

**‘CHILDREN’S UPRISING’- ROLE OF STUDENTS WHO TOOK UP CUDGELS IN
QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT**

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Abstract

‘Bharat Choro’, ‘Quit India’, a passionate war cry presented by Yusuf Meherali to Gandhiji, was indeed a mass revolution which was unparalleled in its amplitude and spontaneity which was unheard of in world history before 1942. World had seen two great revolutions of France and Russia but what happened in August, 1942, a multi-dimensional scenario unseen before shook the British *Raj* to its core and made them feel the heat of masses potent call towards freedom. In this struggle to freedom, the role of young leaders and student including boys and girls of elite class, becomes imperative to acknowledge, who lent their services and *sacrificed* their career and studies to join the gospel of Revolution. Point No. 4 of the 12-Point Programme of the ‘AICC’ was addressed to students. The big jargons of Congress, *Meherali, Ashok Mehta, Purshottam Trikamdas, Sardar Patel, Shakarrao Deo and Kamala devi Chattopadhyaya*, through the secret camps by conducting workshops on reorientation of the youths on the subject of ‘How to make a Revolution’ cultivated the student community. Many instances can be traced in the ‘*August Struggle*’, where students’ activities have made a struggle more youth oriented. This upsurge in the youth was at all India level (Amritsar, Lahore, Allahabad, Calcutta, Benaras Lucknow, Patna, etc.) but the most prominent was the Bombay City. Intelligence Report had frequently mentioned the names of student leaders in Bombay:- M.L. Shah, Laloobhai A. Shah, Jaffer Abidali, Usha Mehta, Chandrakant C. Dalal, M.R. Masani, K.S. Dharia, Batuk Desai et al. In retrospect, a sophisticated student leadership had emerged in the *Bombay City* over the period of 14 years prior to the Movement. Congressmen had done the spadework towards politicization of the student community and it indeed proved to be a significant factor in the success of Quit India Movement. The present paper will try to bring forth the activities and unequivocal support of student community and leaders who lent their resilience towards the struggle.

Keywords: Quit India Movement, August Struggle, Youth and Student leadership, Political training of students

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Introduction

To uproot the injustice, inequality, oppression, exploitation and most importantly anything inhumane towards a human, to bring the balance & equilibrium, that is, bringing the 'dharma', going to war against these wrong in the society is always the last resort.

India has also witnessed many such wars and struggles since the ancient times but in the modern era, 'Bharat Choro', 'Quit India' has proved to be the last uprising which made British *Raj*(Colonial Empire) feel the power of masses, where every strata of the society and people with different ideologies took part in this great movement. This movement was not a result of instant anger rather it was a perfect example of 'Gramscian theoretical perspective of war', that is, power is never seized in a single moment rather with a slow, progressive & prolonged tread by collaborating at moral, political & ideologies level (Chandra, Mukerjee, Mukerjee, Panikkar, & Mahajan, 1989). The highlight of freedom struggle was that it was an amazing mix of values and modern ideals, with socio-economic and political vision of its leadership at the helm(Chandra, Mukerjee, Mukerjee, Panikkar, & Mahajan, 1989).

National leaders of that era in India felt and recognized that the common interest of the people of India is in contradiction vis-a-vis the British colonialism in terms of colonial policies and its colonial structure, which were regressing economically and a process towards underdevelopment (Chandra, Mukerjee, Mukerjee, Panikkar, & Mahajan, 1989). These unsettling feelings and anger, build the road towards freedom struggle through innumerable mass agitational campaigns including the 'The Great Revolt of 1857' and two famous movements prior to Quit India by Mahatma Gandhi, 'The Non-Cooperation Movement' (1920-22) and 'The Civil Disobedience Movement' (1930-32). These feelings were equally reverberated in the young and old, urban and rich, men and women, every person living in the land, in myriad ways. But what lead to the involvement of people in such a large scale was the immense faith in their capacity to shatter the chains of colonization and slavery. 'The nation has got energy of which you have no conception but I have,' Mahatma Gandhi told K.F. Nariman in 1934.

