

The Second Front of the Indian Independence Movement:

Subhash Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army

By Anaya Sheth

Contents

Background.....	3
Aims.....	5
Actions.....	7
Failure.....	10
Significance for the Indian Independence Movement.....	12
Endnotes.....	21

Background

History is determined by a complex interplay of factors. Often, historical figures have attempted to change the course of history with revolutionary plans. However, plans rarely manifest as intended and frequently deviate from their initial objective. Yet, these events are influential, nonetheless. The failures of our present can have unintended yet significant consequences for the future. One such prominent example is the Indian National Army, which failed in its immediate objective to conquest the British Raj in World War Two, but the inadvertent effects of its failure ultimately contributed to India gaining Independence in 1947.

The Indian National Army (INA) was a military organisation, a belligerent force, that fought in World War Two on the side of the Axis Powers. It was conceptualised, organised and directed by the Japanese on the advent of the fall of Malaysia and Singapore in the World War Two campaigns of 1942. It comprised of British Indian Army prisoners of war captured in Malaya and Burma. Though the exact troop strength is unknown due to the destruction of records, available data approximates that peak membership reached 45,000 troops¹. Led by Indian politician, and fugitive, Subash Chandra Bose, the INA served as a second front for the Indian independence struggle, on the outside of India's frontiers.

In sharp contrast to Gandhi's non-violent 'Quit India' movement of 1942, the INA sought to attain complete independence through means of military battle, with the aid of

¹ Sundaram, Chandar S. "The Indian National Army: Towards a Balanced and Critical Appraisal." *Economic and Political Weekly* 50, no. 30 (2015): 21–24.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24481966?seq=3>.

foreign powers, specifically Japan. Through engaging in military infiltration, espionage and anti-British propaganda, the INA intended to work in favour of Axis victory, but with the interests of India's own future independence². Thus, INA is conceptualised as the second front of the Indian nationalist struggle, providing an external base for the independence movement. This essay aims to analyse the aims of the INA, their actions, the reasons for their ultimate failure with the support of historical evidence, both primary and secondary, and references to expert historiography. Most importantly, the essay will examine and evaluate the significance of the INA for the Indian Independence Movement and the ultimate fall of the British Raj in 1947.

This relevance of this study cannot be understated. The method through which India obtained her independence is not merely a matter of historical concern, but also integral to a modern understanding of Indian government for it was the Indian Independence Movement that defined and characterized the government and military organisation of India.

² Office of Strategic Services. "The Rise and Fall of the Indian National Army." *CIA*.

Washington DC: Central Intelligence Agency, June 8, 1945.

https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000709795.pdf.

Aims

To understand the successes and failures of the Indian National Army, it is first important to gain insight into the true objective of its formation.

The purpose of the INA was two-fold. Primarily, it served the purpose of fulfilling Bose's aims of achieving Indian Independence and continued the Indian freedom struggle during World War Two. Yet, the INA simultaneously served as a tool for the Japanese Imperial army in their war campaigns against the Allied Powers, especially Great Britain, in Southeast Asia. This perspective is supported by historian Sundaram who argues that for the Japanese, the INA was little more than a propaganda tool against the Allies, whereas for the Indians who served in it, it was an instrument to gain national autonomy³.

From the viewpoint of the Japanese, the INA regiments were primarily intended to reduce the fighting strength and motivation of the British Indian Army, a major opponent of Japan in Asia from 1942 onwards. Therefore, the INA were to be employed merely in auxiliary war duties during the Malayan campaigns⁴. Their role included encouraging deserters from the enemy forces, and persuading prisoners of war to abandon the British and join the INA cause. Moreover, they were designated to assist in reconnaissance. Rarely were they employed as regular fighting units, and often, were allocated sub-par military

³ Sundaram, Chandar S. "A Paper Tiger: The Indian National Army in Battle, 1944–1945." *War & Society* 13, no. 1 (May 1995): 35–59.
<https://doi.org/10.1179/072924795791200187>.

⁴ ———. *The Indian National Army*. Meerut : Meenakshi Prakashan, 1969.

equipment, as per a 1945 CIA Report⁵. Strikingly, documentary evidence suggests that the highest Japanese authorities desired to organise the INA for the purpose of alienating loyalty to the British Empire, rather than raising an army for India's liberation⁶.

