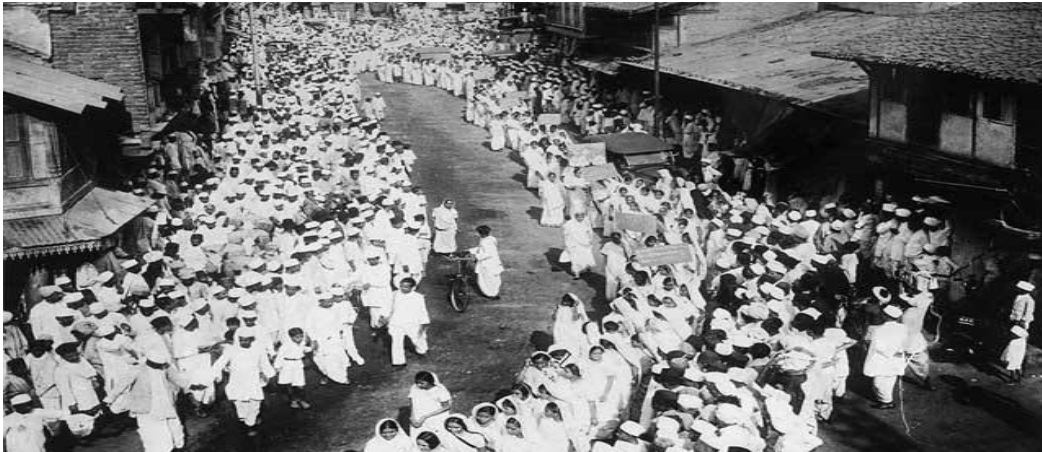


August Kranti – An Insight into Civility



*Dr. John Chelladurai**

“Quit India” resolution of 8th August, 1942, marked a decisive moment in the history of India’s freedom struggle. Gandhiji found the tenet of Truth and nonviolence put to most severe test.

It was world war. The unrelenting colonial power bestriding on India; Axis forces are threatening to invade our land. In the midst, the freedom fighters were contemplating up on a humane methodology, beyond killing, destruction and betrayal to set all the wrongs right. And they proved them right coming out victorious, and gave humanity a unique civilizational learning.

Axis forces decimated the British and the Allies so thoroughly in the East Asian theatres and marched close to Indian border. There was a wide spread fear that Japan would any time invade India. Axis’ interest in Indian Territory was primarily due to the British presence here. In the absence of the British, it was believed, India would have been of least interest to Axis forces.

The Mission led by Sir Stafford Cripps in the early 1942 had offered what Gandhi quipped as a ‘post dated cheque on a bank largely failing’. The sole purpose of Cripps Mission was to convince India to support the British war by supplying the wherewithal to their army, soldiers in particular.



Stafford Cripps with Mahatma Gandhi on the steps of Birla House, Delhi, during his mission to India, 22 March 1942

The Dominion status it promised India in return after the war was quite vague and without a definite time frame. Indian Leaders felt deceived when the Mission announced that the British would hold complete control over Indian affairs in the mean time.

This created a political urgency. It was essentially a British war. They were turning India into a battle field using people as cannon fodder in a mission they had been only losing. and appeared to let us doom in the same way they did in the East. Trekking with the British anymore would be allowing ourselves to be dragged into a war in which we had no business to do, and siding with a party that was bound to sink and drown us along with. To top it all, our solidarity and sacrifices would be rewarded with the resumption of colonial subjugation.

We could neither remain quiet for a moment. Even if we did not cooperate but stayed away from the war, we'd have ended up being a mute witness to the fall of India at the defeat of the Britain in the hands of the fascist forces.

The compulsive situation demanded us to act. The national leaders chose to defend nation's honor on their own; let the destiny of the nation be decided by our merit or the lack of it, and not by the despairing British.

