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## UNIT 11 GANDHI AND THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

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### Structure

- 11.1 Introduction
  - Aims and Objectives
- 11.2 The Impact of the World War II
- 11.3 Indian National Movement
- 11.4 The Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan
- 11.5 Quit India Movement
  - 11.5.1 Consequences of the Quit India Movement
- 11.6 Gandhi and the Quit India Movement
- 11.7 Summary
- 11.8 Terminal Questions

### Suggested Readings

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## 11.1 INTRODUCTION

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The Quit India movement in India in 1942 cannot be understood without a basic understanding of the impact of the Second World War. Developments during the war not only influenced Britain and India but also the relationship between the colonial powers and their subject people throughout the world. It is also important to keep in mind the evolution of the Indian national movement up to the outbreak of the war in 1939 and the anti-colonial upheaval in 1942. Finally, since the focus of this course is on the role of Gandhi and his thought, the political ideals and practice of Mahatma Gandhi as the leader of the national movement need to be looked at closely.

### Aims and Objectives

After reading this unit, you would be able to:

- Understand the impact of World War II on India
- The course of Indian National Movement
- Examine the developments that led to the Quit India Movement.

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## 11.2 THE IMPACT OF THE WORLD WAR II

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The Second World War was an event that many commentators had been predicting for sometime before the outbreak of hostilities. Nevertheless, the scale of the German and Japanese victories and the rapidity with which the Axis powers expanded was not anticipated by most observers. The War affected the former imperial powers in that Britain became dependent on the financial and military support of the USA and faced severe economic hardships. Its exports virtually disappeared and its debts mounted. It

was apparent that the world would be a very different place even if Britain and its allies were to win the war. Eventually the war would compel Britain to loosen its grip on South Asia and change its attitude towards the African and Asian colonies; but the British political leadership, specially the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, was unwilling to accept the 'dismemberment' of the British Empire. It was Clement Attlee who presided over the dismemberment of Empire in India. Churchill did his utmost to defend Britain and preserve the Empire and by all accounts scuttled efforts in 1942 to create a National government in India that would be willing to participate in the war on Britain's behalf (R.J. Moore). The war was transforming the economic and political relationship between Britain and India but by 1942 many of these changes had not occurred and political decision makers could not or would not accept the changes that had happened.

When the war ended in 1945, Britain had been reduced to the status of a second rate power although it still held sway over large parts of the world. It was a power in decline and needed the support of the USA in the Cold War era that began a few years after the defeat of the Axis powers. It owed huge sums of money to the USA and also to India in the form of sterling balances. These were sums of money that Britain owed to India for the raw materials and finished goods the British government in India bought during the war years. The rise of the USA as creditor and the world's most productive economy meant that Britain would be unable to play the role in the colonial world that it had during the interwar period. The transformation of Britain also took place owing to the churning of society that occurred because of the war. Full employment and economic welfare became more important objectives of policy than the preservation of the Empire (Floud and Johnson). The Labour party victory at the end of the war in that sense made the final decision to withdraw from India easier although Labour's anti-imperialism was always faint-hearted (P.S. Gupta, Bayly and Harper). The victory of Labour, inspite of the significant role of the Conservative Winston Churchill during the war, indicated the changing political climate of Britain. The war changed the expectations of voters and the fortunes of political parties. It is not surprising that it had a significant impact on the nature of Indian nationalism and the freedom struggle.

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### **11.3 INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT**

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The Indian National Congress had opposed the Government of India Act of 1935 that had introduced certain unacceptable features while granting Provincial autonomy with considerable expansion of the electorate. The object of the British government was to grant considerable freedom at the provincial level while retaining substantial power at the level of the Central government; the central government intended to have substantial powers over finance and the distribution of resources. There was a proposal for an All India Federation that would bring together the representatives of the Princely States of India and of British India into a single assembly that would represent the British Indian Empire as a whole. The representatives of Indian India were to be chosen by the Princely States and they were not to be coerced into joining the Federation. Only if a substantial number of Princely states voluntarily accepted federation would the Union with British India take place (Robin Jeffrey, Ian Copland). By the time the war broke out in 1939 this process had not made much headway. As a result of the dramatic changes that came about due to the war, this plan of constitutional development was abandoned altogether.

