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## Muslim Participation in the Quit India Movement of Birbhum District

Md. Golam Murshid

Research Scholar, Department of History, Aliah University, Kolkata, WB.

### Abstract

*The disappointment of Cripps Mission led Mahatma Gandhi to launch the historic Quit India Movement. The All India Congress Committee met at Bombay on 8th August 1942, and passed the Quit India Resolution under Maulana Azad. The Quit India Resolution was followed by the arrest of all the prominent Congress leaders throughout the country including Gandhi, who was interned at Pune while other members of the Congress working committee such as Maulana Azad, Dr. Syed Mohammad, Nehru, Sardar Patel, Narendradeo were put in the Ahmadnagar Fort. With banning and arrest of the Congress leaders, the masses indulged in violent activities. The Government unleashed a reign of terror. But they did not stop the violence. The Quit India Movement deviated from the principle of non-violence throughout India including Bengal resulting in large-scale violence, arson and disruptions. The participation of the people of the country was remarkable. People of all religions fought shoulder to shoulder. This movement soon gathered momentum in Bengal and spread across other districts including Birbhum, in which the Hindus and Muslims jointly took active part. The nationalist Muslims plunged themselves wholeheartedly into the Movement. They had taken Gandhiji's call 'Do or Die', as the guiding source for the movement. In this historic struggle, Hindus-Muslims did play a definite role, shared the responsibility of liberating India from the yokes of British imperialism which paved the way for the Independence of India.*

**Keywords: Birbhum, India, Quit, Movement, Muslims.**

The Quit India Movement or the August Movement was an important momentous in the history of India's Freedom Struggle. It was third and last major movement in the entire course of the India's freedom struggle which was launched under the leadership of Gandhiji. The Quit India movement saw the yearning of freedom flow through every Indian's blood, making it a massive movement of mass participation. During this movement, people throughout the country came together to uproot British imperialism. The year 1942 witnessed the full zenith of national political consciousness in India. In August, 1942 Gandhiji for the first time commanded that the British should immediately quit India. The genesis of Quit India Movement was because of the British Imperial Authorities stalwart decision on several parameters.

The year 1939 witnessed the beginning of the Second World War in Europe and brought new dimension in Indian politics.<sup>1</sup> England and France declared war on the

German Reich on September 3, 1939. India had no independent foreign policy and had to follow the one laid out by England. Lord Linlithgow, the then Governor General of India, declared India to be at war with Germany the same. The British authorities got India involved into the war without consulting the National Congress or the elected members of the Central legislature. In September, 1939 The working Committee said that the “declared wishes of the Indian people have been deliberately ignored by the British government” and while the committee unhesitatingly condemns the latest aggression of the Nazi Government in Germany against Poland the issue of war and peace for India must be decided by the Indian people. The Congress Working Committee also demanded from the government a clear declaration of its war objectives and a promise of independence for India. if these demands were accepted India would be ready to help the British government in her insecure time. However, the British Government rejected the demands of the Congress. The Congress Ministries resigned from the Central Legislature. In October 1940, Gandhiji gave call for a limited Satyagraha by a few selected individuals. It was “to carry on non – violently and openly anti war propaganda” and “to preach non – cooperation with the government in their war efforts”.<sup>2</sup> Vinoba Bhave was the first individual to accept Satyagraha. By 15<sup>th</sup> May 1941, More than 25,000 thousands satyagrahis had been jailed.<sup>3</sup> With fast speed the Japanese armies took over Singapore, Malaya and captured Rangoon and Mandalay which brought the war to the door of India. There was a great tension in the allied powers over the fortune of India. President Roosevelt of USA and Chiang Kai Shek of China put pressure on the British Government to some settlement with Indian leaders.<sup>4</sup> In this situation, W. Churchill, the British Prime Minister decided to pacify the Congress and people of India by sending Cripps’s Mission to in month of March of 1942. The proposal of Cripps failed to satisfy the Gandhi and the Congress who wanted complete transfer of power to Indian hands.

