

An Evaluation of the Role of Non-Gandhian Nationalist Movements in India's Struggle for Independence from 1945-1946

What were the roles of the Indian National Army and the Royal
Indian Navy mutiny in India's pursuit for independence?

an Extended Essay in History by

Nina Tourabi

Candidate number: 0571 020

Helsingin Suomalainen Yhteiskoulu

supervised by

Steven Huxley

Word count: 3999

Tiivistelmä

Perinteisillä historiallisilla Intian itsenäisyyden tulkinnolla on taipumus keskittyä Mahatma Gandhin rauhanomaisiin liikkeisiin. Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on asettaa tämä kyseenalaiseksi tutkimalla kahden rauhattoman intialaisen itsenäisyysliikkeen roolia vuosien 1945–1946 välisenä aikana. Päämääränä on samalla syventää ymmärrystä siitä, miksi Intia itsenäistyi vuonna 1947. Tutkielma keskittyy kahteen Gandhin hylkäämään ja rauhattomaan itsenäisyysliikkeeseen; Indian National Army:n (INA) ja Royan Indian Navy:n (RIN) pyrkimyksiin. INA:n rooli keskittyy sen häviön jälkeisiin tapahtumiin: oikeudenkäyntien laukaisemaan laajalle levinneeseen tietoisuuteen ja väkivaltaiseen mellakointiin. Keskeistä näiden kahden tapahtumien arviointiin on brittien reaktio, sillä siirtomaan kohtalo oli loppujen lopuksi heidän käsissään. Tutkielman ensimmäinen osa tarkastelee INA:n alkuperää, taisteluja ja niiden jälkiseurauksia. Niiden roolia punnitessa paljastui, että brittien suostumus tehdä kompromisseja oli enemmänkin jälkiseurauksena olevien oikeudenkäyntien ansiosta kuin itse sotimisen. Ensimmäinen osa antaa myös todisteita tälle laajalle levinneen tietoisuuden ja sen laukaisemien Kalkutan mellakointien avulla. Brittien suhtautuminen massamellakointiin osoittaa todellista pelkoa ja epävarmuutta siitä, miten oikeudenkäynnit vaikuttaisivat aseistautuneihin joukkoihin. Tutkielman toisessa osassa tämä huolestuneisuus paljastuu ymmärrettäväksi. Siitä huolimatta, että brittien päätös lähettää Cabinet Mission Intiaan tehtiin ennen RIN-kapinointia, brittien suhtautuminen osoittaa jälleen vahvistuvaa pelkoa aseistettujen joukkojen uskollisuuden menettämisestä. Näin ollen, molemmat pyrkimykset voidaan nähdä osana Intian rauhattomien itsenäisyysliikkeiden sarjaa: RIN-kapinointi oli osaksi INA oikeudenkäyntien luoman massamellakoinnin tulosta. Muiden tekijöiden olemassaolon takia ei voida kuitenkaan väittää, että Intian itsenäisyys saavutettiin ainoastaan RIN-kapinoinnin ja INA:n pyrkimysten ja vaikutuksen ansiosta. Brittien suhtautuminen osoittaa kuitenkin, että kokonaisvaltainen historiallinen tulkinta Intian itsenäisyydestä ottaisi myös nämä kaksi liikettä huomioon.

Abstract

The aim of this essay is to investigate the roles of two non-Gandhian nationalist movements during 1945-1946 in order to further an understanding of the immediate causes of India attaining independence in 1947. This involves examining the efforts of the Indian National Army (INA) and the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) mutiny. The role of the INA concentrates on the aftermath of its military defeat: the popular consciousness and the accompanying violent rioting triggered by the INA trials. Essential to analyzing the roles of these two movements is the reaction of the British who would ultimately decide upon withdrawing from India. The first part of the investigation examines the origins and military efforts of the INA manifesting that it was rather the aftermath of the INA's military endeavor that resulted in British leniency than the actual fighting. Moreover, the first section gives evidence to this: the popular consciousness during the INA trials and the coexisting violence through the Calcutta riots. The British reaction suggests a legitimate concern for the influence of the trials on the armed forces. This concern is proved plausible in the second part of the investigation. Even though the decision to send the Cabinet Mission to India was made prior to the RIN mutiny, the British reaction suggests a genuine concern for the further loss of army loyalty to the British. These two events can be seen as a sequence of non-Gandhian movements as the RIN mutiny was partly triggered by the INA trial spirit. However, it cannot be said that the two alone led to the British withdrawal. In the light of the British reactions to them, however, a comprehensive analysis of the independence of India would incorporate them alongside the traditional explanation concentrating on the efforts of the Congress and non-violent Gandhian campaigns.