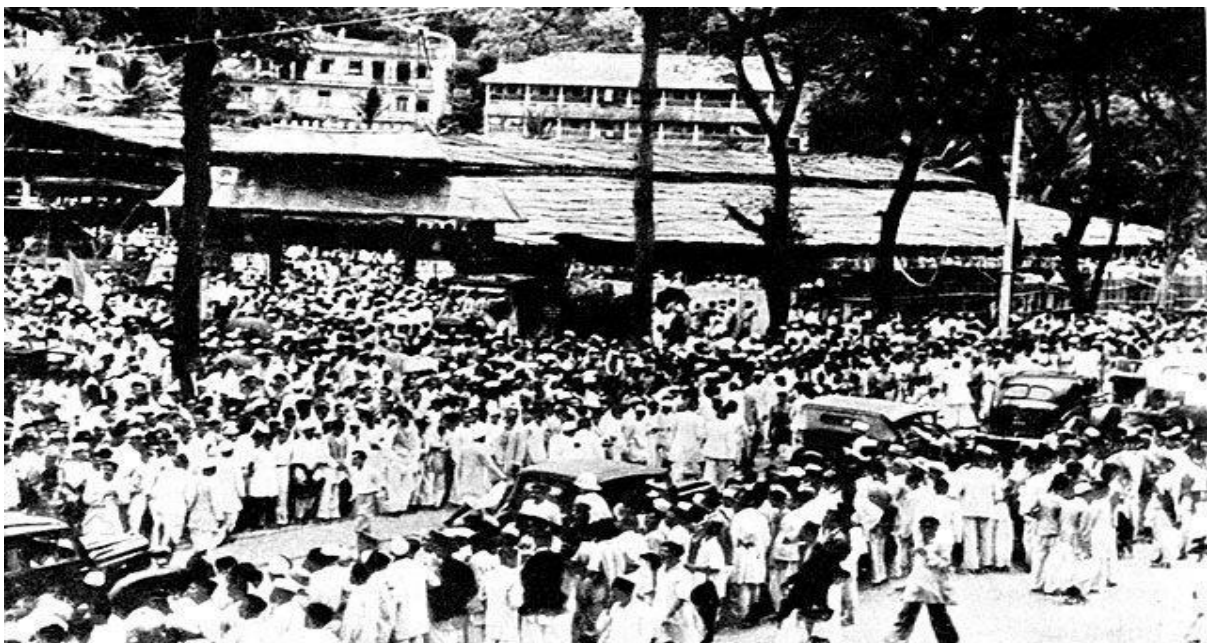
They called the British to 'Quit India', not for the sake of independence, but to extricate us from the perilous situation the British had led us into. We ought to tear away the British mask stuck on the face of India upon which the fascist forces are raring to fire.

The national leaders and Gandhiji in particular had moral dilemma. It was part of Satyagraha ethics not to attack the opponent at their distress; it amounts to be a betrayal of the tenet of Truth. Whereas, in 1942, the British forced us into a pyrrhic situation, in which supporting the British is tantamount to siding with violence only to our own demise. The question before us was, whether we should enter into war, if at all yes, why not on our own terms.

There was another dilemma; whether we could wage the whole war without our people turning violent. The explosive situation, Gandhi apprehended, would lead to widespread violence, if he called for mass satyagraha.

The year before, in 1941, when the negotiations failed, he took recourse to his avowed means and declared that the fight would be waged by only those who were nonviolent to the core. And he called it Individual Satyagraha. And the Satyagraha would be decisive, he declared. Thousands of freedom fighters were put behind bars. However they were all released in a couple of months, as a gesture of goodwill by the British war cabinet, towards renegotiating war collaboration.

Post Cripps Mission, the situation was fast deteriorating that Gandhiji even reconciled to waging satyagraha against the forces even if it means few go astray on the way.



Thus out of that deep frustration was born the “Quit India” cry, at the All India Congress session on August 08, 1942 in Bombay. In his resolute speech from the Gowalia Tank Maidan, he called it a mission to ‘do or die’ with the emphasis on the ‘do’.

Even then, Gandhiji was particular on his position vis a vis the fascist. He did not want the people out of sheer bitterness and frustration to disgrace themselves by welcoming the Japanese invaders. It was for him a moral issue—an act of faith. Come what may, India must not lose her soul.

Gandhiji and over a hundred thousand freedom fighters were arrested within a few days. With the call for ‘do or die’, it was reported, Gandhi told his compatriots, he would go on fast until death, if put behind bars. Having heard this, Vinobha who too was arrested started fasting. He told his fellow inmates, ‘Ram commanded, Hanuman complied’. Gandhiji had to send an emissary to end Vinoba’s fasting with a promise he would not fast himself. The struggle was fortified with iron will yet humane.

World opinion in India's favor started mounting. The US President Franklin D Roosevelt pressured Churchill to give in to Indian demand. Churchill used his trump card. 'I would resign than concede to India'.

In Pyarelal Nayar's words, *"in less than five years the seditious slogan of August, 1942, became the official programme of action of the British Government, and before long even "Quit India" was outmoded and gave place to 'Quit Asia' "*.

Thus Quit India movement gave India freedom and to the world a nonviolent method that works even in a dire situation such as the one India was placed in 1942.

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