After lot of discussion, the Congress Working Committee was held at Wardha and passed a resolution on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1942, calling upon the British to withdraw from India.<sup>5</sup> The All India Congress Committee which held in Bombay on 7th and 8th August 1942, passed the historic Quit India resolution under Maulana Azad. The Quit India Resolution was followed by the arrest of all the prominent Congress leaders throughout the country including Gandhi, who was interned at Pune while other members of the Congress leaders we working committee such as Maulana Azad, Dr. Syed Mohammad, Nehru, Sardar Patel, Narendradeo were put in the Ahmadnagar Fort. As many as 148 Congress leaders were arrested and interned along with their followers.<sup>6</sup> With banning and arrest of the Congress leaders, the masses indulged in violent activities. The Government unleashed a reign of terror. Thousands of people – Hindus and also Muslims died by opened fire of police. But they did not stop the violence. All over the country, there were hartals and strikes in factories, schools and colleges and public demonstrations. The angered people took violence at many places in India. they attacked police stations, post offices, railway stations, etc. They burnt the Government buildings and destroyed military vehicles. Bengal was most affected in this respect. In many places of Bengal, the people got temporary control over

towns, citizens and villages. The Quit India Movement deviated from the principle of non-violence throughout India including Bengal resulting in large-scale violence, arson and disruptions. People of all religions fought shoulder to shoulder. This movement soon gathered momentum in Bengal and spread across other districts including Birbhum, in which the Hindus and Muslims jointly took active part. The nationalist Muslims plunged themselves whole-heartedly into the Movement. They had taken Gandhiji's call 'Do or Die', as the guiding source for the movement. Many patriotic Muslims leaders of Bengal in general and Birbhum in particular took part in the Do or Die movement. The contribution of Ajim Baksh, Sheikh Abdul, Allauddin Seikh, Ali Bux, Shaikh Suleman Musa Mia, Abul Hasim, Ramjan Ali Vadhu Sk, Abdul Sattar and Abdul Momin of Bengal was remarkable. From September onwards the gravity of the movement was being shifted to the countryside and the rural masses came into the vortex. Birbhum, Dinajpur and, then, Midnapore became the storm centres of vigorous mass upsurge. Civil administration completely collapsed in the Rampurhat sub-division of Birbhum district for some time.<sup>7</sup>

Birbhum is one of the important districts of Bengal. Birbhum had a long tradition to fight against the British imperialism. The momentum at which the Quit India Movement in the district was started did not far behind to the other districts of Bengal. The people of Birbhum district responded extremely wholeheartedly to the call of the historic struggle which had yawning impact in almost all the parts of the district.

Birbhum was the northern most district of the Burdwan Division. The district Birbhum is bounded on the north and west by the Santal Parganas and the Murshidabad district; on the east by the district of Murshidabad and Burdwan; and on the south by Burdwan, from which it is separated by the Ajay river. The principal town, which is also the administrative headquarters of the district is Suri which situated two miles south of the Mor (Mayourakshi) river.

In Birbhum, Quit India Movement started under the leadership of Lal Behari Singh on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1942.<sup>8</sup> He visited some parts of the district and appealed to the people to join in the historic struggle. The people took part in the movement with tremendous excitement, and in several cases they resorted to steps to counteract repression and torture and arrests unleashed upon them by police. On 16<sup>th</sup> August, the people of Birbhum observed complete hartal and the momentum of the movement greatly extended. Mr. Daud Sk of Bolpor took violent steps in the district.<sup>9</sup> He was an important patriotic leaders of Birbhum who actively participated in this historic movement. He was injured by the open fire of police when he led the Quit India Movement in Bolpor. Mr. Daud was also arrested and sent to jail for the active participation and led the movement in the section.