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. The Indian National Army	2
2.1 The Background: Birth and Military Efforts of Subhas Chandra Bose’s Indian National Army.....	2
2.2 The Aftermath: the Impact of the 1945 Trials on National Consciousness.....	3
2.3 The Calcutta Demonstrations of November 1945 and February 1946 over the Issue of the INA Prisoners.....	4
2.4 British Reaction.....	5
2.5 The Role of the INA in the Freedom Struggle.....	7
3. The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny	8
3.1 Roots of Discontent.....	8
3.2 The Drift to Violence.....	9
3.3 British Reaction.....	10
3.4 The Role of the RIN Mutiny in the Freedom Struggle.....	10
4. Conclusion	12

Bibliography

Introduction

A number of books and biographies on British India recognize nationalism and the accompanying non-violent resistance campaigns as the central cause of the British withdrawal from India. However, in their coverage of this period they get submerged in the spurt of the constitutional negotiations between 1945 and 1947 and the stances taken up by the British, the Congress under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, paying little attention to popular activity, such as the Indian National Army (INA) agitation, the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) revolt as well as the popular, often violent popular upsurges that were tied to these two events.

India's independence came about due to manifold factors recognized by historical studies since independence: the maturation of the Congress into a political machine, the weakening impact of World War II on Britain in maintaining its imperial power, the declining importance of South Asia to maintain Britain's economic prosperity, the degrading of the civilian and military services, the enfeeblement of key support groups and the withdrawal of popular consent, and the election of the Labour Party.¹ Even without taking the individual roles of these factors into consideration, it can be seen that independence is multifaceted and cannot be explained with solely one factor.

It is worth noting that other non-Gandhian movements had existed prior to the efforts of the Indian National Army, the Royal Indian Navy mutiny, and the popular upsurges prior to independence in 1945-1946. They can be traced back from the Sepoy Mutiny of 1897 all the way through out the first half of the 1900s. The Indian National Congress's Quit India Movement of August 1942 assumed the character of a popular revolt with a great deal of violence in large cities² as well as the countryside: "Furious mobs not only attacked government buildings, offices, stores, etc., they assaulted officials, injured many and killed some."³ Furthermore, it sparked an underground terrorist movement.⁴

Thus, exploring the role of non-Gandhian nationalist movements during the few years prior to independence will allow for a more versatile and realistic understanding to the immediate causes of India attaining independence in 1947. The roles of both the INA efforts and the RIN mutiny will be

¹ Ian Copland: *India 1885-1947*. Pearson Education Limited, London: 2001. p. 83-87.

² Bombay, Calcutta, and Delhi.

³ Tara Chand: *History of the Freedom Movement in India*. Publication Division, New Delhi: 1972. p. 379.

⁴ It was most intense in Bihar and the United Provinces.

evaluated in the light of British reaction since it was the British who ultimately withdrew from India.

2. The Indian National Army

2.1 Background: Birth and Military Efforts of Subhas Bose's Indian National Army

Amar Singh, an old revolutionary, formed the Independence League of India in December 1941. Captain Singh⁵ was placed in command of the Indian troops: "The days of British oppression in the East are numbered and their hated rule must soon come to and end..."⁶ The League decided to raise the Indian National Army⁷ and to call a meeting of leading Indians in East Asia and Bangkok in June 1942. The meeting decided to organize an army of 150 000 under direct control of the Council of Action of the Indian Independence League and Mohan Singh was elected General Officer Commanding (G.O.C.) of the INA. Eventually about 20,000 people joined the INA: "The Indian community was stirred by a strong desire to contribute their mite to the freedom movement."⁸

According to Gopal, The INA was yet a disorganized mass when a freedom fighter called Subhas Chandra Bose arrived in their midst: "There was jubilation in Indian camps; all said they had now a leader amongst them."⁹ Rash Behari Bose announced at a conference of delegates from different parts of East Asia, held at Singapore, that Subhas Bose would take over from him the leadership of the Indian movement. Thus, it can be seen that Bose was installed in a leadership position – he seized an army whose foundation had already been laid.

