**.

HindMahasabha:

- The **HindMahasabha** did not participate in the Quit India Movement as a collective organisation.
- Its leaders differed from the Congress strategy and continued political activity within existing constitutional and administrative structures.

Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army:

- **Subhas Chandra Bose** pursued a different strategy from Gandhi and the Congress leadership.
- He organised the **Indian National Army** and established the **Azad Hind Government** from outside India.
- His strategy sought to achieve Indian independence through armed struggle and international military alliances.

Achievements and Significance:

Mass Nationalism:

- The movement demonstrated the extraordinary depth of **anti-colonial sentiment among ordinary Indians**.
- Students, workers, peasants, women and local political activists participated in different forms of resistance.
- The movement therefore represented one of the broadest mass challenges to British authority during the freedom struggle.

Decentralisation of Nationalist Politics:

- The imprisonment of Congress leaders forced local activists to assume leadership.

- This encouraged the emergence of **decentralised political networks, underground leadership and regional resistance centres**.
- The movement therefore demonstrated that Indian nationalism had developed beyond dependence on a small group of national leaders.

Emergence of New Leadership:

- Underground resistance provided political experience to leaders such as **Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Aruna Asaf Ali and Sucheta Kriplani**.
- Several of these personalities later became important figures in independent India's political and social life.

Women's Political Participation:

- The active participation of women strengthened the social base of the nationalist movement.
- Figures such as **Aruna Asaf Ali and Usha Mehta** demonstrated women's ability to assume leadership roles under conditions of severe colonial repression.

Challenge to Colonial Legitimacy:

- The British successfully suppressed the movement militarily, but the movement demonstrated that colonial rule increasingly lacked **popular legitimacy**.
- The continued cost of maintaining colonial authority became increasingly difficult in the post-war environment.
- The movement therefore contributed to the broader political conditions that culminated in independence in **1947**.

Limitations and Failures:

Immediate Objective Not Achieved:

- The movement failed to secure the immediate withdrawal of British rule.
- British authorities retained control over the central administration and suppressed the open phase of the movement.

Absence of Unified Political Support:

- Major political organisations, including the **Muslim League and Communist Party of India**, did not participate in the movement.
- The absence of complete political unity weakened the possibility of presenting the movement as a universally supported national front.

Leadership Vacuum:

- The pre-emptive arrest of the Congress leadership prevented the movement from being centrally coordinated.
- This contributed to **regional variation, communication difficulties and uncontrolled forms of protest**.

Limited Organisational Coordination:

- The movement developed largely through spontaneous local mobilisation rather than a centrally coordinated national campaign.
- As a result, some regions experienced intense resistance while others witnessed comparatively limited mobilisation.

Deviation from Non-Violence:

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- Acts of sabotage and violence in some regions departed from Gandhi's preferred method of **non-violent mass resistance**.
- This created tension between the movement's declared Gandhian philosophy and certain forms of local action.

Quit India Movement and Other Major Movements:

Comparison with Non-Cooperation Movement:

- The **Non-Cooperation Movement** focused primarily on withdrawal of cooperation from colonial institutions, whereas the Quit India Movement demanded the **immediate termination of British rule**.
- The Quit India Movement emerged in a much more radical wartime political context and was accompanied by stronger decentralised resistance.

Comparison with Civil Disobedience Movement:

- The **Civil Disobedience Movement** was associated with specific laws and symbols of colonial authority, most famously the **Salt Satyagraha**.
- The Quit India Movement directly targeted the legitimacy and continuation of **British colonial rule itself**.

Distinctive Feature:

- The most distinctive feature of the Quit India Movement was that the **national leadership was arrested almost immediately**, yet the movement continued through local, underground and spontaneous initiatives.
- This demonstrated the depth of nationalist consciousness developed over the preceding decades.

Overall Historical Assessment:

Nature of the Movement:

- The Quit India Movement was neither a completely centrally controlled campaign nor a uniformly violent uprising.
- It was a **mass, decentralised and regionally diverse anti-colonial movement** containing non-violent protests, strikes, underground activities, sabotage and parallel administrations.
- Its character changed significantly after the arrest of the national leadership on **9 August 1942**.

Contribution to Independence:

- The movement did not directly force the British to leave India in **1942**, but it significantly weakened the political legitimacy of continued colonial rule.
- Along with the **Second World War, post-war economic pressures, the Indian National Army experience, the naval revolt of 1946 and changing international attitudes towards colonialism**, it contributed to the circumstances that made British withdrawal increasingly unavoidable.
- Therefore, the Quit India Movement should be understood as a **major political milestone in the final phase of India's freedom struggle**, rather than as the sole or immediate cause of independence.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Facts:

- **Year:** 1942.
- **Resolution:** Adopted by the **All India Congress Committee** on **8 August 1942**.
- **Place:** **Gowalia Tank Maidan, Bombay**, now **August Kranti Maidan**.
- **Main slogan:** **"Do or Die"**.

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- **Associated slogan:** “Quit India”, associated with **Yusuf Meherally**.
- **Important women:** **Aruna Asaf Ali, Usha Mehta and Sucheta Kriplani**.
- **Underground leaders:** **Jayaprakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia**.
- **Parallel governments:** **Ballia, Tamluk and Satara**.
- **British response:** **Mass arrests, censorship, police firing, detention and collective fines**.
- **Final outcome:** The movement was suppressed by **1944**, but it became a decisive landmark in the final phase of the freedom struggle.

Mains-Ready Analytical Line:

- **“The Quit India Movement failed as an immediate insurrection but succeeded as a political demonstration that colonial rule could no longer command enduring popular legitimacy.”**

Essay Value:

- The movement provides a historical illustration of how **collective political consciousness can survive institutional repression**, particularly when nationalism has already developed a broad social base.

Prelims Traps:

- **8 August 1942:** Quit India Resolution adopted and Gandhi delivered the **“Do or Die”** call.
- **9 August 1942:** Major Congress leaders were arrested and the mass phase of the movement intensified.
- **Gowalia Tank Maidan:** Associated with the launch of the movement and Aruna Asaf Ali's flag hoisting.
- **Tamluk:** Associated with **Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar**.
- **Satara:** Associated with the **Prati Sarkar**.
- **Ballia:** Associated with the temporary parallel government led by **ChittPandey**.