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Indian National Army: Formation and Evolution

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Introduction

Subhas Chandra Bose was a rising figure and maverick in pre-World War II Indian nationalism, and presented an alternative approach to that of Gandhi and Nehru. He favoured a more radical approach to driving the British out of India, while the moderates proposed civil disobedience and limited cooperation with the British. Bose disagreed with Gandhi's non-violent approach to Indian independence from Britain, instead advocating for an alliance of forces to build an Indian army to drive the British out of India. This ultimately led to the formation of the Indian National Army in April 1942. This Chapter examines the roles played by Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army (INA) in the struggle for India's independence. It highlights how their presence and hard work inspired and motivated the people of India, resulting in a new wave of nationalistic feelings that helped bring about independence.

The Context

INA was a military force formed by the Japanese, during WWII with around 45,000 Indian POWs of the British Indian Army, captured after the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942. It was initially formed by Rash Behari Bose who headed it till April 1942 before Subash Chandra Bose took over the charge of INA in 1943. Bose along with Indian National Army made a major contribution to India's independence in 1947, sacrificing thousands of lives in the process. Without their deliberate efforts and strong determination, India's freedom may have been delayed (Sundaram 2007, p. 123-130).

Efforts for International Alliance

When Bose was in exile, he attempted to establish contacts with axis powers. Ayer has pointed out that Netaji travelled from Afghanistan to Germany using a false identity of Orlando Mazzotta, an Italian name on his passport (Ayer 2019,p.20). He attempted to meet Hitler, but he failed to do so. However, in May 1942, he met with German political leaders, including the foreign minister Von Ribbentrop. This was the start of a series of summit conferences between the Indian leader and

the German political leaders (Ayer 2019, p.22). In the meeting, the German foreign minister agreed to Netaji's requests for no interference with his work and for financial assistance to be provided in the form of loans to Free India, with the foreign office and supreme military command supplying personnel and technical assistance. Netaji was given access to the foreign minister's special fund for war expenses (Ayer 2019, p.22).

Therefore, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was able to create the nucleus of the Indian National Army in Germany at approximately the same time as General Mohan Singh established it in East Asia. However, due to logistical issues, the Indian Legion from Europe could not be transferred to the north-western frontier of India. Thus, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had achieved his primary goal in Germany by establishing the Free India Centre and the Indian Legion. Unfortunately, no formal agreement was made between Germany, Italy and Japan to ensure India's independence after the war (Ayer 2019,p.23). In his meeting with Hitler, Netaji had not only asked for the guarantee, but also asked for himself freedom of political action within Germany. When asked about his political concepts, Netaji impatiently replied Hitler "Tell His Excellency that I have been in politics all my life and that I don't need advice from any side" (Ayer 2019, p.25). And therefore, the meeting was a complete disaster, leading Bose to realize that he needs to shift his focus from Europe to Asia in order to achieve his mission. Later, in 1942, he drew up tentative plans to organise and unify the three million Indians in east Asia and to prepare them for a fight from across the eastern borders of India (Ayer 2019, p.25).

Formation of INA

The Indian National Army (INA) was an armed force formed in 1942 by Indian collaborators and Imperial Japan. It fought alongside Japanese soldiers in the Southeast Asian theatre of WWII, with the goal of liberating India from British colonial rule. The Indian National Army (INA) was formed in 1942 by Mohan Singh Deb, using Indian prisoners of war from the British Indian Army captured during the Malayan campaign and the Battle of Singapore (Aldrich 2000, p.159). Ayer has noted that "When Subhas was waiting in the west for destiny. Rash Behari Bose was waiting in the east for the predawn hour of India's freedom. The frail, aging revolutionary in exile had been waiting in Japan for the great hour to strike. It struck when Japan declared war on Britain on December 8/1941. India's British rulers became Japan's enemies overnight, thus suddenly releasing Rash Behari Bose from all restraints and clearing the decks for all-out action for the liberation of his motherland" (Ayer 2019, p. 26). Rash Behari Bose from Tokyo was unanimously elected as the presiding chairman of the League by the delegates. He was chosen due to his long record as a revolutionary, his lack of personal ambition and his working relationship with many Japanese leaders. Mohan Singh proposed Bose's name as chairman and was supported by the other Indian delegates (Lebra 2008, p. 75).