Under Subhas Bose's leadership the INA fought beside the Japanese, but their military success¹⁰ turned out to be short-lived. The INA's defeat was sealed for good with the surrender of the Japanese at Kohima¹¹ on 22 June 1944. Even though the INA's efforts to free India did not match the British military might, it was the consequences of their defeat that was to exert any influence on the Indian people – and eventually on British policy.

⁵ Senior Indian officer in the 14th Punjab Regiment stationed at Jitra.

⁶ Ram Gopal: *How India Struggled for Freedom*. Frederick Muller Limited, London: 1967. p. 442.

⁷ Its official Indian name was Azad Hind Fauj.

⁸ Ram Gopal: *How India Struggled for Freedom*. Frederick Muller Limited, London: 1967. p. 442.

⁹ Ram Gopal: *How India Struggled for Freedom*. Frederick Muller Limited, London: 1967. p. 442.

¹⁰ They advanced through Burma and captured the Andaman and Nicobar islands and renamed them Shaheed and Swaraj. The INA reached the borders of Assam and Bose raised the Indian tricolour at the town of Moirang in Manipur.

¹¹ The British prevented Japan from gaining access to India at the Indian/Burmese border.

2.2 The Aftermath: the Impact of the 1945 Trials on National Consciousness

A number of historians¹² recognize the nationalist awareness and “widespread support”¹³ that awoke during the INA trial which opened in Red Fort¹⁴ and lasted from 5 November to 31 December. There was “immediate and widespread public interest”¹⁵ as the three commanders Shah Nawaz Khan, P.K. Sahgal and Gurbaksh Dhillon responsible of the INA were to be tried. The charges involved the general conduct of officers in “waging war against the King” as well as the death sentences they were alleged to have carried out on soldiers of the INA. According to Mahajan, the agitation caused by the trials was a landmark: “...the high pitch or intensity, at which the campaign for the release of INA prisoners was conducted, was unprecedented.”¹⁶ Even Nehru remarked: “Intense passion has been aroused and iron has entered the soul of large numbers of the people.”¹⁷

These claims can be understood from the press coverage and other publicity that it received, from threats of revenge that were publicly made and also from the large number of big meetings held. Public interest through out India was lit by the publishing of “long commentaries day by day.”¹⁸ This was evident from newspapers like *Amrita Bazar Patrika* that wrote: “These events have stirred public feeling to its very depths.”¹⁹ By November 1945, when the first Red Fort trials were held there were daily editorials hailing the INA men as the most heroic patriots and criticizing the government stand.²⁰ Pamphlets such as “Patriots not Traitors” were being circulated²¹ and posters threatening the death of “20 English dogs” for every INA man sentenced were pasted all over Delhi.²² A speaker at a meeting in Rajahmundry warned that for every INA man executed, 100

¹² Sumit Sarkar, Ram Gopal, Hugh Toye, Sucheta Mahajan, and Bradip Bose.

¹³ Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*. Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 77.

¹⁴ Also known as “Lal Quila” which derived its name from the red sandstone used in its construction. It was built in 1618 and once housed the Mughal emperors. Under the British, the Fort became a criminal court.

¹⁵ Hugh Toye: *Subhash Chandra Bose: The Springing Tiger*. Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai: 1957. p. 172.

¹⁶ Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*. Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 81.

¹⁷ File No. G-20/1942-45, *All India Congress Committee Papers* (henceforth AICC papers), NMML, New Delhi.

¹⁸ Hugh Toye: *Subhash Chandra Bose: The Springing Tiger*. Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai: 1957. p. 173.

¹⁹ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 15 November 1945, NMML.

²⁰ *The Searchlight* editorial of 27 August 1945 spoke of the INA as a “clear cause for large-hearted clemency”. The editorial of 13 October 1945 in *The Leader* declared “that the INA men fought for their country’s freedom and their countrymen will continue to look upon them as national heroes...”

²¹ Delhi FR for second half of October 1945, *ibid.*, 18/10/45. Appears in Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India..* Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 82.