It was alleged by militant nationalists and the left wing nationalists that the conservative and moderate wing of the Congress was willing to accept the idea of an Indian

Federation despite the fact that the representatives of Princely States were to be chosen by the Princes rather than the people of the state. On the other hand the struggle for freedom and representative government in the Indian states, led by the States' Peoples' Congress, intensified soon after the union of British India and Princely India was mooted in the early 1930s. The Congress opposed the Federation because the Princes were beholden to the British and were likely to side with them. If they chose their representatives they would be spokesmen of the rulers and not the common people. The left wing of Congress had numerous differences of opinion with the moderate sections within the Congress and the willingness to compromise with the British on this question became one of them. The conflict between Subhas Chandra Bose and the Gandhian leadership of the congress was partly because of this (Gowher Rizvi).

It was also connected to the Congress attitude towards the impending war. The militant nationalists thought that the outbreak of a war in Europe would provide Indian nationalists an opportunity to strike at the foundations of British rule in India. The left wing of the Congress had been arguing that Indians should refuse to support the British during the war and opposed participation in the war effort. Militant nationalists had been opposed to military recruitment in the years before the war began. The anti-war and anti-recruitment propaganda in the years before the war in the Punjab, which was a major source of manpower for the British Indian Army, worried the British government. Although there were very large numbers of nationalists who remained opposed to the war effort right through the war years, the British had little difficulty in finding recruits for their army. The educated unemployed were willing to join as officers and those who sought a secure pay and benefits joined as soldiers. It has been proposed that recruits came substantially from the non-martial groups partly because the increase in the demand and price of agricultural commodities from the Punjab made military service less attractive. There was also recruitment of more educated soldiers for the more specialised branches of the army. The British may have had reservations about the quality of the recruits that they got but there was no shortage of manpower during the war years despite the rise of nationalist feeling and the Quit India movement (Indivar Kamtekar).

Soon after the Second World War broke out the Congress ministries resigned from office in the Provinces where they had been in power for over two years since 1937. The ministries had not been consulted when the Viceroy pledged Indian support to Britain after the outbreak of war. The Congress did not wish to embarrass the British during the war although it refused to cooperate with the war effort. Gandhi supported the idea of individual satyagraha and not a mass struggle against the British. It was the rapidity of the Japanese advance towards India in 1942- the fall of Singapore, Malaya and then Burma that changed the Indian perceptions of the war. The Japanese victories shattered the myth about the might and invincibility of the British Empire. The fall of France in the summer of 1940 and the Battle of Britain did not have the same impact on Indian perceptions, but the early defeats of the British did create considerable ferment in political circles in the country. Revolutionary and militant nationalists thought that the predicament of Britain was an opportunity to end the British rule and this sentiment began to enter the calculations of Congress leaders as well.

The fall of the 'impregnable' naval base at Singapore and the Japanese advance towards Burma in early 1942, led to a serious bid by the USA to get Britain to negotiate with the Indian nationalists. President Roosevelt and Chiang Kai Shek of China urged Winston Churchill to win the support of Indian political parties to mobilise resources and

manpower more effectively against the Axis powers. In response Churchill did send Sir Stafford Cripps to India in March 1942 to negotiate with the Congress and the League. The Congress leaders demanded responsible government and the 'substance' of independence during the war. The control over the Ministry of Defence was one of the important points for the Congress (CWMG, Vol. LXXVI, pp. 28-29). The conservative Viceroy Lord Linlithgow was hostile to the idea of making concessions to the Congress during the war and he showed little interest in winning the support of the Congress. He collaborated with Winston Churchill in ensuring that the negotiations did not succeed (RJ Moore). The British officials in India felt relieved that the Congress ministries had resigned in late 1939 and did not have any desire to have them on board at the national level. The presence of the Congress at the centre would only hamper the war effort which was going ahead smoothly despite the ideological hostility of the Congress.

Gandhi was seriously disturbed by the military advance of the Japanese towards India. In April 1942 he argued that the British should "leave India now in an orderly manner and not run the risk that they did in Singapore and Malaya and Burma. Britain cannot defend India, much less herself on Indian soil with any strength. The best thing she can do is to leave India to her fate." (CWMG, Vol-LXXVI, pp.60-61). The distressed Indian refugees fleeing Burma and the scorched earth policies of the government in parts of eastern India upset Gandhi. The language of Gandhi during this period indicates his immense anxiety about the implications of the Japanese advance for the people of India. Gandhi argued that the "British presence is the incentive for the Japanese attack. If the British wisely decided to withdraw and leave India to manage her own affairs in the best way she could, the Japanese would be bound to reconsider their plans." (CWMG, vol. LXXVI, pp. 67-68). He called the Cripps proposals a 'post-dated cheque on a crashing bank.'

