

MODERN ODISHA

The Quit India Movement in Odisha

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • July 19, 2017 • 9 min read

The British Government's dragging India into the World War II war scenario, combined with the expectation of Japan's capture of India, compelled Gandhiji to declare the Quit India movement in India. The AICC adopted the Quit India Resolution in Bombay on 8 August 1942, dealing a final blow to British imperialism. This movement, dubbed the August Revolution, was the culmination of Gandhi's struggle for Indian independence and its manifestations in Odisha. However, the following day, all of the Congress leaders from across the country were arrested. Among Odisha's leaders, only H. K. Mahtab was arrested in Bombay and sent to the Ahmadnagar fort jail. The British Government declared all Congress institutions in the Province to be unlawful in its gazette notifications Nos. 137 and 147 dated 9 August. By 10 August 1942, the Police had seized all Congress offices in the province. The police arrested all prominent Congress workers at the district level. The mass arrest of nationalist leaders in Odisha backfired in the form of public outrage.

The British Government's strategy of repressing the uprising through tight control of urban areas failed miserably. The movement's leadership has now shifted to the younger generation of students. Following these arrests, the situation appeared to be normal and quiet. However, within two weeks, reports of revolutionary activity began to circulate from remote villages in Odisha where the police were unwilling to address the law and order problem. Ravenshaw College students organised meetings, processions, and boycotted classes in support of Mahatma Gandhi's call. As a form of protest against their leaders' arrest, they resolved to break the law and became violent, torching government buildings and assaulting officers. They even engaged in harmful activities such as defacing railway tracks and severing telegraph lines.

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Quit India movement in Koraput district

Despite the lack of leaders, spontaneous popular outbursts occurred in a number of locations. The anti-war propaganda already being waged by Congressmen and Socialists, as well as the suffering of the populace as a result of the war, had laid the groundwork for a spontaneous outburst of the masses, even among the hill tribes of the Koraput district. Civil Disobedience took on a more serious tone toward the end of August 1942. In remote villages of Odisha, believing that the Government machinery had collapsed, the populace defied the authorities. Without the guidance of their imprisoned leaders, they engaged in violent behaviour. They attacked and burned several government institutions, including post offices, revenue offices, P.W.D. bungalows, and police stations. In some locations, telegraph lines were severed.

The Quit India movement assumed the form of a mass uprising in the backward district of Koraput, which was primarily populated by Adivasis. The Adivasis became so enraged with the British authorities that they threatened to demolish all of the district's government institutions. With this in mind, the British government put an end to the movement by arresting its leaders. Despite the fact that the movement was initiated by two boys in Jeypore. On 13 August 1942, these two boys, carrying Congress flags, preached the message of revolution. It was followed by hartals and campaigns against tax evasion. Congress workers organised large gatherings in various important locations throughout the Koraput district on 16 August 1942, and several workers were arrested. On the same day, a mob of 1,000 people stormed a taluka office. The police used lathi charges to disperse the violent mob. Meanwhile, Congress workers began picketing in front of excise shops and shops selling foreign goods.

Role of Laxman Naik

The mob set fire to several records at the Lakshmipur police station. During the Quit India Movement, Laxman Naik, an ordinary illiterate four-anna member of the UPCC, demonstrated supreme heroism in the Koraput district. He could mobilise public opinion in

favour of the INC and against the British Government and its exploitation by virtue of his leadership qualities. In 1936, he was arrested for organising a no-tax campaign in the Koraput district's Mathili area. Additionally, he was arrested twice and sentenced to nine months rigorous imprisonment for his involvement in the 1940-1941 Individual Civil Disobedience. On 31 July 1942, he attended a meeting of Congress workers in Jeypore, where instructions regarding the impending Quit India Movement were issued.

Laxman Naik assembled a 200-strong army armed with saplings, cudgels, and lathis to fight the British Government. On 21 August 1942, Laxman's followers dressed in Khadar and carrying Congress flags and Gandhi's portrait marched through the dense jungle, destroying liquor stores and attacking the Mathili police station. The violent mob disregarded the police's caution and assaulted them. This attack resulted in the injury of several police officers. The police officers opened fire on the mob, killing four people and injuring four more. Laxman Naik sustained personal injuries in this incident. He was apprehended and transferred to Berhampur jail, where he was executed on 29 March 1943 on the false charge of murdering forest guard Ramaya. He was not only a revolutionary, but also an active member of Congress.

He had built a road, a bridge, and a school in his neighbourhood with the assistance of his followers. The situation in the Peppadahandi area of the Nawarangpur Taluk deteriorated in the final week of August 1942. On 24 August 1942, a violent mob of four to five thousand people marched towards the Peppadahandi police station. The police requested that the mob disperse. However, the mob attacked the police station in Peppadahandi. A subedar and a constable sustained minor injuries. The police opened fire, killing 12 people and injuring 14, including three who died in the hospital.