²² Delhi FR for the first half of November 1945, *ibid.*, 18/11/45. Appears in Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India..* Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 82.

white men would lose their lives²³ while in Banares it was declared at a public gathering that “if INA men were not saved, revenge would be taken on European children.”²⁴

Further indication of not only the popular interest, but action can be measured from the 160 political meetings held in the Central Provinces and Berar alone in the first fortnight of October 1945, at which the INA was discussed.²⁵ The INA Day and Week celebrations²⁶ all over the country were characterized by strikes and huge processions. Commercial institutions, shops and markets stopped business on the day of the first trial and during INA Day and Week in various towns.²⁷ Participation was of many kinds: some contributed funds, others attended or organized meetings, shopkeepers owned shutters, and political parties and organizations raised the demand for the release of the prisoners. Municipal committees and Indians abroad subscribed liberally to the INA funds, leading Nehru to comment that money “flows in unasked from all quarters.”²⁸

2.3 The Calcutta Demonstrations of November 1945 and February 1946 over the Issue of the INA Prisoners

According to Sarkar, the “decisive shift in British policy really came about under mass pressure in the autumn and winter of 1945-46...”²⁹ during the INA trials. On the 20 November, an Intelligence Bureau note admitted: “There has seldom been a matter which has attracted so much Indian public interest and, it is safe to say, sympathy...”³⁰ On the 21 November 1945 a procession of students, mainly from the Forward Bloc³¹ shouted slogans such as “*Jai Hind.*”³²

This popular explosion in Calcutta on the INA issue on 21-23 November 1945 set a pattern of periodic upheavals as trouble spread all over the city with strikes by Sikh taxi factories, burning of cars and lorries, crowds blocking trains, and barricades on streets. The students retaliated by hurling

²³ Madras FR for the first half of November 1945, *ibid.*, 18/11/45. Appears in Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India..* Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p.

²⁴ Hallett, Governor, U.P., to Wavell, 19 November 1945, TP, Vol. 6, pp. 507.

²⁵ Note on the INA Situation by Director, Intelligence Bureau, enclosed in Government of India, Home Department to Secretary, Political Department, India Office, 20 November 1945. Appears in Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India..* Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 82.

²⁶ 12 November and 5-11 November, respectively.

²⁷ Punjab, Bombay, Madras, Patna, and Quetta. Appears in Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India..* Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 84.

²⁸ Nehru's statement to the press, 16 November 1945, Allahanad, *JNSW*, Vol. 14, pp. 352-53.

²⁹ Sumit Sarkar: *Modern India, 1885-1947.* The Macmillan Press Limited, London: 1983. p. 418.

³⁰ Sumit Sarkar: *Modern India, 1885-1947.* The Macmillan Press Limited, London: 1983. p. 418.

³¹ Students from the Student Federation and the Islamia College also joined.

³² Patriotic slogan meaning "Victory to India" or "Long live India".

stones and brickbats. The police later noted that “the crowds when fired on largely stood their ground or at most only receded a little, to return again to the attack.”³³ Order was restored only after 14 cases of firing, in which 33 were killed and about 200 civilians injured; 150 police and army vehicles had been destroyed, and 70 British and 37 American soldiers injured. In November 1945, the governor of Bengal spoke of the virtual “paralysing” of the “life of the community.”³⁴

The British faced a second Calcutta riot from 11 to 13 February 1946 when the people rioted³⁵ during the second Red Fort trials. Protest meetings and rallies were held, barricades set up, Europeans assaulted, strikes observed by students and workers and hartals organized. The burning of military lorries, cars and trams was fairly common and the Tollygunge Tram Depot was set on fire.³⁶ The police and army could restore order only after two days of street clashes in which 84 were killed and 300 injured according to official estimates.³⁷

2.4 British Reaction

Initially, the outcome of the trial was that the charges of waging war were found proven and likewise one of the charges arising out of the death sentences. All three officers were sentenced to transportation³⁸ and cashiering³⁹ for life.