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## 11.4 THE MUSLIM LEAGUE AND THE DEMAND FOR PAKISTAN

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The growth of communalism during the 1920s and 1930s was an important problem for the Congress' national leaders. For Gandhi, this was a major political issue as he was greatly concerned with Hindu-Muslim unity and communal harmony. The Khilafat movement had brought large numbers of Muslims in a common struggle with the Hindus against British rule and policies in India but this feat could not be repeated later. Muslims on the whole stayed away from the civil disobedience movement in many regions. The Congress rule in seven provinces enabled the Muslim League to claim that it was oppressing the Muslims and that the future of Indian Muslims in a country dominated by the Hindu Congress would be very bleak. In March 1940, the Muslim League passed a resolution demanding self-determination for the Muslim majority regions of the North West and East of India. It did not use the word Pakistan but the Lahore Resolution indicated the determination of the League to represent the Muslims of India and a refusal to accept a subordinate position to that of the Congress. The British welcomed the Lahore Resolution because it gave them a reason for rejecting the claim of the Congress to represent all Indians and their demand for independence. If important sections of Indian society were not satisfied with the Congress then the constitutional future of India could not be determined by the Congress alone.

The Congress leaders initially considered the Lahore resolution of the League as a bargaining counter and that the problem could be overcome. Gandhi was perturbed by the support for the demands of the Muslim League by the British government in India.

He believed that the British were deliberately promoting the ambitions of the Muslim League to promote their interests in India and that the communal problem would not be resolved as long as the British ruled India. The Congress had long blamed the British for a policy of divide and rule and the third party was always held responsible for promoting communal conflict and discord. The British endorsement of Jinnah's intransigent attitude meant that they would not let the Indians resolve the communal problem as long as they were the rulers. As the British lost their ability to even provide protection against external threats Gandhi became more upset. After the failure of the Cripps Mission in April 1942 Gandhi grew increasingly restive and his language reflected that. Finally, Gandhi and the Congress decided to launch the Quit India Movement. It was a rejection of British rule in India even if it was not a bid for power by the Congress in the middle of the war.

Many historians today do not believe that the League had asked for a separate country in March 1940. Yet few doubt that the Muslim community did not participate in the Quit India movement in any significant way. This could be attributed to the distrust of the Congress among many Muslims regardless of the differences between Muslims of different regions of India. The League's propaganda against the Congress ministries during the period 1937-39 also played a role in this process. Secondly, Muslim endorsement of the Civil disobedience movement was also limited and the fear of a Hindu dominated centre had grown after the British had introduced the idea of an All India Federation under the Government of India Act of 1935 (Ayesha Jalal, David Page). Finally, Muslim politicians as well as sections of the community feared that the Congress might use their political clout to force the British government to make concessions to them during the war. These three reasons could account for the poor participation of the Muslims of the subcontinent in the Quit India movement. Those who believe that the League was indeed demanding a separate state believe that this was a devious attempt by the Congress to wrench power from an embattled colonial power in order to bypass the League demand for a separate nation state. It has been noted that even during the Civil Disobedience movement, the boycott of foreign goods was not endorsed by Muslim shopkeepers in several towns of United Provinces and they resented Congress pressures to observe hartals and stop trade in imported cloth. Even the Harijan welfare programme was perceived as an attempt to consolidate the position of the Hindu community and weaken the position of the Muslim community (William Gould).

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## 11.5 QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

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The Quit India movement was different from the other two movements associated with Gandhian leadership of the Congress. The resolution was passed by Gandhi without the usual policy of slow escalation following the declaration to break the law in order to achieve political goals. The movement was a product of the steady disillusionment of Gandhi with British policies during 1942 and the gravity of the Japanese threat to the security of the country. Gandhi did not advocate violence but he gave a powerful slogan "Do or Die" that in the period of war and growing nationalist resentment was bound to have grave consequences. Gandhi believed in ahimsa but preferred violence to cowardice. The philosophical position of Gandhi can be debated but the launching of a mass movement during wartime was bound to involve violence both by the nationalists and the colonial rulers. Gandhi could not have been unaware of the consequences of his slogans and programme for domestic order and he declared that the British should quit India immediately even if it led to anarchy. Gandhi observed that the British withdrawal from India "may induce unity or it may lead to chaos. There is also the risk of another power

filling in the vacancy if it is there” (CWMG, Vol. LXXVI, p. 121). A revolutionary periodical from Tamluk, in Midnapur district of Bengal, claimed to have a message from Gandhi that although he believed in non-violence he could not condemn the violent resistance to the bestial repression by the government since it was “just like the violence of the mouse against the cat.” (Biplabi, 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1943, Greenough).