However, for the Indians serving within the INA, the role and objectives of the INA were perceived quite contrastingly. In the words of the leader, Bose himself, the aim of the INA was 'to launch and to conduct the struggle that will bring about the expulsion of the British and of other allies from the soil of India.' Bose outlined these aims in an address to the INA. While ambitious, these goals clearly highlight the radical and determined nature of the INA soldiers. Their master plan included a military campaign with the ultimate goal of arriving at Delhi, as demonstrated by Bose's famous battle cry "Delhi Chalo" (on to Delhi). Bose even delineated that the army's mission 'would not be complete until the tricolour flag flew over the Vice-regal Palace, and they stood at the gates of the Red Fort,' suggesting their overarching aim of achieving complete Indian independence. It was their hope that when they attacked the British Army of occupation in India, revolution would break out not only among civilian populations at home, but also among the Indian army which was then standing under the British Flag. It was firmly believed by Bose that when the British government was thus attacked from both inside and outside India, it would collapse, and the Indian people would regain their liberty⁷.

⁵ Office of Strategic Services. "The Rise and Fall of the Indian National Army." *CIA*.

Washington DC: Central Intelligence Agency, June 8, 1945.

https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000709795.pdf.

⁶ Kalyan Kumar Ghosh. *The Indian National Army*. Meerut : Meenakshi Prakashan, 1969.

⁷ Bose, Subash Chandra. "Why I Left Home and Homeland." July 9, 1943.

Actions

To facilitate the work of the INA, and to gain legitimacy as a belligerent force, Bose established a provisional government ‘in exile,’ the first government of a liberated India. On 21st October 1943, Bose proclaimed the Provision Government of Free India (PGFI), which was recognised by Japan on the 23rd of October⁸. The PGFI can be viewed as a culmination of the political movement of the early 1940s, with the purpose to liberate Indian from British rule. Functioning with 11 ministers, and developing its own currency, court, and civil code⁹, this government became the springboard for Indian nationalist action and provided greater legitimacy to the independence struggle. Furthermore, Bose mobilised the financial and human resources of the Indian expatriate communities in Southeast Asia, which consisted of approximately 2 to 3 million Indians. Bose was able to penetrate this large base of support through mediums such a radio broadcasts in July 1943¹⁰. Moreover, the INA was divided into three regiments, deliberately named after Indian Freedom Fighters Gandhi, Nehru, and Azad in an effort to build a common connection with the struggle at the home front and the foreign front. On October 23rd, 1943, the Provisional Government of Free India declared war on

⁸ Kuracina, William F. “Sentiments and Patriotism: The Indian National Army, General Elections and the Congress’s Appropriation of the INA Legacy.” *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2010): 817–56. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40664947>.

⁹ Chaudhury, Sumeru Roy. “Revisiting Events Celebrated by Subhas Chandra Bose’s Azad Hind Government.” *The Wire*, October 21, 2020. <https://thewire.in/history/revisiting-events-celebrated-by-subhas-chandra-bose-azad-hind-government>.

¹⁰ Cultural India. “Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj) History : Objectives & Achievements.” *Cultural India*, June 28, 2018. <https://learn.culturalindia.net/indian-national-army.html>.

Britain and the United States of America, thus marking the beginning of the INA's military history.

Though the Japanese were initially reluctant to confer any military responsibilities to the INA, Bose convinced Japanese leadership to permit the INA to play a role in the Japanese offensive against the British Empire in Manipur¹¹ by contributing a substantial number of troops. This, Bose believed, would help forge a distinguished identity of the Indian liberation army. Ultimately, he secured an assurance from the Japanese army Chief of Staff, General Sugiyama, that the INA would be recognised as an allied army in the Japanese military operation, the 'U-Go Offensive,' aimed at capturing the Naga Hills from the British¹².

As the offensive opened, the INA's first division, which comprised of four guerilla regiments, was divided between U-Go, the primary offensive, and Ha-Go, the diversionary offensive¹³. Thus, in this campaign, the INA served as a relatively strong fighting force, but lost many casualties. Subsequently, their army was weakened considerably.

Between 8th March and 18th July of 1944, the INA engaged, alongside the Japanese, in the battles of Imphal and Kohima, which signalled the turning point of the Japanese campaigns in Asia during the Second World War. In the initial moments, the battle seemed to favour the Japanese and INA. Led by Shah Nawaz Khan, the first division of the INA successfully protected the Japanese flanks against Chin and Kashin guerillas and pushed

¹¹ Toye, Hugh. *The Springing Tiger: A Study of the Indian National Army and of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2009, p.86

¹² Toye, Hugh. *The Springing Tiger: A Study of the Indian National Army and of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2009, p. 149

¹³ Toye, Hugh. *The Springing Tiger : A Study of the Indian National Army and of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2009, p.161-162.

forward the offensive through Tamu towards Imphal and Kohima¹⁴. By 29th March, they had managed to cut the Imphal-Kohima Road, and isolated Kohima. Eventually, the battle continued to a three-and-a-half-month-long siege, during which the Nagas, the major tribal community of Kohima, and the Manipuris aided the INA as they were sympathetic to their cause¹⁵.