The reactions to the Calcutta riots were “very significant”⁴⁰ and which Wavell called a “turning-point.”⁴¹ The British recognized the need for some concessions and on 1 December it was announced that only INA members accused of murder or brutal treatment of fellow-prisoners would be brought to trial and imprisonment sentences passed against the first batch were remitted in January. The Commander-in-Chief Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck remitted the sentences of transportation, but confirmed the other penalties. The Commander-in-Chief’s action “amounted, in the popular mind, to an acquittal.”⁴² There were a few more courts martial to be tried, such as Ali

³³ Governor Casey to Wavell, 2 January 1946, *Ibid.*, pp. 725. Appears in Sumit Sarkar: *Modern India, 1885-1947*. The Macmillan Press Limited, London: 1983. p. 422.

³⁴ Casey to Wavell, 2 January 1946, *ibid.*, p. 724. Appears in Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*. Sage Publications Private Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 95.

³⁵ Against the seven years’ rigorous imprisonment sentence passed on Abdul Rashid of the INA.

³⁶ Gautam Chattopadhyay: “The Almost Revolution”, *Essays in Honour of S.C Sarkar*. India People’s Publishing House, New Delhi: 1976. p. 427.

³⁷ Gautam Chattopadhyay: “The Almost Revolution”, *Essays in Honour of S.C Sarkar*. India People’s Publishing House, New Delhi: 1976. p. 427.

³⁸ Transportation or penal transportation is the deporting of convicted criminals to a remote location, usually an island or distant colonial territory in order to to exile prisoners and separate them from the general populace.

³⁹ To deprive a military man of his office.

⁴⁰ Sumit Sarkar: *Modern India, 1885-1947*. The Macmillan Press Limited, London: 1983. p. 421.

⁴¹ Sumit Sarkar: *Modern India, 1885-1947*. The Macmillan Press Limited, London: 1983. p. 421.

⁴² Hugh Toye: *Subhash Chandra Bose: The Springing Tiger*. Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai: 1957. p. 174.

Rashid, but in May 1946 these remaining charges were withdrawn after the second round of riots in February 1946. But what exactly was the reason for British leniency?

It can be said that one of the most alarming features of the INA agitation to the British government was the “unexpectedly sympathetic”⁴³ support to the cause from within the armed forces. According to Mahajan their opinion gave rise to British concessions: “...it was the weight of their opinion behind the demand for leniency that acted as the decisive factor in the government’s decision to modify its policy.”⁴⁴ This viewpoint can be understood from the comments made by the British, such as Sir Auchinleck who illuminated to Wavell about a “growing feeling of sympathy for the INA” that pervaded the Indian army.⁴⁵ Auchinleck’s evaluation for the sympathy for the INA stated that 100 per cent of the Indian Commissioned Officers were sympathetic, that the King’s Commissioned Indian Officers were very divide, that 100 percent of the Royal Indian Air Force were “100 per cent INA” and Indian Other Ranks were, on the whole, apathetic, but sympathetic.⁴⁶

The Commander-in-Chief Auchinleck, who had earlier argued for stern punishment, modified his view by late November, when he reported to Whitehall that “general opinion in the army is in favour of leniency”⁴⁷ The “great majority” of the army was believed to be “pleased” at the “leniency” shown by the authorities in commuting the sentences of the first three INA men accused of cashiering and forfeiture of pay.⁴⁸ Lt. General Toker stated that the “INA affair was...threatening to tumble down the whole edifice of the Indian Army”⁴⁹ while Wavell commented that “harm had been done to the morale and discipline of the army.”⁵⁰ Indeed, the former British Prime Minister Mr. Clement Attlee commented later: “The loyalty of the British Indian Army to the crown was so severely shaken when they saw Netaji’s INA that it was just not

⁴³ Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India..* Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 87.

⁴⁴ Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India..* Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 87.

⁴⁵ Auchinleck to Wavell, 26 November 1945, cited in J. Connell, Auchinleck, London, 1949, p. 806. Appears in Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India..* Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 87.

⁴⁶ Appreciation of Political Situation, 20 February 1946, cited in Chowdhury, “The Congress Triumph in South-East Punjab”, pp. 92. Taken from Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India..* Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 88.

⁴⁷ Auchinleck to Wavell, 24 November 1945, *ibid.*, Taken from Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India..* Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 88.

⁴⁸ Secret and Personnel letter from the Commander-in-Chief to all Army Commanders, 12 February 1946, enclosed in Auchinleck to Wavell, 13 February 1946, *ibid.*, pp. 939. Taken from Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India..* Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. p. 88.