The scale of the mass movement, at least in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, was unprecedented. Even in other parts of the country the movement was marked by acts of violence, strikes, student protests and disruption of civic life. The Quit India movement did not have a strong agrarian dimension because the duration of the struggle was cut short by the massive repression that was unleashed by the colonial state. While the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements had involved the peasantry, both because of Congress initiative and that of the peasants themselves, this did not happen in 1942. It was more focused on nationalism and had less peasant participation (Gyan Pandey). The Government had been waiting for the Congress to launch the Quit India movement and had prepared itself to suppress the movement under draconian laws. Days after the Quit India resolution was passed on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1942, the majority of the front ranking Congress leaders were arrested throughout the country. The movement was therefore taken over by the younger and more militant nationalists both within and outside the Congress.

Militant students of Benares University and even schools played a significant role in this movement. While there were workers, students and middle class radicals involved in most parts of the country in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh the movement spread to the villages. Socialists like Jayaprakash Narayan played an important role in the Quit India movement in eastern UP and Bihar. Popular opinion in the region had been disturbed by the movement of wounded soldiers who passed through in trains. The fall of Burma and the end of remittances from that country had created much anxiety about the very survival of British rule. Rumours about the impending collapse of British rule led to the withdrawal of money from banks and post offices and the loss of respect for British authority. The Quit India movement in this region was marked by the pulling down of telegraph lines and the removal of fish plates and rails to disrupt the movement of trains. The ferment was higher than in the regions that were closer to the advancing Japanese armies (Kamtekar).

The existing millenarian tradition of protest in the Koraput region of Orissa combined with the exactions because of the war to bring the peasants and tribals into a struggle against the British during the Quit India movement. In Malkangiri the leadership of the local Congress activist Laxman Naiko linked local protest with the ideas of Gandhi Raj and Swaraj (Biswamoy Pati). In Midnapur in Bengal the Tamluk National Government was set up by the Congress inspired revolutionaries. The resistance continued unabated until 1944 (Greenough, Chakravarty). In many parts of Bengal, the worker, tribal and peasant movements picked up momentum by linking up with the Quit India movement. In Dinajpur, Birbhum and Bankura districts Rajbangshis, Santals, Oraons and Mundas participated in the struggle (Suranjan Das). The peasant movement in Bihar had become vibrant much earlier under leaders like Swami Sahajanand but it emerged in full force during the period 1942-43. Azad Dastas were created and they played a significant role during this period when large tracts went completely out of British control. Several divisions of the Indian army had to be deployed to suppress the rebellion in regions like Azamgarh (Vinita Damodaran, Hutchins).

The British government survived the Quit India movement because it had vast resources to suppress the movement. Although in the villages of eastern UP and Bihar, the British power seemed to be on its last legs, in 1942; this was an erroneous assessment. The Japanese offensive had bogged down in Burma and support from the United States had begun to play a critical role in World War II by this time. The American Navy had managed to secure a victory just about this time (Milan Hauner). Although the momentum of the Japanese advance had broken by mid 1942, the outcome of the war was still uncertain. The Quit India movement was launched because the leadership of the Congress and Gandhi in particular felt that there was a need to protect India from a Japanese invasion that was imminent. Gandhi argued that he wanted independence during the war "so that no Indian worth the name would then think of going over to the Japanese side." In an interview with foreign correspondents he said that independent India would have an interest in fighting the Japanese (CWMG, Vol-LXXVI, pp. 300, p. 298-303).