In the Cuttack district

Following the arrest of the leaders, the movement was continued in the Cuttack district by students from Ravenshaw College and other educational institutions. On 15 August 1942, approximately 200 Ravenshaw College students set fire to the office building. Surajmal Saha

and Bibhudendra Mishra, two student leaders, were arrested and taken to the Berhampur Jail. The UPCC workers pasted posters throughout the city, urging government officials to resign and citizens to cease taxation and engage in various revolutionary activities. Several prominent citizens, including town lawyers, organised meetings in Cuttack during which resolutions condemning the Government's repressive measures and demanding the release of national leaders were passed. In some locations, ordinary men became violent and engaged in revolutionary activities such as arson and looting.

Quit India movement in Cuttack's Jajpur subdivision

The majority of revolutionary activities were reported in Cuttack district's Jajpur subdivision. In August 1942, a revolutionary mob in Jajpur set fire to 26 police uniforms, six canal revenue offices, four post offices, five excisable articles, six zamindari Kutcheries, and four P.W.D. bungalows. The mob began torching various government buildings and destroying embankments, canals, and telegraph lines throughout Jajpur. In Binjharpur, a mob attacked police officers as they escorted some prisoners. After police fired, the mob dispersed. In some villages, young men formed defence associations to oppose police oppression. On 27 August 1942, a mob of 10,000 people in Jajpur town marched towards the police station and S.D.O.'s office. The armed forces dispersed the mob by dropping dynamites among the crowd.

Quit India movement in Balasore district

The most severe police oppression occurred in the Balasore district. Workers from the Congress travelled to remote villages to organise revolutionary activities among the populace. Students walked out of schools and colleges and staged a sit-in at various locations throughout Balasore. The Balasore Zilla School was closed; hartals were held in a number of markets; and picketing took place in front of the Balasore courts and government offices. The students distributed a pamphlet to the public urging them to attend the district's Congress programme. The Congress workers urged the populace through the pamphlet to plunder salt stocks, to obstruct Government servants by withholding

information, to refrain from allowing domestic servants to work in the homes of Government servants, to refrain from providing any boat, motor, or other mode of conveyance to Government servants, and to compel merchants to refrain from supplying food to Government servants.

The police and the violent mob clashed in several locations throughout the Balasore district. On 17 August 1942, a mob of approximately 5,000 armed men invaded the police station in Bhandaripokhari village, injuring police officials, smashing furniture and tearing up records. Additionally, the crowd set fire to the post office, demolished a wooden bridge, and severed telegraph lines in various locations. To punish the populace, the British Government imposed a collective fine of Rs. 6,000/- on the affected area's twelve surrounding villages. The police also arrested two of the uprising's leaders—Jagannath Das and Dwarakanath Das, both of whom were Congress Members of Parliament. According to Balasore Six people were killed and five others were injured in a clash between the police and the mob on 21 September 1942 in Dhamnagar.

At Khairadihi, there has been violence.

On 28 September 1942, another altercation between police and civilians occurred in the village of Khairadihi, which is located beneath the Khaira police station. Two people were killed and one was injured as a result of the police shooting.

At Eram, police oppression

At Eram in Basudevpur, the Quit India movement reached a fever pitch. This village witnessed the most heinous act of police oppression. This location had developed into a significant hub of congressional activity in the district. On 28 September 1942, a group of people gathered in a public space (Melan Padia) and resolved not to pay taxes. As a result, the police arrived in Eram village to apprehend several leaders. When the police arrived, the crowd began blowing the conch, and about 5,000 people armed with lathis gathered. The police requested that the mob disperse. However, rather than dispersing, they attacked the police. The gathering place had a narrow exit from the field. The D.S.P. secured the exit

point and issued an evening firing order. This resulted in the death of 26 people and the injury of 54 others. However, an unofficial estimate indicates that 35 people were killed and 107 were injured. The Eram tragedy is comparable to the Punjab's Jallianwallabagh massacre. Eram has been known as "Rakta Tirtha Eram" since that day. Following the police oppression, the Congress Socialist leaders of Odisha formed an underground organisation to continue the civil disobedience movement.

In Odisha, the Quit India Movement was a mass-based and widespread movement. It received overwhelming support in towns, villages, Adivasi communities, and even princely states. It had developed into a militant, and in many cases violent, mass upsurge in certain areas such as Papadahandi and Mathili (Koraput district), Nimapada (Puri district), Bhandaripokhari, Dhamnagar, Khaira, and Eram (Balasore district), and Kaipara (Cuttack district), among others. Due to the arrest and imprisonment of top Congress leaders immediately following the passage of the Quit India resolution, the masses resorted to their own brand of violent assertion. The populace attacked colonial government symbols such as post offices, revenue offices, police stations, dak bung lows, and telephone lines, as well as constables, chowkidars, and peons who resisted the attacks. Not only was the Quit India Movement anti-colonial, but also anti-feudal. In various areas of Odisha, people attacked zamindars' kutcheries in Kalkala, Darpan, Madhupur, and Kanika, stole paddy from paddy owners' stores, and set fire to money lenders' accounts.

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