However, the powerful British defence, along with Allied help, caused a turn in events, and eventually forced a retreat of the Japanese and INA. Despite this defeat, the INA continued to pursue their military goals. As the Allied Burma campaign commenced in 1945, the INA remained committed to the defence of Burma. This time, it was the second division of the INA that was tasked with the defence of Irrawaddy. Later, they were tasked with the defence of Mount Popa, during the Battles of Meiktila and Mandalay. However, both these events proved fatal, placing this division in a helpless situation, fighting the Allied tanks with mere hand grenades and bottles of petrol¹⁶. The INA lost many men to exhaustion, shortage of food and of ammunition. The surviving units, thus, were coerced to retreat, facing a tremendous military defeat.

Albeit the INA has great ambitions, their practical military contributions were minor. The army's most important engagement, the Battle of Imphal-Kohima on the Burma-Indian frontier, ultimately resulted in defeat and a forced retreat¹⁷.

¹⁴ Toye, Hugh. *The Springing Tiger : A Study of the Indian National Army and of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2009, p. 189-191.

¹⁵ Shah Nawaz Khan. *My Memories of I.N.A. & Its Netaji*, 1946, p. 155-156

¹⁶ Toye, Hugh. *The Springing Tiger : A Study of the Indian National Army and of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2009, p.90.

¹⁷ Kalyan Kumar Ghosh. *The Indian National Army*. Meerut : Meenakshi Prakashan, 1969.

By the end, the Bose regiment of the INA had lost one-third of its men through disease, fighting and starvation, due to poor supply lines by the Japanese. Yet only two of the INA men had re-deserted to the British, a testament to the strong convictions of the INA soldiers and the budding sense of patriotism it would imbue to Indian citizens.

Failure

Despite its initial successes and significant nationalist fervour, the military actions of the INA ultimately failed to achieve their objectives. The defeat of the INA can be attributed to many causes. Primarily, the flawed logistics and insufficient supplies of the INA as compared to the Allied Powers.

One of the primary reasons for this failure was the severe lack of resources and logistical support. The Japanese had taken an enormous risk by choosing to travel light, with limited supplies and equipment across long distances, and over difficult and perilous terrains. In fact, the Japanese relied heavily on the hope of capturing ‘Churchill Rations,’ in Imphal-Kohima since their own supply links connecting Rangoon to Mandalay were tenuous. The shortage of necessary equipment hindered the effectiveness of the military operation and limited the INA’s ability to sustain prolonged offensives. Due to the lack of contingencies, many men starved in the worst monsoon conditions¹⁸, failing to achieve victory.

Moreover, the fighting force of the Axis Powers at the battle was inadequate as compared to the Allies. While 84,000 Japanese troops and 12,000 INA officers fought on the battlefield, the Allies had a fighting power of 150,000 British, British Indian, British West African, and American troops¹⁹. In addition to a quantitative disadvantage, the INA faced a qualitative disadvantage as well. A persistent scarcity of skilled officers was an intrinsic structural weakness of the INA. Though most of their soldiers possessed a strong nationalist

¹⁸ National Army Museum. “Battles of Imphal and Kohima | National Army Museum.”

www.nam.ac.uk. Accessed July 9, 2023.

<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/battle-imphal>.

¹⁹ Sugata Bose. *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2013.

spirit, and determination, many lacked professional training and experience. Since, the INA recruited from diverse backgrounds, including civilians, they lacked the expertise to conduct large-scale military operations. This issue was only exacerbated by the absence of experienced military leaders within the INA, as leadership and command structures were often weak and chaotic.

Strategic limitations further contributed to the INA's losses. Its primary theatre of operations was Burma, with only minor incursions into northeastern India. Thus, the vast distance from their end-goal, Delhi, and their theatre of operation, Burma, presented a geographical challenge for the INA, and demanded sustained efforts. Additionally, the INA's reliance on guerilla tactics, such as hit-and-run attacks and sabotage, proved insufficient in directly confronting well-entrenched British forces.