⁴⁹ Francis Toker: *While Memory Serves.* Cassell, London: 1950. p. 43.

⁵⁰ Wavell’s interview with Azad and Asaf Ali, 10 March 1946. Quote from: Archibad Wavell: *Wavell the Viceroy’s Journal.* Oxford University Press, London: 1973. p. 222.

possible to continue British rule in India.”⁵¹ The INA might have not been the sole factor in British withdrawal, but it did play its part in distressing the British.

2.5 The Role of the INA in the Freedom Struggle

Even though the INA got the opportunity to revel in military success, it was to a limited extent and was no match to the British military might. In the long-run, however, the INA efforts came to spark the courage to rebel as they triggered off a revolutionary struggle among various sections of the society. The mood of unrest awoken by the INA trials underlines how the impact of the INA was more the result of the public INA trials than the military ambition: “...there can be little doubt that the Indian National Army, not in its unhappy career on the battlefield, but in its thunderous disintegration, hastened the end of British rule in India.”⁵²

However, by the time of this “thunderous disintegration” there was no INA leadership - Subhas Bose had died.⁵³ Even though some INA historians⁵⁴ claim that Bose provoked the events that would eventually contribute to the emancipation of India, it was the trials of the three commanders Shah Nawaz, Sahgal and Dhillon that agitated the masses into popular revolt. His contribution in the aftermath of the INA efforts was limited to a symbolic significance as he “kept the freedom movement alive the minds of the people.”⁵⁵ This spirit was reflected from the tense political atmosphere following the INA trials in the wake of the Calcutta upsurges. Even though these riots did not directly lead to independence, they manifested to the British the widespread discontent among the masses, especially the students. The speed at which consciousness spread and the immediacy of the riots as a reaction to the initial trial outcomes created a sense of urgency, which is manifested in the exchanges between the British.

Toye argues that these popular riots sparked by the INA trials “turned the issue of independence for India into an instant burning question once more.”⁵⁶ However, the British reaction suggests that one

⁵¹ Amrita Bazar Patrika, 20th August, 1973. Appears in G.S Mangat: *Indian National Army: Role in India's Struggle for Freedom*. Gagan Publishers, Ludhiana: 1991. p. 170.

⁵² Hugh Toye: *Subhash Chandra Bose: The Springing Tiger*. Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai: 1957. p. 175.

⁵³ He is said to have died in a plane crash over Taiwan on 18 August 1945. “Bose’s final fate has remained one of the enduring mysteries of the war.” Quote from: Subhadra Sen Gupta: *A Flag, a Song, and a Pinch of Salt*. Penguin Books India Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2007. p. 34.

⁵⁴ G.S Mangat, Subhadra Sen Gupta, and Hugh Toye.

⁵⁵ Subhadra Sen Gupta: *A Flag, a Song, and a Pinch of Salt*. Penguin Books India Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2007. p. 35.

⁵⁶ Hugh Toye: *Subhas Chandra Bose: The Springing Tiger*. Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai: 1957. p. 175.

of the main concerns was the spread of agitation to the armed forces. The urban concentration of the Calcutta riots made it easy for the authorities to deploy troops and effectively suppress the upsurges demonstrating that the government retained its repressive machine intact, and was determined to use it harshly and effectively in case of violence. Disorder could always be suppressed and violence crushed, but the loss of army loyalty could deprive the British from a vital support system. Thus, leniency was an act of far-sightedness on the part of the British.

But far-sightedness could only be derived from the prevailing situation: the widespread action taken by the people in the form of campaigns, meetings, donations, and INA Day and Week celebrations. It was not a question of law – whether the three officers had committed the crimes was not the main issue. As Nehru said: “Those three officers and the INA became symbol of India fighting for her independence...It became in reality not merely a question of law or of forensic eloquence...but rather a trial of strength between the will of the Indian people and the will of those who hold power in India.”⁵⁷ Thus, without the people, the role of the INA would remain minimal in the road to independence – it contributed by providing an agitation that the masses could pick up.