Mohan Singh handed over INA to Subhas Chandra Bose, which was

later revived under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose after his arrival in Southeast Asia in 1943. On 4 July 1943, Bose assumed the leadership of the Indian National Army in a ceremony at Cathay Building. Bose's influence was notable. His appeal re-invigorated the INA, which had previously consisted mainly of prisoners of war: it also attracted Indian expatriates in South Asia. He famously proclaimed that 'Give me blood! I will give you freedom' (Lebra 2008, p.99) (Khajuria, IJCRT, 2021). "Two days later, the presence of Netaji in Japan was announced by Tokyo Radio with the Indian leader holding a press conference on 19 June detailing his plans for the freedom of his country. He called for the Quit India movement back at home to be escalated to an armed struggle. "Only when the Indian people have received the baptism by fire on a large scale would they be qualified to achieve freedom", he said. The news about Netaji's arrival in Japan electrified the Indians in Singapore and other Southeast Asian countries. Soon Netaji was addressing them on radio" (sankalp india 2023t).

Netaji addressed the world through Radio broadcasted from Tokyo, "BRAVE soldiers! Today you have taken an oath that you will give fight to the enemy the last breath of your's under the national tricolour. From today you are the soldiers of the Indian National Army of Free India. You have volunteered to shoulder the responsibility of forty crores of Indians. From today your mind, might and money belong to the Indian Nation. Friends, you have the honour to be the pioneer soldiers of Azad Hind Fauj. Your names will be written in golden letters in the history of Free India. Every soldier who is martyred in this holy war will have a monument in Free India. The coming generations will ….shower flowers on those monuments. The drum of Indian Independence has been sounded. I assure you that the time is not far off when you will have to put to use the military skill which you possess. Today we are taking the vow of independence under the National Flag. A time will come when you will salute this flag in the Red Fort. But remember that you will have to pay the price of freedom. Freedom can never be had by begging. It has to be obtained by force. Its price is blood. We will not beg for freedom from any foreign country. We shall achieve freedom by paying its price. It does not matter how much price we must pay for it. I assure you that I shall lead the army when we march to India together. The news of the ceremony that we are performing here has reached India. It will encourage the patriots at home, who are fighting empty-handed against the British. Throughout my life it was my ambition to equip an army that will capture freedom from the enemy. Today I congratulate you because the honour of such an army belongs to you. With this I close my speech. May God be with you and give you strength to fulfil the pledge which you have taken voluntarily today. Inquilab Zindabad", Broadcast to the Indian National Army in Europe, June 1942 (Netaji Subhas 1942)

In other words, Bose in his speech clearly said that the Indian National Army of Free India is a brave and historic movement that has been undertaken by its volunteer soldiers. These soldiers have taken an oath to fight for their nation until their last breath and to shoulder the responsibility of forty crore Indians. Every soldier that dies in this fight

for freedom will have a monument in Free India, and will be remembered by generations to come. In his speech he promised to lead the army into India in order to achieve freedom. He was aware of the price that is to be paid for freedom, and assured the soldiers that they will not beg for it, but instead will achieve it through strength and courage. He further clarified that the Indian National Army of Free India is an inspiring movement that encourages nationalist in India to take part in the freedom movement. It is a solemn vow taken by the soldiers to protect the nation and to defeat the enemy. The dedication and commitment of the soldiers, who gave them his word of honour that they will achieve freedom. He further said that The Indian National Army of Free India is a movement that will be remembered for generations to come. It was a fight for freedom and independence, and the soldiers have taken up the responsibility to protect the nation and to give their all for the cause. It was a brave and noble endeavour that will surely inspire many generations to come. With such a historic speech, Bose vitalises the morals of the soldiers and led the foundation of the INA.