The logical and communications superiority possessed by the Allies was an essential element to their success. This enabled them to allow quick deployment of reinforcements, and transporting equipment rapidly²⁰. For instance, the Americans organised a continuous airlift of supplies into Imphal throughout the long-standing siege of three and a half months. In terms of air power, the allied advantage was far superior, as they held a ten-to-one advantage. The Japanese, extremely overextended over the Pacific, were unable to provide air cover or transport for adequate supplies, neither to the INA troops not their own.

²⁰ National Army Museum. "Battles of Imphal and Kohima | National Army Museum."

www.nam.ac.uk. Accessed July 9, 2023.

<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/battle-imphal>.

Ultimately, as per the INA's official records, 26,000 were killed in action²¹. By the end, a total of 16,000 INA soldiers had been captured by the British²². With the end of the Second World War, and the defeat of the Axis Powers, the INA had failed to militarily defeat the British Raj in India or reach Delhi. Nevertheless, this failure would later become an instrumental element to the success of the Indian Independence Movement.

²¹ Bakshi, Maj Gen G D . *Bose: The Military Dimension - a Military History of INA and Netaji*. KW Publishers, 2022.

²² Cultural India. "Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj) History : Objectives & Achievements." Cultural India, June 28, 2018.
<https://learn.culturalindia.net/indian-national-army.html>.

Significance for the Indian Independence Movement

The traditionalist perspective is that the INA and Bose had little to no role to play in the eventual Independence of India, as they failed in their military mission to defeat the British Raj and 'reach' Delhi.

However, though the INA failed in their direct mission to achieve Indian Independence through the military campaign, their indirect impact was far more significant and contributed greatly to the Indian Independence Movement and the ultimate decision of the British to leave India. As Dr GD Bakshi suggests in his book, 'Bose: the Military Dimension,' Subash Chandra Bose was instrumental in achieving Indian Independence.

The powerful impact of the INA was demonstrated most prominently through the aftermath of Red Fort Trials: the trial of 20,000 INA men, but most significantly, 3 top INA officers, Shahnawaz Khan, Prem Sahgal and Gurbaksh Dhillon, charged with conducting a war against British India, and for murder and abetment to murder. The selected officers were considered a 'trifecta,' as each was a member of one of the three religions followed by approximately 98% of Indians: Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism respectively²³. This selection was a grave miscalculation by the British government, as it meant that the immediate Indian outrage was unified across religions. This was an immense feat, given that political and religious differences were dividing India at the time. This consequence is clearly evidenced by how both, the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress joined hands,

²³ Maanvi. "Explained: How the Azad Hind Fauj Changed India's Freedom Struggle."

TheQuint, January 23, 2020.

<https://www.thequint.com/explainers/explained-how-netaji-subhash-chandra-bose-azad-hind-fauj-changed-india-freedom-struggle#read-more>.

wholeheartedly, to defend the INA,²⁴ though, during the war, neither party supported it. Nehru had even said that the INA soldiers must be ‘resisted, in India or outside²⁵.’ Yet, on recognising the massive potential of INA to ignite an incontrovertible nationalist movement, both parties united, for the sake of political expediency, to achieve their common goal of Indian Independence.

In addition, the trial’s location was of great significance, as the Red Fort was the seat of the former Mughal emperors, which elicited romantic ruminations of a pre-Raj period in Indian history, and incited hope for a future liberated from the British. Thus, these elements of the trial complemented each other, creating an excellent stimulus for mobilizing a nationalist public opinion. Moreover, another significant factor was the Punjabi ethnicity of all three defendants, since Punjab had long been the primary recruiting ground of the British-Indian army. Before the war, 75% of the British-Indian army’s soldiers were Punjabi²⁶. Thus, the trial also raised concerns about the potential damage to the loyalty and obedience of a majority of British-Indian Army officers.

Notably, the trial of the INA officers not only exacerbated the people’s patriotic emotion, but it became a ‘tribute to the martial courage of Indians, a symbol of her sense of total independence, a matter more of pride than justice.’²⁷ As Nehru so wisely stated, ‘the

²⁴ Cohen, Stephen P. “Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army.” *Pacific Affairs* 36, no. 4 (1963): 411. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2754686>.

²⁵ Sundaram, Chandar. “Trial at the Red Fort, 1945–1946 the Indian National Army and the End of the British Raj in India.” *Education about Asia* 27, no. 3 (2022).

²⁶ Sundaram, Chandar. “Trial at the Red Fort, 1945–1946 the Indian National Army and the End of the British Raj in India.” *Education about Asia* 27, no. 3 (2022).