Road towards the 'August Struggle'

- 1) **Civil Rebellion, Tribal Uprisings, Revolt of 1857 and Peasants Movement:** The economic decline in the climate of 'enslaved' Hindustan from 1770 to 1857 with numerous famines adding to such broken will, the barbarian economic policies British introduced with respect to changes in the structure of administration and land revenue system made things more worse, leading to Civil Rebellion and Tribal uprisings (*from 1763 to 1856 as many as 40 major rebellions apart from hundreds of minor rebellions*) resulting in the first Revolt of 1857. The struggle continued after the revolt of 1857 with the Peasants Movement and the most famous & widespread movement was Indigo Revolt of 1859-60. All these revolts were unsuccessful as they followed the framework of old social order and the lack of adequate knowledge of colonization (its economic structure and social framework) (Chandra, Mukerjee, Mukerjee, Panikkar, & Mahajan, 1989).
- 2) **The Swadeshi Movement:** To break down and bring to the knees the gaining nationalism in the people of India, Lord Curzon, the Viceroy (1899-1905), played the political game as a strategy to divide/ partition of Bengal, leading to 'The Swadeshi Movement'- boycott of foreign goods (1903-1908). On the fateful day of partition, 16 October, 1905, '*Bande Mataram*' became the chant on the streets and was considered as the black day & day of mourning, as people took to streets in large processions and no fires were lit in the kitchens (Chandra, Mukerjee, Mukerjee, Panikkar, & Mahajan, 1989). To extend this movement to rest of India, militant nationalist, Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lalpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghosh favoured not just 'Swadeshi' but aimed for 'Swaraj' and the abrogation of partition had become the 'pettiest and the narrowest of all political objects' (Sarkar, 1973). Numerous public meetings and processions emerged as a successful form of mass mobilization. For the first time large section of society was the part of this uprising towards 'Swaraj' and becoming part of the modern nationalist politics. (Chandra, Mukerjee, Mukerjee, Panikkar, & Mahajan, 1989)
- 3) **The Non-cooperation Movement (1920-1922):** The programme of non-cooperation included the surrender of titles and honours, boycott of government affiliated schools and colleges, law courts, foreign cloths, and resignation from government activities and mass civil disobedience including non payment of taxes (01 August, 1920) but it was later withdrawn by Mahatma Gandhi in February, 1922 after the incidents of violence at

Chauri Chaura and by the prospect of the movement going out of his hands and into the hands of radicals.(Dutt)

- 4) **Civil Disobedience (1930-31):** With the ignorance of 11- point ultimatum to Lord Irwin on January 31, Mahatama Gandhi saw the only way out of Civil Disobedience. Lahore Congress granted the authorization to the Working Committee to launch this programme in 1929 including to urging non-payment of taxes and later Gandhi announced the disregard to Salt Act & started the '*Dandi March*'. Besides, vast majority of people (students, merchants especially women, for them this was a liberating moment by making their presence felt in India's struggle to freedom) and groups were politicized for Indian Nationalism as they joined the movement in humongous number for demonstrations.

These all depressive and traumatic scenario breathed 'this is my own native land' thought in the souls of men and women, who by 1942 became strong, robust and filled with resolute resistance against the injustice and suppressions.

The Rise of Quit India Movement

The injustice meted out to the people of India by the Government by implementing the draconian measures and suppressing the basic civil rights & liberties, the outburst was evident but the question was when?

After the failure of Cripps Mission in 1942, national leaders including Gandhi and Nehru were of the opinion that mutely accepting the 'empty Cripps offer' will lead to bowing before the British Government. Moreover, rising prices, war-time shortages, trains bringing wounded soldiers from Assam-Burma border adding to the injustice and feeling of angst, it became necessary to bring out the people of India out of this state of demoralizing and motivating them to further participated in the freedom struggle.

