

When I recall the Quit India movement, I find the youth in me resurfacing," says Dr Madhavdas Thackersay.

"I was 22 years old on August 9, 1942, when I went to Gowalia Tank [now the August Kranti Maidan]. I was curious; I wanted to see what was going to happen as Gandhiji had called for the British to quit India."

"The ground was packed with thousands of people but, to my surprise, none of the big leaders were there. The crowd was beginning to get impatient, but there was still no sign of the senior Congress leaders. Suddenly, everyone started running helter-skelter. There was a *lathi* charge. I started running as well but I could not escape the police who hit me on my back."

That was 60 years ago. The blows to his back changed his life forever as Dr Thackersay felt the need to contribute to the freedom struggle and become more involved in the Congress party.

His tragedy, however, lay in the fact that neither he nor his friends who wanted to participate in the Quit India movement knew what to do. Unlike previous movements, this time Mahatma Gandhi had not laid down any clear guidelines as to what the people should do to fight the British.

Dr Thackersay's hands automatically spin the *charkha* to make *khadi* in keeping with the promise he had made to himself that he would only wear *khadi* all his life and would follow the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi.

"There was a slogan," he recalls, "Do or Die. I never understood what it meant. But I started going to different schools and colleges with my friends to tell the students that they should boycott all British institutions. I also started distributing pro-freedom pamphlets. I did that on my own because I felt it was the best way I could serve my country's cause."

Not far from Dr Thackersay's house lives Dr G G Parikh, who participated in the Quit India movement as a Congress volunteer. He was just 18 years old and a student at St Xavier's College. His life too changed after August 9, 1942; he vowed to be a political worker all his life and to fight for Independence.

"I learnt how to save my eyes when the police fired tear gas shells; my colleagues in the Congress told me to wet my handkerchief and apply it over my eyes," he recalls.

He had Communist leanings in his early teens, but felt betrayed after they decided to boycott the Quit India movement and support Great Britain during World War II. He was determined to get the British out of the country and started organising anti-British movements in his college and among the youth.

On August 12, 1942, he was arrested for carrying the flag of the Indian National Congress and distributing pamphlets exhorting the people to rise against the British government. "I was detained under the Defence of India rules because the police thought I was a big student leader. I was shifted to a temporary jail in Worli where 15 of us were put in a small room. I was kept there for 10 months."

It was in jail that he came in contact with many senior Congress leaders, who exposed him to different philosophies. Once, they shouted pro-freedom slogans in their small prison room. The beating that he received as punishment only strengthened his resolve to fight the British.

Aloo Dastur, president, Gandhi Samarak Nidhi and Mani Bhavan Gandhi Sangralay, who then lectured at Mumbai's Sophia College, says, "As I was walking towards the Maidan, I got a feeling that the British would not be able to hold on to their power in our country for long. Time proved us right; they had to quit India five years after the Quit India movement.

"It was the first time anyone who took part in the Independence struggle was on his own. There were no leaders, nor were there any directions given to the people. It was a self-driven movement." Dastur comes from a family with a strong Gandhian background. The atmosphere at home was full of national pride; her elder brother had been jailed several times because of his participation in the freedom struggle.

"Had we not launched the Quit India movement, we would have never got our freedom. Many people say its timing was not right, but I don't agree," she says. Like [M.V. Kamath](#), Dastur believes Gandhi and the other Congress leaders never anticipated they would be arrested before the launch of the Quit India movement. "Gandhiji left no instructions to the public and everyone was in quandary. Still, people took the movement in their hands and spread Gandhiji's message peacefully."

Dastur recalls how the Congress party launched Congress Radio on a special wavelength and how they would all wait eagerly to listen to the speeches and directions. "Ushaben Mehta (*the wellknown Gandhian*) used to speak on the radio; we would get news and instructions from her."

But the sparkle in their eyes fades when they review the situation today. All three freedom fighters are disillusioned because they feel the gora sahibs have been replaced by the brown sahibs. And India has gone from bad to worse.

"It is sad that Gandhiji's relevance is felt more in other countries than in India. Time and again, different political parties have tried to stop Gandhi's message from spreading but they could never succeed. Gandhiji's message will always be alive because truth and non-violence are everlasting," says Dastur.

"Nothing we dreamt of is visible today," says Dr Parikh. "In fact, I am sad to be alive today. I wish I had died much earlier. We were told there would be no poverty in India after freedom but poverty still exists. We were told the leaders would function as servants of people, but that has not happened either."

Adds Dr Thackersay, "No ruling chief minister or leading politician bothers to celebrate the anniversary of the Quit India movement. For many years, it is only us old people who celebrate this day and remember the martyrs. God alone knows what will happen after we die."