Quit India Movement in Orissa

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The Quit India Movement was the expression of India's last push towards its "tryst with destiny." No wonder that the Congress Working Committee, at its meetings at Wardha (6-14 July 1942) adopted a resolution demanding that "British rule in India must end immediately." Should this appeal fail, "the Congress will then be reluctantly compelled to utilize all its non-violent strength for a widespread struggle." Here was the forerunner of the historic Quit India Resolution passed by the All India Congress Committee (A.I.C.C.) at Gwalia Tank field in Bombay on 8th August 1942.

The next day all the Congress leaders from various parts of India who had assembled at Bombay were arrested. Dr. H.K. Mahatab, the eminent Congress leader of Orissa was one of those leaders who was arrested in Bombay and sent to the Ahmadnagar Jail. Quit India Movement in Orissa was the most successful mass agitation in the region because of its anti-colonial and anti-feudal nature. The Govt. of Orissa declared all Congress bodies, their offices and other allied organisations unlawful and the police took possession of those notified places as quickly as possible. Within two weeks, the arrest of the important leaders of Orissa caused a strong resentment among the people. Local Congress Workers became free to choose their own way of action. Gandhian way of non-violence was no longer strictly followed. Anguis of the people was at its zenith. It also became difficult on the part of the local leaders to control them. Brutal police atrocities in villages made the people more violent. Large number of people congregated in different places and set the Govt. institution on fire under the leadership of local leaders. The bravery and boldness of the people, who were once very submissive and inert, could prove the success of a Gandhian technique of mass mobilisation.

The Quit India Movement assumed the character of a formidable mass uprising in the
district of Koraput, mostly inhabited by the Adivasis or aborigins. Carrying Congress flags the Satyagrahis circulated inflammatory pamphlets. A daring incident took place at Mathili police station in Koraput district when a mob under the leadership of Laxman Naik tried to capture the police station. But the mob was mercilessly beaten up. During the scuffle, a forest guard was killed and the police opened fire killing five on the spot. Laxman Naik was falsely accused of beating the guard to death. Later on, he was sentenced to death on 29th March 1943 in Berhampur Central Jail. Right upto his very last breath, he was found to have chanted "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai," which reverberated the Jail campus. In the Papadahandi area of Nawarangpur Taluk, police shot dead 15 persons and injured many more.

The arrest of veteran leader like Gopabandhu Choudhary and Ramadevi infuriated the people of the Kaipada area of Jajpur. The violent mob crossed the river Baitarani and gathered at Kaipada. In order to disperse the mob the police resorted to firing which resulted in the death of three people on the spot.

At Nimapara in the Puri district, police resorted to firing when the public held a meeting on 16th September 1942 and resolved not to pay taxes to Government. Following this, they proceeded towards the police station and persuaded the police personnel to quit Government service and join the movement. Despite the warning of the police, the mob set fire on the police station. Then the police opened fire killing one person and injuring several others.

An open field called Chandiaposi, adjacent to the village Lunia, witnessed a police firing on 22nd September, 1942 in which nine people died and five injured. At Tudigadia and Kahiradhia also, two persons were killed and one was injured due to police firing.

The most ghastly massacre that took place at Eram in the Balasore district is a memorable event in the history of India's Freedom Struggle and it is befittingly called the jallianwala Bagh tragedy of Orissa where 28 persons were killed and 56 persons were injured. It is true that nowhere in India, so many people were killed in a single police action during the Quit Movement for which Eram has been named as "Rakta Tirtha."

At Cuttack Surendra Nath Dwivedi started underground activities. He circulated revolutionary bulletins which recharged the atmosphere with high patriotism. But he was spotted soon and was arrested.

In Gadjat States of Orissa the Quit India Movement had its deep impact. In Talcher, the people gave up non-violence and started guerrilla fighting against the ruler's force. In Dhenkanal, the Satyagrahis started armed skirmishes with the police. Jail, Police Station and Institutions were burnt. The people of Nayagarh, Athagarh and Mayurbhanj started agitations. These movements though followed violence, were more or less Gandhian in nature. Gandhiji's photographs were taken out in processions and the war cry was "Mahatma Ghandhi Ki Jai".

Though the Quit India Movement came to close by the middle of 1945, it occupies the same place as do the French Revolution and Russian Revolution in the history of their respective countries and the active role played by Orissa is unique. Despite the excessive British repression, the supreme sacrifice and the spirit of nationalism exhibited by the Oriyas is exemplary for all time to come.

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