Gandhi gave his unprecedented speech on 14 July, 1942 at AICC in Bombay attended by huge crowds, stated, "Nothing less than freedom" and made his clarion call of 'Do or Die' and gave specific instructions for different section of the society including the students and the resonating words of Sardar Patel "This is going to be opportunity of Lifetime" to 70,000 men and women was the penultimate call towards the rise of the movement as they were already in

the state of angst and needed a catalyst, a moment to start a fight against the draconian empire. Government in no mood to bow down arrested the top leaders of Congress in anticipation of the movement in the early hours of August 9, 1942. Next day, when the news of arrest spread *hartals* and processions were taken out in Delhi and many places of U.P. and Bihar (Kanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi and Patna, Ahmedabad, Poona). Even the rural areas joined in large numbers.

The movement took furious turn of events turning into open rebellion (to destroy the structure of imperial rule, to work at underground and revitalize the campaign & start new war of terrorism against the government) as masses adopted the arson way to protest till late August, 1942. The people formed guerrilla bands to target many police stations, post offices, courts railway stations, telegraph communication, telephones, paralyzing the factories and other government offices were torched or destroyed. Schools and colleges were emptied and closed and students took part in numerous processions, merchants closed the markets, workers stopped the mills & factories despite the terror from police and military (Chaudhari, 1996) (Bombay Congress Bulletin, 1942). Many Gurkha and Sikh soldiers and some Punjabi sailors mutinied in sympathy with the citizens of Bombay. Crowd overpowered the police parties and they had to be rescued by the Military (Chaudhari, 1996) (War of Independence, Bulletin No. 2, 1942).

Even the brutalities and constant threat, resentful and discontented people's spirit was undaunted. Such oppressive circumstances imply made the people insensate and desperate. Any demonstration related with non-violence and peace was severely put down.

After the carnage of mass struggle and the oppressive conditions prevalent young leadership emerged secretly bringing the source of guidance and command all over the country and started working underground, by the names of Achyut Patwardhan, Aruna Asif Ali, Ram Manohar Lohia, Sucheta Kripalani, Chootu bhai Puranik, Biju Patnaik, R.P. Goenka and Jayaprakash Narayan (after evading from the jail) and they were active as underground organizations at Bombay, Poona, Satara, Baroda and other parts of Gujrat, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra, U.P., Bihar and Delhi. (Chandra, Mukerjee, Mukerjee, Panikkar, & Mahajan, 1989)

Tilling of Young students' mind towards the struggle

Students' role in the movement was very crucial yet very complicated because of Communist betrayal on the eve of movement. Communist student leaders (Lalji Moreshwar Pande) in Bombay tried to sabotage the movement with the false slogans and indulged in camouflage activities, even the sincere student became the bait of such sabotage. Thus, tilling and cultivating the student community's mind became essential for the freedom struggle (Chaudhari, 1996).

The big jargons namely, *Meherali*, *Ashok Mehta*, *Purshottam Trikamdas*, *Sardar Patel*, *Shankarrao Deo* and *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya*, through the secret camps by conducting workshops on reorientation of the youths on the subject of 'How to make a Revolution' cultivated the student community by training them to enunciate their logic of revolution (**Meherali**). **Ashok Mehta** carried out the message and nucleus of Congress even after the leaders were arrested, through People's Volunteer Brigade (Chaudhari, 1996) (Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta's Report, Home Poll. (I), File No.3/31/42, 1942). **Sankarrao Deo** urged students to give up studies and join the movement and sacrifice their studies for the sake of independence (Chaudhari, 1996) (H.D.S.B., File No. 1110 (1), 1942). **Sardar Patel** also resonated the students by instructing and communicating that they must pick up anything from 1919 fights and ought to stop every government schools or colleges in the event anything happens to Gandhi and pass the message from house to house by making it 'opportunity of lifetime'. Making the struggle as the movement not restricted but cover all patriotic forces. (Chaudhari, 1996) (H.D.S.B., File No. 1110 (1), 1942). P.C. Joshi (Communist Leader) in his report on crisis of August 9, 1942 claimed that the students of Bombay were most deeply affected and influenced by the Congress as the numbers of students from Bombay were quite high.