The British authorities began taking action against the people who took part in the movement and intensified the movement. Kalim Sharafi leading leader of Muslim Student league of the district was arrested in connection in the movement. On 28<sup>th</sup> August, he was arrested from Rajnagar and sentenced to jail for six months.<sup>10</sup> After

his release from jail he once again joined in anti-British activities. He organised a mass rally to protest against the British in some parts of the district. As a result he was again arrested by the police on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1942.<sup>11</sup>

The Quit India Movement spread all parts of the district and the people of Birbhum carried on the movement with great zeal. The 'Do or Die' message became the source of strength and sacrifice slogan for the movement. Jabbar Mia did play a significant role in the historic struggle. For the release of Gandhiji, Jabbar Mia and Panchkori Dasgupta led a rally from Ragunathganj. The people of Ragunathganj greatly responded in this rally. The Police lathi-charged the processions and as a result some of the participators were seriously injured. After lathi-charged many leaders were arrested including Jabbar Mia and Pacchkori Dasgupta. Both of them leaders were sentenced to jail for six months.<sup>12</sup>

The role of the students in the Quit India Movement was also remarkable. The students of Birbhum played foremost role in the movement. According to the Government Report The students of Birbhum played an important part in district. During the Quit India Movement Students from twelve institutions joined the movement. The railway station was ransacked by the students of Suri Vidyasagar College. On 28 August, some students cut off telegraph wires near at Chipai Railway station. They ransacked the rooms of the post office of Dubrajpur and damaged its properties. Mr. Tejrat Hossain was an important student's leader who took active part in the national movement with other students like Milan Bandhopadhyay, Prabhatkusum Ghose, Sardish Roy, Debobroto Bandhupadhyay Nepal Majumdar, Asok Mukhopadhyay, Binoy Banejee, Kalikrishna Mitra, Nresingha Sengupta Bipol Das.<sup>13</sup>

Abul Khayer was a prominent nationalist leader of Birbhum. On 29<sup>th</sup> August, the people of Birbhum gathered in Bolpur station and protest against the rice export from the district. The people Shouting the slogan "Do or Die" and "British! You Quit India" in the Bolpur railway compound. The police came to spot and used tear gases and fired on the crowd. Many people were died. Abul Khayer was one of the leaders who participated in the movement. In connection with the movement, he was arrested.<sup>14</sup> The following leaders of the district also arrested on the same day – Jatin Sinha, Sailaj Mitra, Sakti Roy, Bomkesh Roy, Protadut Mondal, Moni Ganguly, Ramapodo Dutta, Susen Mukherjee, Mamta Rao, Biswanath Rao, Baleshwar Bhakat, Durjoti Prasad, Ahdar Banerjee and so on.

At Bolpur, after the arrests of the local leaders, common people took the lead in the Quit India Movement. The people of Bolpur observed complete hartal on 29<sup>th</sup> August in 1942. Mrs. Allarakha Box also took part in the movement at Bolpur with the other nationalist leaders such as Tarapodo Roy, Bupendra Narayan, Tarapodo Ghosh, Jatindra Singh, Surendra Narayan Sen, Cherka Maji, Anil Chakraborty and carried on the movement in the district.<sup>15</sup>

The following Muslim leaders of the district did play a significant role during the historic struggle were – Khairul Basar, Shah Ahmad, Ali Mahmud, Mansur Habbullah, Dr. Maruf Hosain, Pir Muhammad, Abdul Majid, Khuda Nawaj, Muhammad Zafar, Muhammad Keraun, Muhammad Ismail.

The movement showed remarkable unity among the Hindus and Muslims. The Quit India Movement greatly affected the people of Birbhum. The whole area of Birbhum wholeheartedly responded to the call of Quit India Movement. It was the real mass movement with the participation of different sections of Indian society such as peasants, workers, students, teachers and women. In processions, meetings and jails people of all castes and communities worked together which weakened the caste separateness and accelerated the pace of social mobility and reform. The Quit India Movement demonstrated the willingness and ability of the masses to endure hardships and make sacrifices. In this historic struggle, Hindus-Muslims did play a definite role, shared the responsibility of liberating India from the yokes of British imperialism which paved the way for the Independence of India.

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