The Indian public opinion was growing increasingly hostile and restive and Gandhi's perceptions about British ineffectiveness were quite widely shared. The surrender of Indian forces in Singapore and the disorganised retreat from Burma affected Indian public opinion. Stories about the discrimination faced by Indians in the evacuation from Burma aroused anti-British sentiment. For the most part, scarce resources were used to protect European lives and interests and the majority of Indians had to fend for themselves. Gandhi told Horace Alexander that the British left "Burma and Malaya neither to God, nor to anarchy, but to the Japanese." He did not want the story to be repeated in India (Harijan, 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1942, CWMG, Vol-LXXVI, pp. 244-45). A whole host of resentments against the British led to a violent upheaval after the Quit India movement was launched but the fear of Japanese invasion was a primary factor in the decision to challenge British rule during the war.

The Quit India movement was launched at one of the worst moments of the Second World War in the East as far as the British were concerned. They were aware that a movement was to be launched and they took swift and decisive actions to suppress the movement. They tried to charge the Congress and Gandhi of harbouring sympathy for the Japanese and of trying to arrive at a separate agreement with them. An enquiry by Tottenham however could find no evidence of any direct link between the Congress and the Japanese or of fifth column activities. Gandhi had declared that there was no quarrel between the Indians and the Japanese but he had made no overtures for a separate peace. In fact he had declared that he would resist a Japanese invasion by non-violent means. In a letter to President Roosevelt of the USA, Gandhi had assured him that he had no objection if Allied troops were stationed in India to fight the Japanese aggression or in order to aid China but not for the maintenance of internal order. A treaty with a free Indian Government could be drawn up for this purpose (Letter of July 1, 1942, CWMG, Vol-LXXVI, pp. 264-265). A few days before the Quit India movement was launched, Gandhi observed, "We know that if India does not become free now the hidden discontent will burst forth into a welcome to the Japanese should they affect a landing. We feel that such an event would be a calamity of the first magnitude. We can avoid it if India gains her freedom" (Harijan, 2 August 1942, Pyarelal).

According to the British intelligence assessments there was a growing fear among the moderate Congressmen that their leadership of the national movement and the Congress party would be undermined if they failed to launch a movement against the British during the middle of the war. Gandhi had been reluctant to embarrass the British during the early stages of the Second World War but his attitude changed after the Japanese approached

the borders of India. The constant pressure from the left wing and militant nationalist groups also shaped Gandhian strategy during the late 1930s and it is likely it did so in 1942 as well. The fight for control of the Congress party during 1938-39 had led to the resignation of Subhas Chandra Bose as the Congress President and Gandhi had managed to retain control. The growing discontent among sections of the population and the frequent calls for a revolt against British rule at a time when its power had declined probably indirectly influenced Gandhi and the moderate leaders of the Congress. The broadcasts by Subhas Bose from exile in Germany and the creation of the first Indian National Army began to influence public opinion in India.

The launching of the Quit India movement brought different sections of the Congress together and represented a major effort to gain freedom. The August Kranti in 1942 became a major force unifying different sections of Indian nationalist opinion. Its value lay not in achieving independence during the war but in shaking the foundations of British power in India. It was a nationwide movement that established once again the credentials of the Congress party to represent a wide swathe of Indian opinion. The growing challenge from Jinnah's Muslim League and the need to find a solution to the communal problem increasingly made the ideological conflict within the Congress a less pressing political concern. The Quit India movement and the demand for Pakistan made the Left wing and militant challenge to the Gandhian leadership of the Congress a less significant issue.

The movement was more of an outcome of the failure of the Cripps Mission in March-April 1942 that changed the situation and led to the Quit India movement in August 1942. If the British government had offered India the assurance of independence after the war, as the United States of America had done in the case of the Philippines, the cooperation of the Indian National Congress during the war could have been possible. There was, of course, the view of the Muslim League to consider but substantial acceptance of the demands of the Congress for cooperation during the war could have led to the setting up of a National Government in 1942.

There was a section of Indian society that was cooperating with the British because of economic reasons because the British demand for commodities and manpower had opened up opportunities for employment and profit. While this was no guarantee of support to British power in India, it did not signify a total rejection of British power during the war. Farmers with a surplus to sell, traders and industrialists found it worth their while to cooperate and so the discontent in the country was not inexorably leading to a mass movement. While this trend was more pronounced in the Punjab, it was not confined exclusively to this region. While an outburst against the wartime hardships was probably inevitable and the military defeats of the British made some upheaval highly likely, the scale of the spontaneous outbursts would have been much less had the Congress decided to cooperate with the British during the war. It could have cooperated with Britain had it got an assurance of freedom after the war and the basis for an honourable cooperation with the British in April 1942 in the struggle against the Axis powers.