The Rise of Students' Activities and their Role in the Struggle

Winston Churchill's contemptuous attitude gave the name of 'Children's Uprising' (Chaudhari, 1996); (Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1942-43) to the Quit India movement but the role and services of the students in the movement must be enshrined and acknowledged as glorious, heroic and valor towards the path of freedom. In this struggle to freedom, the role of young leaders and student including boys and girls of elite class, becomes imperative to acknowledge, who lent their services and *sacrificed* their career and studies to join

the gospel of Revolution. Point No. 4 of the 12-Point Programme of the 'AICC' was addressed to students. It fills the heart with pride to know the heroic response of numerous college and school students, to the call of Indian Nationalism and persuaded their old & elders to join the fight to freedom. Moreover, at Shivaji Park in Bombay, *Fight for Freedom* leaflet was the creation of students'; showing their strength and grit, will not lag behind in the struggle rather will not rest till the freedom is achieved.(Chaudhari, 1996)(Fight For Freedom, Students' Action Committee, 1942)

Many instances can be traced in the '*August Struggle*', where students' activities have made a struggle more youth oriented. This upsurge in the youth was at all India level (Amritsar, Lahore, Allahabad, Calcutta, Benaras Lucknow, Patna, etc.) but the most prominent was the Bombay City. Intelligence Report had frequently mentioned the names of student leaders in Bombay:- M.L. Shah, Laloobhai A. Shah, Jaffer Abidali, Usha Mehta, Chandrakant C. Dalal, M.R. Masani, K.S. Dharia, Batuk Desai, Arvind Mehta, Haji Javer Gilani, Dinakar Mehta, Rohit Manushankar Dave, Kantilal Dahyabhai Bhat, Miss Manek, G. Mahimtura, Miss Viduyt, K. Khandwalla, Dinakar Ganesh Sakrikar, Rajaram Gopal Kuljarni, Prabhkar K. Kunte, P.M. Joshi, Shantilal Shah, Bahani Shankar Yajnik, P.M. Bhangwati, AmulMaganlal Desai, M.B. Bhat, T.C. Modi, Shridhar Krishna Pai, Lalit Mohan Jamnadas, Mrs. Urmila Mehra, Kalpalata and Usha Munshi, G.S. Patke, Joachim Alva, etc.(Chaudhari, 1996).

Students' Activities

Students' were so filled with the emotion of nationalism that their contributions were immense in the struggle, they did not bother about their studies & careers and fought bravely for the freedom.

- 1) Students' proceeded in batches in all directions to disrupt the government buildings and offices particularly at Dadar and Matunga on August 10, 1942; especially the students of Elphinstone, Wilson, Grant Medical, Ruia and Khalsa Colleges were in the vanguard and they widened the scope of revolution to whole new level. These activities were so intense that the government had to curfew North Bombay also(Chaudhari, 1996)(Intelligence Report of CP, 1942).