²⁷ Sundaram, Chandar. “Trial at the Red Fort, 1945–1946 the Indian National Army and the End of the British Raj in India.” *Education about Asia* 27, no. 3 (2022).

trials gave form to the old contest: England vs India.²⁸ Therefore, the trials placed the British in an imperial quandary.

Notably, any news or information about the INA in India media had been strictly censored by the British, in favour of British propaganda during the war. However, these restrictions were entirely lifted after 1945. This enabled the Indian media to expunge the courageous, heroic stories of INA soldiers to promote Indian nationalism. For instance, *The Hindu*, a notable nationalist daily, published articles extolling the INA's role in the Imphal-Kohima battle. Similarly, the pro-Congress *Hindustan Times* published an editorial cartoon depicting Viceroy Wavell in the defendant's dock, being tried by a series of judges: Sahgal, Dhillon and Shah Nawaz²⁹, for his injustices against India. Such publications, becoming prevalent across the country, fanned the flames of the nationalist movement.

Notably, while the defendants in the trial were charged, and then convicted of treacherous crimes, their sentence was relatively forgiving, and ultimately remitted. This result is considered a grave mistake by the British, because, by only lightly punishing those who had turned against the Indian Army, the sentence contributed to the erosion of its discipline and obedience as argued by Bose's biographer, Leonard Gordon. In fact, Lt. Gen.

²⁸ Mitra, Anirban. "Freedom on the Waves: The Story of the 1946 Indian Naval Mutiny." *The Wire*, January 24, 2022.

<https://thewire.in/history/freedom-on-the-waves-the-indian-naval-mutiny-70-years-later>.

²⁹ Maybritt J. Alpes, "The Congress and the INA Trials, 1945–1950," *Studies in History* 23, no. 1, n.s., 2007, 138.

Tuker even identified this result as an integral factor in enabling the subsequent uprisings of the Indian armed forces to take place³⁰.

As a consequence of the outrage at the Red Fort Trials, demonstrations were organised throughout the country by various groups. Sarat Bose, the brother of Subash Chandra Bose, mobilized the public sentiment in support of the INA. Mass demonstrations took place in November 1945 and then again in February 1946 in Kolkata, the hometown of Bose. In total, six hundred people were shot down, and nearly one hundred killed³¹. Common slogans of protestors included ‘They are patriots, not traitors,’ and ‘Save INA patriots.’³² Students, from various political factions and religions, participated in these nation-wide revolts. Such an outcome had been foreseen by certain British authorities, such as Field Marshal Auchinlek, who wrote in a confidential letter to Attlee in December 1945 that revolt would likely erupt in India early in 1946 under the impact of the INA trial³³. He determined that the revolt could only be defeated by the arrival of a massive British army in India, which would be especially costly post-war, since the Raj could no longer depend on the loyalty of

³⁰ Rajani Palme Dutt. 1949. *India To-Day*. Bombay: Peoples Publishing House.

³¹ Kumar, Susmit. “Hitler, NOT Gandhi Was the Reason for the 1947 Indian Independence.”
www.susmitkumar.net, 2008.
<https://www.susmitkumar.net/index.php/hitler-not-gandhi-was-the-reason-for-the-1947-indian-independence>.

³² *The Hindu*. November 7, 1945.

³³ Susobhan Chandra Sarkar. *Essays in Honour of Prof. S. C. Sarkar*. New Delhi : People’s Publishing House, 1976.

Indian soldiers and civilians³⁴. This primary source is telling of the British fear of an eventual decline of power in India.

The most prominent demonstration against the British was conducted by the Indian Royal Navy in February 1946, commencing at the Bombay port and eventually spreading to other naval establishments. At its peak, 78 ships, 20 shore establishment and over 20,000 ratings were involved in the revolution in Bombay, Karachi, Madras, Calcutta, Cochin, Vizagapatam, Mandapam and the Andamans³⁵. This movement was motivated by the outcome of the Red Fort Trials, and its demands even included the release of the INA personnel and the abandonment of their trials³⁶.