INA: Its Regiment

On 15 February 1943, the INA was reorganized and former ranks and badges revived. The Director of the Military Bureau, Lieutenant-Colonel Bhonsle, was clearly placed under the authority of the III, to avoid any repetition of IIL-INA rivalry. Under Bhonsle were Lieutenant-Colonel Shah Nawaz Khan as chief of general staff; Major P.K. Sahgal as military secretary; Major Habibur Rehman as commandant of the Officers' Training School; and Lieutenant- Colonel A.C. Chatterji, and later Major A.D. Jahangir, as head of enlightenment and culture. Apart from this policy-making body was the Army itself under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel M.Z. Kiani. This was the organization which held the INA together until the arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose from Berlin six months later. Because of opposition to the reorganization, only eight thousand officers and men rejoined the INA as opposed to nearly forty-five thousand who volunteered for the first INA (Lebra 2008, p. 98).

Gen. Bakshi records the following order of battle of the INA at the time when Bose had assumed charge. Bose had interestingly used the names of Nehru, Gandhi and Azad for his regiments. As Bakshi explains, The First Field Force Regiment was commanded by Lt. Col. S.M. Hussein comprised three Infantry Battalions, a Vickers Machine Gun Company, a 3 inch Mortar Company, the Heavy Guns Battalion (with nine 4.5” howitzers) and an Armored Fighting Vehicles Battalion with 12 Bren Gun Carriers (all equipped from captured British weapons). The Second (Gandhi) Guerilla Regiment, Third (Azad) Guerilla Battalion and Fourth (Nehru) Guerilla Regiment were each organised similarly and commanded by Lt. Col. I.J. Kiani, Lt. Col. Gulzara Singh and Lt. Col. R.M. Arshad respectively (Bakshi 2016, p.142).

The Special All-Woman Regiment

The Rani of Jhansi regiment was an all-women regiment formed during World War II, with Lakshmi Swaminathan as its chief. The women were trained in combat and fought in the war. Janaki Athi Nagappan, a member of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, recounts the intense training and preparation they undertook in anticipation of the hardships they would face in battle. They were motivated by the vision of a free India and the courage of Rani Lakshmi Bai (Netaji Centre 1991, p. 43). Bose at the opening of the Rani Jhansi regiment gave another historic speech " SISTERS! The opening of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment Training Camp is an important landmark in the progress of our movement in East Asia. We are engaged in the great task of regenerating our nation. And it is only in the fitness of things that there should be a stir of new life among our womenfolk. Our past has been a great and glorious one. India could not have produced a heroine like the Rani of Jhansi if she did not have a glorious tradition. In the same way, as we have figures like Maitreyi in the ancient days, we have the inspiring examples of Ahalyabai of Maharashtra, Rani Bhawani of Bengal, and Razya Begum and Noor Jehan who were shining administrators in recent historic time prior to British rule in India. I have every confidence in the fertility of the Indian soil. I am confident that India, as in the past, will surely produce the best flowers of womanhood" (Rani of Jhansi training camp opening speech, ASI,1943).

The Axis Powers recognised Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's interim government within a few days of its formation. Bose attended a conference of East Asian countries, where he promoted the idea of a free and independent Asia free from colonialism and imperialism. The Azad Hind Government was also known as Arzi Hukumat-e-Azad Hind, in 1943. He declared the Indian National Army (INA) and aimed to recruit 50,000 soldiers from British Indian Army POWs and civilian volunteers. He famously declared the slogan "Dilli Chal" which meant they were ready to march to Delhi and liberate India. In his call for Dilli Chalo he said that "There in front of you is the road that our pioneers have built. We shall march along this road. We shall carve our way through the enemy's ranks or if God wills, we will die a martyr's death. And in our last sleep we will kiss the road which will bring our Army to Delhi. Road to Delhi is the Road to freedom. On to Delhi" (Bose, 1944)
Invasion of Imphal and Kohima