- 2) Various students' committee (Students' Action Committee, National Students' Union, North Bombay Students' Union) took the 'do or die' mood leading to closure of colleges till August 19.
- 3) Being directionless and leader as own, their attendance was meager in colleges as they went on rampage by destroying government machinery 'symbolically', ransacking Dadar Station, were involved in petty instances like molesting pedestrians in western dress, burned hats and ties. Their attack was selective & symbolic yet it was intense.
- 4) They also ransacked Oval Maidan, entered into Asiatic Building and induced the clerks to strike and took the procession at Churchgate Station under the leadership of V.N. Kamath, G.G. Parikh, J.K.Shah, L.H. Thakkar and G.M. Umravanshi(Chaudhari, 1996)(Intelligence Report of CP, 1942)
- 5) Students of Elphinstone hoisted the Congress flag on the college premises and declared freedom. With this the police went wild and under the threat asked Principal to suspend the activists.
- 6) During the first phase, labour area in Bombay City became the most important area for students as it was in conflict with the Congress and pro-war Communists. They created a sustained urban turmoil and wild street warfare was used (stones, bottles, bullets and tear gas)(Chaudhari, 1996)(Hutchins, 1971)
- 7) College students' in collaboration with Rashtriya Girni Kamgar Sangh campaigned door to door and persuaded workers to abstain from work to immobilize the government(Chaudhari, 1996)(Bombay Congress Bulletin, 1942)
- 8) Students' rebellion continued, Governor Roger Lumley gave strict warning with dire consequence to absentees from colleges by striking off their names to contain students to prevail peace. In response, students decided to protest strike. Situation at Wilson and Elphinstone was charged with angry protest.(Chaudhari, 1996)(Intelligence Report of CP, 1942).
- 9) Students' of prestigious Victoria Jubilee Technical Institute took their contribution and patriotism deeply as only 15 students out of 212 appeared for final examinations.(Chaudhari, 1996)(Bombay Chronicle, 1942)
- 10) Many students gained sense of unity and power and started engaging in sabotaging activities such as placing bombs in cinema houses, cafes (mostly visited by Europeans),

picketing Stock Exchange when the colleges reopened after Diwali vacations on November 3.(Chaudhari, 1996)(Intelligence Report of CP, 1942)

- 11) Boys and Girls from eminent and elite class too participated in the struggle. Girls from eminent families were more active. On September 17, they entered Sydenham College. Moreover, they also entered Sir J.J. School of Art and stopped its working. Students of Wilson went towards Secretariat. The daughter of Amritlal Sheth, an eminent journalist and editor of *Janam bhoomi* was also among the activists at Elphinstone College.(Chaudhari, 1996)(Intelligence Report of CP, 1942)
- 12) Students of Banaras Hindu University raised slogans of '*Thana jalao*', '*station phoonk do*', '*angrez bhaggaya*' in an attempt to spread the message of Quit India in the villages.
- 13) Not just college students' even school students took equivalent part in the movement. Over 300 girl students picketed the General Education Institute's High School for Girls and Chhabildas High School at Dadar. Boys from King George High School were also on the path of war. They worked with Desh Sevikas Sang.(Chaudhari, 1996)

Professors and Teachers Role in Students' contribution in the struggle to freedom

Many professors and teachers also helped the students' in their task of movement. Professors Radhey Sham Sharma, Dr. K.N. Gairola, U.S. Asrani and Mukat Behari Lal of Benaras Hindu University were asked to lead the students by ceasing the functioning of the university.(Chaudhari, 1996)(Intelligence Report from Benaras, 1942).

Even the most eminent inspirator Vice-Chancellor Dr. S. Radhakrishnan during his lecture shared the news of arrest of Mahatma Gandhi resulting in closure of BHU and declared as free Indian soil.

Allahabad University Vice-Chancellor, Pandit Amarnath Jha, Rajaram Shastri, Professor from Kashi Vidyepeeth and Rabindranath Tagore of Shantiniketan guided and encouraged students to participate in the movement. (Chaudhari, 1996)(C.I.O. Clacutta's Report, 1942)

Exemplary and Remarkable Activities of students'

They not only indulged in symbolically destroying the government offices but were also involved in constructive activities. Even in the days of trouble, students' of G.S. Medical College and K.E.M. Hospital reached the shooting areas (Dadar, Shivaji Park, Matunga, Parel and Lalbaug) and treat the wounded including policemen and sent them in ambulances to the hospital for the treatment. They even undertook the expenses for first aid assistance by collecting it among themselves and took up the duties of nurses to relieve them heavy work. (Chaudhari, 1996)(Jivaraj Mehta's Letter to Editor of the Bombay Sentinel, 1943).