The motivations of the revolutionaries can be traced further back to the INA, specifically, to the interaction between INA soldiers and British Indian army officers during battle which had an insidious effect on the Indian army officers. As a British officer observed, ‘in the eleventh months which had elapsed since the first contacts of the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force with the mass of the INA in Rangoon, there had been widespread fraternization. Its result was political consciousness which the Indian servicemen had never before possessed.’ This interaction had a transformative effect on the Indian Army officers, who began to support and participate in the national movement. It is estimated that seventy-six out of every eighty Indian officers were against the prosecution of INA

³⁴ Transfer of Power, Vol. VI, C-m-C's assessment of the internal situation in India, 1 December 1945, Document no. 256 pp. 576-584

³⁵ Raghavan, Srinath. “Revisiting the 1946 Royal Indian Navy Mutiny.” Mint, April 2, 2017. <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/mj2aFwKwRlwae44ANxrEO/Revisiting-the-1946-Royal-Indian-Navy-mutiny.html>.

³⁶ Bombay Chronicle, 20 and 21 February, p. 5; Tillies of India, 21 February 1946, p. 7.

members³⁷. Quarterly reports on the morale of the ratings of the Royal Indian Navy also suggested a change in the traditional apathy towards contemporary politics. The December 1945 report, post-trial, noted that ‘some ratings influenced by INA propaganda and sympathetic to INA,’ and that the ratings were ‘politically conscious.’³⁸ This observation was a drastic evolution from July 1945, when ratings were considered ‘indifferent to politics’.³⁹ Historian Sumit Sarkar argues that the naval ratings had become inspired by the INA image of extreme non-cooperation and open disobedience. The leaders of the mutiny even embraced the INA greeting of ‘Jai Hind’ in messages to their fellow revolutionaries,⁴⁰ a testament to their respect and admiration.

According to historian KK Gosh, this renewed consciousness guided British Indian Army officers to react more sharply to the pressing political issues of imperialism in the post-war years. This is corroborated by Mahatma Gandhi’s statement that by 1945, the whole nation had been ‘roused’ and that even the regular forces had ‘been stirred into a new political consciousness and begun to think in terms of independence.’⁴¹ This expression was

³⁷ Toye, Hugh. *The Springing Tiger : A Study of the Indian National Army and of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2009, p. 170.

³⁸ Kalyan Kumar Ghosh. *The Indian National Army*. Meerut : Meenakshi Prakashan, 1969, p. 27.

³⁹ Kalyan Kumar Ghosh. *The Indian National Army*. Meerut : Meenakshi Prakashan, 1969, p. 27.

⁴⁰ CHATTOPADHYAY, GAUTAM. “SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE, INA and the RAJ SOME RE-EVALUATION.” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 55 (1994): 527–31. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44143406?read-now=1&seq=3#page_scan_tab_contents.

⁴¹ Bose, Sugata, and Ayesha Jalal. *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*. 2004. Reprint, Taylor & Francis, 2011.

manifested in the form of open dissent against the trials of the INA officers. Just as the trials had commenced on November 5th, 1945, the Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) stationed at Calcutta expressed their opposition to the trial, and in a message to the Bengal Congress Committee, they praised the 'noble ideal' of the INA, and even described its violent methods and alliance with Britain's war-time enemy as 'commendable and inspiring.' The RIAF underscored their 'strongest protest against the autocratic action of the Government of India and, in effect, that of the British Government in trying these brightest jewels of India⁴².' Such a strongly worded and openly nationalist dissent was unprecedented from the Indian military and showed the strength of the patriotic spirit ignited by the INA. When verbal dissents did not achieve any result, the army's disapproval was expressed through mutiny. When this happened, as Lt. Gen. Toker noted, the 'INA affairs threatened to tumble down the whole edifice of the Indian Army⁴³.'

Certainly, the results of the trial contributed to a breakdown in discipline in the army. However, the role that the INA and its trial had to play must be evaluated by placing this in the context of other powerful influences within the Indian services. According to the findings of the special Commission appointed to enquire into the causes of the mutiny, political influence was a 'contributory cause of mutiny,' and not the sole reason. Another factor, for instance, were the genuine grievances in the armed services, such as the racial discrimination against Indian officers for promotions to high command. This propelled a renewed nationalistic fervour, which admittedly was intensified, but yet not created by the trials. Though the subversive propaganda through contact with the INA, *Azad Hind* literature in

⁴² Hindustan Standard, 11 November 1945, p. 5

⁴³ Kalyan Kumar Ghosh. *The Indian National Army*. Meerut : Meenakshi Prakashan, 1969.

Singapore, Malaya and Burma, were impactful, they accentuated the existing racial tension, discontent and unrest in the Service⁴⁴.