"The Imphal campaign, (including the battle of Kohima) will perhaps go down in history as one of the most daring and disastrous campaigns in the annals of world history". This operation has often been compared to the German Operation Wacht am Rhein or more popularly the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes in France in December 1944. This… pulled it off. This is a tribute to the human spirit and shows what courage and tenacity it is capable of displaying. It was a grim and hard fought battle but the Japanese had overreached themselves operationally and logistically. The operation had come two years too late. By 1944 the Japanese had completely lost air superiority and their Navy had lost control of the sea. This had foreclosed any options of

operational manoeuvre from the sea. Had the attack gone in 1942 itself, as Col. Hyashi had proposed or even in the next year it had all the chances of succeeding. Without air superiority, the Japanese Army did not have a chance of executing a Malaya or Burma style Blitzkrieg through the Jungle in 1944 (Bora 2013).

Subhas Chandra Bose shifted the headquarters of the Azad Hind Government to Rangoon in January 1944 and launched two successful military campaigns in March with the support of the Japanese to capture Imphal and Arakan. His plan was to enter north-east India through Burma and free India from British rule (Netaji foundation 2023). The Battle of Imphal, took place in the region around the city of Imphal, the capital of the state of Manipur in Northeast India from March until July 1944. Japanese armies attempted to destroy the Allied forces at Imphal and invade India, but were driven back into Burma with heavy losses. Together with the simultaneous Battle of Kohima on the road by which the encircled Allied forces at Imphal were relieved, the battle was the turning point of the Burma campaign, part of the South-East Asian theatre of World War II. The Japanese defeat at Kohima and Imphal was the largest up until that time. (Bond, Tachikawa 2012, p.122) with many of the Japanese deaths resulting from starvation, disease and exhaustion suffered during their retreat. (Allen 2000, p.63). The battles of Imphal and Kohima saw the British and Indian forces, under the overall command of Lieutenant-General William Slim, repel the Japanese invasion of India and helped turn the tide of the war in the Far East. The Japanese, along with soldiers of the Azad Hind Fauj, eventually lost 53,000 dead and missing in the battles. The British forces sustained 12,500 casualties at Imphal while the fighting at Kohima cost them another 4,000 casualties (PTI 2013).

The fight for Imphal went on longer than that for Kohima, lasting from March until July. Kohima was smaller in scale, and shorter, from April to June - but the fighting was so intense it has been described as the “Stalingrad of the East”. In one sector, only the width of the town's tennis court separated the two sides. When the relief forces of the British 2nd Division arrived, the defensive perimeter was reduced to a shell-shattered area only 350 metres square.

There are several memorials to the British and Indian troops who fought in the area, including one with an inscription that has become famous as the 'Kohima Epitaph'. It reads-- 'When You Go Home, Tell Them Of Us And Say, For Your Tomorrow, We Gave Our Today' (PTI, 2013).

Conclusion

Consequently, INA happen to be one of the strongest of the will that has caused in many the feeling of the nationalist feeling, which has brought in INA tremendous human resource in the form of the trained military personnel. They did not came in vacuum, it was the call of determination and vision, to bring India on its own foot, that was crippled by the Britishers, through their abrupt and discriminating

attitudes towards fellow Indians. INA was the trail blazing in the quandaries that people were in. It brought in people a new fresh hope within Indian that freedom is not far from achieving. It is the leaders of INA, who should be acknowledged, and given due credits for the aspirations. They were far from being pursuing their personnel ambition much little what will happen to their immediate acquaintances. The dedication was such, that nothing could match at par with it. Subash Chandra Bose as the pioneer, exploring different avenues for alliance, he succeeded to far extent in doing so in Asia, travelling all over the places, establishing a dialogue with all at the receiving end, though there is not much said at the end about his life. Forming a women battalion supposed to be a great achievement, it speaks volumes about his vision and mission about the free India. It is very much embedded in the process of forming, making, dissolving of the INA, that write the story of free India, there will be. Before establishing the INA Bose had to go through much and sought alliances with Axis powers. However, at the last it was Bose who kept charging the morals of the soldiers and pragmatically strengthened the Azad Hind Government and created deterrence for the British government that led to the independence of India as well as his mysterious death

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