Students' of three medical colleges namely Grant Medical, G.S. Medical and National Medical College and other colleges and High Schools also rendered their exemplary services to the bereaved families of freedom fighters, wounded volunteers and the sick.(Chaudhari, 1996)(Bombay Congress Bulletin, 1942)

Their greatest contribution was also in dissemination of new and revolutionary bulletins, thus, becoming the efficient courier system. Bulletin centers at Girgaum, Chikhawadi, Prospect Chambers, Dadar and Matunga had student volunteers who worked day and night.(Chaudhari, 1996)(Home Poll. (I), 1942). Batuk Desai and P.T. Sanghvi were bulletin organizers. Haji Javer Gilani was secret reporter of *Janambhoomi*. Rohit Dave, a private tutor. P.M. Bhagwati, fellow of Elphinstone College was the pamphleteer.(Chaudhari, 1996)(Intelligence Report of CP, 1942).

Consequences of uprising for the Students'

Government tried its best to contain the movement by adopting Nazi methods designed to terrorize people.

With the above mentioned detailed struggle and the activities of students', they also faced the brunt of the protest/ movement. Inhumane methods (merciless beatings, pulling of hairs) were adopted to punish the students by the Police and military.

These patriotic students' were tried as 'enemy agents' under Criminal Law Amendment Act. Shamaldas J. Parikh, Kantilal L. Dalal and Lalitchandra L. Mehta of Sydenham College were prosecuted under black Act. Even girl students were not spared. Ten girl students and a boy

of Elphinstone College were also prosecuted under the same Act for picketing.(Chaudhari, 1996)(Intelligence Report of C.P., 1942).

The Result: Freedom ‘*strikes at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947*’ but with the byproduct of Partition

India’s struggle to freedom bore fruit as many organizations toiled towards the freedom of India including Congress but they failed in welding the nation as ‘one’ and also failed to integrate the Muslims into this nation, that is, Independence at the cost of ‘Partition’. But why the Congress which till August 15, 1947 believed in one nation, accepted the division of the country still remains in dark and the question, unanswerable. The popular interpreted belief prevailed as the lust of quick and easy power, betrayed the people of India.

Conclusion

The success of the India’s struggle to freedom can only be contributed to the youth and the common man of India (farmers, teachers, students), all walks of life who united together with nationalism running in their blood and fervor towards a common goal, the ever so glorious path of freedom,- Freedom. The result of years of struggle of people of India made British realize that now they can no longer hold this nation as ‘*colony*’ and internal affairs also could not be handled. It was the nationalist movement which ultimately uprooted the imperialist hegemony.

The movement led to rise of many leaders and the emergence of new generation filled the vacuum and took the campaign forward towards its goal of freedom.

Students’ of colleges and schools indeed showed their patriotism, dedication and valour in the need of the hour, when the nation truly required services, for which they even sacrificed their studies and career and put their lives in the service of nation towards the struggle for freedom. They organized umpteen organizations and inspired many people to concerted action in thousands. They did indulge in rampage but did not take lives or kill anybody in their struggle.(Chaudhari, 1996)(Bombay Congress Bulletin, 1942)

In retrospect, a sophisticated student leadership had emerged in the *Bombay City* over the period of 14 years prior to the Movement. Congressmen had done the spadework towards

politicization of the student community and it indeed proved to be a significant factor in the success of Quit India Movement.(Chaudhari, 1996)(Bombay Chronicle, 1942).

The poetic words of Nehru declared the dream of many youths and common man of ‘free India’:-“The glorious struggle, hard-fought, hard won, in which many fell martyrs and countless others made sacrifices, dreaming of the day India would be free. The people of India saw that too, and on 15 August- despite the sorrow in the hearts for the division of their land danced in the streets with abandon and joy”.

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