However, the British Press in India held a different view, which was emphatically emphasized the role of political influence of the INA as a cause of the revolts. The Times of India editorial observed that ‘as a result of the extravagant glorification of the INA following the trials in Delhi, there were released throughout India a flood of comment which had inevitable sequel in mutinies and alarming outbreaks of civil violence.’⁴⁵ Similarly, the Times published ‘in the case of the naval mutinies, the trouble seems to be in the main political’⁴⁶.

Regardless of its motivations, the naval mutiny was deeply significant. This mutiny established a sense of fear among British officials. The involvement of armed forces in the freedom struggle proved to be critical. It made it self-evident that the British Indian Empire could no longer rely on the Indian army, which, thus far, has been an integral element of their authority to impose colonial rule. This realisation caused the British leaders to accept the inevitability of Indian Independence, and virtually precipitated the process leading to the transfer of power. It was only after this mutiny that Lord Wavell, Viceroy of India, reported to London that India had become ungovernable⁴⁷. British historians PJ Cain and AG Hopkins both confer that by this point, there was a loss of control at the very centre of the imperial system. What was most significant was that the INA trial successfully removed the traditional

⁴⁴ Kalyan Kumar Ghosh. *The Indian National Army*. Meerut : Meenakshi Prakashan, 1969, p.

⁴⁵ Times of India, 20 February 1946, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Times (London) 21 February 1946, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Cain, P J, and A G Hopkins. *British Imperialism : 1688-2000*. London: Routledge, 2014.

barrier between the Indian army officers and the main current of Indian nationalism, uniting the two.

In fact, renowned Indian historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar argues that the revelations made by the Red Fort Trials of INA officers, and the reaction it ignited in India, made it obvious to the British, already exhausted by war, that they could 'no longer depend on the loyalty of the soldiers for maintaining their authority in India'. He even suggested that this probably had the 'greatest influence upon their final decision to quit India,' and was far more significant than movements such as the Civil Disobedience Movement⁴⁸. Historian Sumit Sarkar claims that Britain's **decisive** shift' regarding Indian Independence 'came about under mass pressure' emerging from the Red Fort Trials⁴⁹. Even British Prime Minister Clement Atlee, during whose reign India gained independence, remarked in 1956 that Gandhi's non-violence movement had next to zero effect on the British. Rather, it was the INA. This is corroborated by Chief Justice PB Chakrabarty of the Kolkata High Court, former governor of West Bengal, who said that Atlee disclosed to him in personal governance that key reasons for a hasty British departure was 'the erosion of loyalty to the British Crown among the Indian army and navy personnel as a result of the military activities of Netaji Bose⁵⁰.'

Bose, through the formation and actions of the INA, transformed the Indian armed services from a colonial tool to enforce imperialism, to a national instrument to spark the

⁴⁸ Ramesh Chandra Majumdar. *Three Phases of India's Struggle for Freedom*. Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 1961.

⁴⁹ Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India 1885-1947.*, 2014, p.419

⁵⁰ Majumdar, R.C [Ramesh Chandra], *Jībanera smṛtidīpe [Jibanera Smritideepe]*. Kolkata [Calcutta]: General Printers and Publishers [Jenārela], 1978. pp. 229-230

independence movement⁵¹. Therefore, the INA not only re-energised the nationalist movement following the failure of the Quit India movement in 1942, but also destabilized the central control of imperial Britain by weakening their hold on the institutions by which colonial rule was upheld. Thus, the INA trials essentially coerced the British to establish a process and timeline to de-colonise India, as they were no longer able to sustain their reign.

Thus, the impacts of the INA were far more significant psychologically than militarily. Sumit Sarkar emphasizes that the ‘impact on the patriotic imagination of an actual army fighting, however ineffectively, for the country’s liberation⁵².’ The INA’s actions brought about the realisation that British power could be challenged by force, and highlighted the vulnerability of the British empire, which had a transformative impact. Thus, the above conclusion challenges the prevalent narrative that India had obtained her freedom entirely through soft power and non-violence. This is an enormous sacrilege, for their role was evidently significant in forcing the British to quit India. Though most of the post-war revolts were spontaneous, the single largest catalyst for this result was the legend of Subash Chandra Bose and the INA⁵³.

This significance is not only recognised in hindsight by modern historians but was also appreciated by Bose’s contemporaries at the time. Gandhiji himself, who Bose dubbed the ‘Father of the nation,’ stated that though the INA ‘failed in their immediate objective,

⁵¹ Cohen, Stephen P. “Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army.” *Pacific Affairs* 36, no. 4 (1963): 411. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2754686>.

⁵² Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India 1885-1947.*, 2014.