### **11.5.1 Consequences of the Quit India Movement**

The Quit India movement was the last of the great nationwide movements launched by the Congress and established the nationalist credentials of a whole range of leaders for years to come. This was not inevitable but as the demand for Pakistan gained momentum,

the communal question overshadowed the social question. The Congress became preoccupied with the question of partition rather than a mass struggle to promote a popular and secular national movement. The post-war British willingness to consider withdrawal from India also made another nation-wide struggle for independence unnecessary. The belief of the Congress leaders, including Gandhi, that the opinions and aspirations of the Muslim community ought to be respected, meant that a mass struggle that sought to challenge the right of the Muslim League to represent the Muslims of India would not be considered (Sucheta Mahajan). The post-war ferment and communitarian or communal polarisation probably ruled out such a movement.

The outbreak of popular protest- the Tebhaga movement in Bengal, the cross communal support for the Indian National Army officers put up for trial at the Red Fort, the discontent that led to the mutiny by the naval ratings at Bombay and Karachi and other stations in 1946- have been regarded as signs that indicate the possibility of a broad national movement cutting across communal lines. However, the mass support for the Pakistan movement, the killings during the Direct Action day in 1946 especially in Calcutta, followed by rioting in parts of East Bengal, Bihar and Punjab are indications of a contrary development (Ian Talbot, Suranjan Das). The support for communalism and Muslim separatism or nationalism was also quite evident in the postwar period. This movement could have been followed by another mass movement after the war had ended but this did not happen. It has acquired greater significance in India's freedom struggle because it was not followed by another mass movement against British rule.

The Quit India movement was a rejection of British rule in the middle of the war and the British suppressed it ruthlessly. Gandhi was imprisoned in the Aga Khan palace and the British were prepared to let him die rather than make concessions when he went on a fast during February-March 1943. It marked a low point in the relationship of the British rulers and Gandhi as well as Viceroy Linlithgow's and Prime Minister Churchill's distrust of and dislike for Gandhi. The British animosity towards the Congress and their support for the League led to the spread of communal propaganda during the period 1942-45. The imprisonment of most of the top Congress leaders ensured that the League was at complete freedom to propagate its views about Hindu domination and the rights of Muslims to live in autonomous zones or an undefined realm called Pakistan. The Quit India movement and the repression that followed enabled the League to mobilise Muslims. In Gandhi's view, the revolutionary violence of 1942 led to the communal violence of 1946 in Bihar. Referring to the role of the revolutionaries and socialists like Jayaprakash Narayan, Gandhi said, "If the Bihar masses had not had the lesson which they had at your hands in 1942, the excesses witnessed last year would never have occurred.... All violence inevitably tends to excess." (Discussion with Aruna Asaf Ali and Ashok Mehta, May 6, 1947, CWMG, Vol-LXXXVII, pp. 421-425).

Perhaps the August Kranti strengthened Muslim fears about the Congress attempt to bypass them and wrest concessions from the British. In that sense the Quit India movement weakened the capacity of the Congress to mobilise the masses on a secular nationalist programme. This can be overstated since the weakness of the Congress to mobilize the masses through the Muslim Mass contact programme arose from the inability of the Congress to overcome the influence of local magnates and defenders of the status quo during periods of mobilization (Gyan Pandey). If the Muslim anxiety about Hindu domination depended on vague feelings rather than the actual behaviour of the Congress, then even a National Government during the war might not have been able to create a

modus vivendi between the Congress and the League. Gandhi launched the Quit India movement to save India from Japanese occupation but it helped the League to expand its influence. It is arguable that regardless of what Gandhi and the Congress did during the war, the League could have mobilised Muslim opinion against a Hindu-dominated centre based on a unitary form of government in a country that had a permanent Hindu majority.

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## 11.6 GANDHI AND THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

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Gandhi was a firm believer in ahimsa and in the use of non-violent forms of protest and civil disobedience to achieve independence. This was an article of faith and also a strategy of struggle according to his closest supporters. Gandhi had defeated the challenge to his leadership from militant nationalists and a section of the Left within the Congress party in 1938-1939 but with the outbreak of war, the political equations had changed dramatically. While the All India Federation had been a feasible political scheme before the outbreak of war, it had become redundant by the time the Quit India movement was launched. The demand for Pakistan, which emerged in March 1940, itself was for some time overshadowed by the advance of Japanese armies towards India. The failure of the Cripps Mission has been attributed to various reasons but Gandhi's hostility is an important factor. It is unclear whether Gandhi would have been willing to accept a National Government during the war if he had not taken such a dim view of British rule in early 1942. Maybe the British policy of divide and rule- the encouragement to the Muslim League in spite of the inability to protect India from external invasion- added to Gandhi's anxiety about the need to break free from British domination.