3. The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny

3.1 Roots of Discontent

The Royal Indian Navy mutiny and the popular discontent it provoked among the civilians was the last major non-Gandhian nationalist effort to weaken the British grip on India. It was partly provoked by the INA trials and the rebellious atmosphere that surrounded it. Like the Calcutta riots and the efforts of the INA, it was not initiated by the Congress and came to develop a violent nature of rebellion.

A chain of various events had led to the RIN mutiny and the INA trials were one factor among the rest.⁵⁸ Thus, the INA trials had played their part in mounting a “fever of excitement affecting the whole political climate.”⁵⁹ Rear-Admiral Rattray, Flag Officer, Bombay stated: “The background of the mutiny was the grievances put forward by the ratings, but the overriding fact, I think, was the

⁵⁷ Foreword by J.L. Nehru to the published proceedings of the INA Court Material. Quote from Hugh Toye: *Subhas Chandra Bose: The Springing Tiger*. Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai: 1957. p. 174.

⁵⁸ The release of Indian leaders in June 1945, their negotiations with the Viceroy Lord Wavell, the end of the War against Japan, and a small mutiny in the Royal Indian Air Force earlier in 1946.

⁵⁹ Percy S. Gourgey: *The Indian Naval Revolt of 1946*. Orient Longman Limited, Chennai: 1996. p. 5.

political tension prevailing in the country since the end of 1945.” According to Gourgey when the RIN mutiny occurred; India was “in a state of great turmoil”⁶⁰ due to the recent INA trials that had “inflamed nationalists through out the length and breadth of India.” This view is verified by Bradip Bose’s who argues that that “the most significant development was the impact of the INA on the British Indian armed forces.”⁶¹

3.2 The Drift towards Violence

The mutiny originated on February 18, 1946 on the *HMIS Talwar* and then spread to ten establishments and 45 ships.⁶² By day two, the news of the mutiny had spread to all parts of India through newspapers and the All India Radio. Casualty figures were low for a mutiny which had assumed countrywide proportions. While this was generally the case with the Navy, it was “certainly not” the case among the civilian masses of India where, as Sardar Patel declared, “the destruction of property was wantonly thoughtless.”⁶³ Moreover, Gourgey claims to have seen the police be greeted by a hail of stones, garbage, and abuse and ratings advancing menacingly towards the police. “The familiar weapons of street rioting, seen before in communal rioting, were all brought into play.”⁶⁴

In Bombay, crowds smashed shop windows and attacked, burned and over-turned tramcars and buses. Several people were injured and the civil police were forced to open fire. In the bazaar and mill areas, four branches of the Imperial Bank were burned down. By the time local jails were packed with rioters, Bombay went to bed that night “with revolution in the air, rioting, looting and acts of violence having broken out in all parts of the city.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Percy S. Gourgey: *The Indian Naval Revolt of 1946*. Orient Longman Limited, Chennai: 1996. p. 2.

⁶¹ Bradip Bose: *Subhas Bose and India Today: A New Tryst with Destiny?* Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Limited: 1999. p. 25.

⁶² Satyindra Singh: *Under Two Ensigns, the Indian Navy 1945-1950*. Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., New Delhi: 1986. p. 95

⁶³ Percy S. Gourgey: *The Indian Naval Revolt of 1946*. Orient Longman Limited, Chennai: 1996. p. 11.

⁶⁴ These included weapons such as slinging soda-water bottles and throwing burning hats in the air. From Percy S. Gourgey: *The Indian Naval Revolt of 1946*. Orient Longman Limited, Chennai: 1996. p. 13.

⁶⁵ Percy S. Gourgey: *The Indian Naval Revolt of 1946*. Orient Longman Limited, Chennai: 1996. p. 13.

3.3 British Reaction

On February 23, Mr Attlee gave to the House a summary of the incidents which had already occurred. He outlined the day-to-day developments of the mutiny and further stated:

“The Congress party officially disclaimed participation in the mutiny... and it is anticipated that there will be more trouble before the situation is stabilised... The mutineers have been told that only unconditional surrender will be accepted...”⁶⁶

Shortly after his statement on the mutiny, Mr Attlee announced in the Commons a decision by the Government with the King’s approval to send to India towards the end of March a special mission of Cabinet Ministers, consisting of Lord Pethwick-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps, and Mr A.V. Alexander who would carry out the transfer of power.⁶⁷

In a dispatch dated March 22, 1946 to King George VI, Lord Wavell then Viceroy of India, had the following to say: “The last three months have been anxious and depressing.”⁶⁸ At the same time, he pinpointed his concern: “A very ugly situation... The most disturbing feature of all is that unrest is beginning to appear in some units of the Indian Army...”