⁵³ CHATTOPADHYAY, GAUTAM. “SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE, INA and the RAJ SOME RE-EVALUATION.” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 55 (1994): 527–31. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44143406?read-now=1&seq=3#page_scan_tab_contents.

they have a lot to their credit of which they might well be proud. Greatest among these was to gather together under one banner men from all religions and races of India and to infuse into them the spirit of solidarity and oneness⁵⁴.' In fact, the legacy of Bose and the INA, so powerful, was appropriated by the Congress to gain popular support. On realising the massive potential of the fervour supporting the INA, the Congress 'sought to gain political capital,' suggested Mihir Bose⁵⁵. Leonard Gordon even observed that Gandhi and Nehru 'brought' the INA and Bose 'back into the mainstream of Indian nationalism' through propaganda and renewed support, though the INA contradicted their personal beliefs of non-violence and abstaining from foreign aid respectively. Successively, they were enabled to 'yolk the powerful emotions of support for the INA to the Congress bullock cart,' as poetically stated by Gordon⁵⁶. They were able to generate support that contributed to their sweeping victories in the polls in 1946⁵⁷, and which determined the trajectory for the birth of modern India.

However, the importance of the Indian National Army in the eventuality of Indian Independence must be evaluated. Other international factors were arguably also significant. Most prominently, British economic prominence suffered greatly after World War II. By 1945, the empire was exhausted and devastated due to intensive aerial bombardments, food

⁵⁴ Gandhi, Mahatma. *My Non-Violence*, 1960.

⁵⁵ Bose, Mihir. *The Lost Hero: A Biography of Subash Chandra Bose*. Vikas Publishing House, 1982.

⁵⁶ Gordon, Leonard a. *Brothers against the Raj: A Biography of Indian Nationalists Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose*. Rupa Publications, 2014.

⁵⁷ CHATTOPADHYAY, GAUTAM. "SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE, INA and the RAJ SOME RE-EVALUATION." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress 55* (1994): 527–31. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44143406?read-now=1&seq=3#page_scan_tab_contents.

shortages and loss of labour. Thus, the question of sustaining a global empire became increasingly bleak.

Simultaneously at this point, Britain held defence obligations globally in the immediate aftermath of World War Two. In view of their commitments globally, British did not possess the military force to maintain power in India against a widespread guerilla movement⁵⁸. With the lack of their own forces, and the lack of support of the British Indian army, Indian independence was a *fait accompli*.

Additionally, the United States was an emerging hegemon. Its rising global influence, and its opposition to imperialism, made colonialism less politically viable. This is evident in the Atlantic Charter signed between USA and Britain in August 1941⁵⁹. The historic declaration outlined a joint future vision of the world and emphasized self-determination for all peoples. This charter propelled decolonization movements in all the British colonies, including the theatres in South Asia and the Middle East, and set the standard for the post-war international order.

Several of Britain's remaining colonies in the world gained independence within nearly a 10-year period post World War II, including Jordan in 1946, Sri Lanka in 1948, Israel in 1948, and Libya in 1951. This serves as a testament to the argument that it was an

⁵⁸ R/30/1/9: ff 15-18, November 1946, featured in Mansergh, N. *Constitutional Relations between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power 1942-47 – Volume IX The fixing of a time limit 4 November 1946-22 March 1947* (London, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1980), p. 68.

⁵⁹ US State Department. "Milestones: 1937–1945 - Office of the Historian." [history.state.gov](https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/atlantic-conf#:~:text=The%20Atlantic%20Charter%20was%20a). Accessed July 27, 2023.

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/atlantic-conf#:~:text=The%20Atlantic%20Charter%20was%20a>.

external economic and political pressure that provoked Britain to begin the process of global decolonisation, rather than any independent factor in India. Nevertheless, the significance of the Indian National Army cannot be ignored, as it served as the deciding factor, and accelerated the process of decolonisation in India.

To conclude, while the INA failed in its military campaign, they were extremely successful in their overarching goal: to incite revolution in both the ‘civilian population at home’ as well as ‘among the Indian army which was standing under the British flag,’ to pose a challenge to the British Raj⁶⁰. As Christopher Bayly noted, ironically, the ‘INA was to become a much more powerful enemy of the British empire in defeat than it had been during its ill-fated triumphal march on Delhi⁶¹.’

Endnotes

⁶⁰ Bose, Subash Chandra. “Why I Left Home and Homeland.” July 9, 1943.

⁶¹ Marston, Daniel. *The Indian Army and the End of the Raj*. Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 118