Nevertheless it was his rejection of British offers in March-April 1942 that led to his growing hostility towards British rule in India. The demand for an Indian Defence Member in a Viceroy's Council or Indian control over defence during the war was not the only issue for Gandhi. It is unclear whether Gandhi's rejection of cooperation in the British war effort was due to his commitment to non-violence or had more to do with the fear of Japanese occupation of India than a moral rejection of Congress participation in war, with the futility of violent resistance to Japan and the intransigence of the British government than the rejection of Indian participation in a world war. His reluctance to disrupt the war effort until the summer of 1942 indicates that his attitude on this question was shaped far more decisively by the military tragedy facing India than any moral outrage at the thought of the willing cooperation of the Congress in a military conflict. He certainly did not denounce the negotiations over the question of the Indian control over defence during the discussions with Sir Stafford Cripps. The commitment of Gandhi to non-violence had led to the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation movement in 1922 after the violence of Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh. Yet Gandhi had resorted only to individual *Satyagraha* against the British Indian government's participation in the Second World War without consulting Indian opinion.

Finally, Gandhi rejected violence and war but he did not impose his views on the Congress party. Although Gandhi did not accept partition in principle, he did not denounce the Congress willingness to reluctantly accept the partition of the subcontinent. Gandhi was not just powerless in the face of cataclysmic changes; he also was against the imposition of views on people or the denial of the right to choose. He did not believe that the majority was right and said so quite categorically in *Hind Swaraj* in 1909. He did not have faith in the Westminster parliamentary democracy or in a simple notion of

the 'will' of the people. Yet he sought to persuade people to accept his point of view by setting an example and trying to arouse the conscience of the people (Parel, Dalton, Habib, Brown). When he was faced with rejection of his views within the Congress party or the national movement he would focus on social reforms or his constructive programme; he would sometime claim that he was not even a four anna member of the Congress; and he would argue that his search for truth was an ongoing one and that he was striving towards his goals.

Those who argue that Gandhi did not believe in absolute principles – and commend the anti-foundationalism of his ideas-must also concede that this poses problems for those who want to judge him exclusively in terms of satya and ahimsa or even sarvodaya. Ultimately, owing to the lack of very precise statements by Gandhi on a whole range of questions that present day scholars and philosophers ask, it is not possible to come to any definitive view about Gandhi's position on some vital matters. It is arguable that even in the case of those philosophers who write down their views in a systematic manner there are gaps and silences that confound scholars subsequently. If as Gandhi claimed he was trying to develop the science of satyagraha then it is an ongoing process and its greatest practitioner might not have had all the answers. Not only did Gandhi not claim to have all the answers he would not have liked people to think that he could supply them with appropriate answers. He observed, "I do not consider myself a Mahatma." [Speech at Prayer meeting Patna, March 7, 1947, CWMG, Vol-LXXXVII, pp. 51-53.] So the role of the satyagrahi in periods of war and communal polarisation will remain open to interpretation for some time to come; this is even truer for those who would like to fashion strategies for non-violent struggles for freedom in war and in peace.

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## 11.7 SUMMARY

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The Quit India Movement came at a time when the British supremacy was crumbling with the approach of Japanese forces towards the Indian sub-continent and the British's apparent inability to defend Indian territory. At the backdrop of the Second World War, the British found themselves losing grip over the Indian affairs but holding on to it firmly inspite of adverse situations. The League's demand for a separate state, the failure of Cripps' proposals, the Indian public unrest and Gandhi's own skepticism about the ability of the British to defend India-have all led towards the calling of the Quit India Movement. It is termed as the last great movement that awakened the masses to take up cudgels against the colonial rule.

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## 11.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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1. The Indian National Movement gained momentum during the World War II years. Substantiate.
2. Discuss at length the launching of the Quit Indian Movement.
3. Write short notes on:
  - a) The Impact of World War II on the Indian National Movement.
  - b) Consequences of the Quit India Movement.

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## SUGGESTED READINGS

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