3.4 The Role of the RIN Mutiny in the Freedom Struggle

Like the INA trials, the RIN strike provoked a violent response from the Indian masses in the form of street rioting. In contrast to the INA agitation, however, it did not lead to British leniency as only unconditional surrender was accepted. Even though the leading Congress figures disavowed the mutiny,⁶⁹ the lower ranks and the civilians generally had evinced tremendous sympathy for the cause of the ratings precisely because it appeared to be bound up with the political situation.

⁶⁶ Percy S. Gourgey: *The Indian Naval Revolt of 1946*. Orient Longman Limited, Chennai: 1996. p. 44.

⁶⁷ 1) preparatory discussions with the elected representatives of British India and with the Indian States, in order to secure the widest measure of agreement as to the method of framing a constitution; 2) setting up of a constitution-making body; and 3) bringing into being of an Executive Council having the support of the main Indian parties.

⁶⁸ "... They have been marked by continuous and unbridled abuse of the Government, of the British, of officials and police ... The RIN mutinies came on us with practically no warning. The riots in Bombay which accompanied the mutiny were simply due to the dangerous mobs which are always ready in any Indian city to seize the opportunity for burning and looting; they have of course been encouraged by the violent speaking of the last six months. A very ugly situation..." Quote from: Satyindra Singh: *Under Two Ensigns, the Indian Navy 1945-1950*. Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., New Delhi: 1986. p. 125.

⁶⁹ Gandhi condemned it: “In resorting to mutiny, the Royal Indian Navy ratings were badly advised... If they mutinied for the freedom of India they were doubly wrong. They could not do so without a call from a prepared revolutionary party. They were thoughtless in believing that by their might they would deliver India from foreign domination.” Quote

According to Sarkar, the RIN mutiny was “quite possibly the single most decisive reason behind the British decision to make a quick withdrawal.”⁷⁰ Gourgey takes a similar stance: “The tense political situation which continued to exist, and of which the mutiny was a symptom, doubtless caused the Prime Minister to make a decisive statement on India’s future.” According to Dutt, the Cabinet Mission was sent as a direct response to the naval mutiny: “On February 18, the Bombay naval strike began. On February 19, Attlee, in the House of Commons, announced the decision to dispatch the Cabinet Mission.”⁷¹

However, these claims on the role of the RIN mutiny are merely in accordance with the date of the announcement of the Cabinet Mission Scheme. The decision to send out the mission was taken by the British Cabinet on 22 January 1946 and even its announcement on 19 February 1946 had been slated a week earlier.⁷² According to Sarkar “the greatest threat of all, however, was the naval mutiny in Bombay on 18-23 February 1946 – one of the most truly heroic...episodes in our freedom struggle.”⁷³ Even if it was heroic, does it make it the greatest threat of all? After all, the decision to send the Cabinet Mission to India was made prior to the mutiny. Despite this, a few things can be said for certain about the role of the RIN mutiny.

The Commission of Inquiry revealed that the RIN mutiny was partly sparked by the atmosphere created by the INA trial agitation. Wavell’s dispatch depicts that the RIN mutiny had made a deep impression on the minds of British political leaders who were worried of it spreading to the Armed Forces. Moreover, it can be seen that Sir Auchinleck’s evaluation⁷⁴ of the sympathy of the Indian Army towards the INA in the aftermath of the trials proved to be plausible. The RIN mutiny verified the British concerns of the spread of the national consciousness concerning the INA trials. That itself was a distressing beginning - the British could not afford a potential loss of Indian Army loyalty. The mutiny and the fear it propagated stood as a confirmation on the British decision to send the Cabinet Mission.

from Satyindra Singh: *Under Two Ensigns, the Indian Navy 1945-1950*. Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., New Delhi: 1986. p. 129.

⁷⁰ Sumit Sarkar: *Modern India, 1885-1947*. The Macmillan Press Limited, London: 1983. p. 411.

⁷¹ Rajani Palme Dutt: *India Today*. People’s Publishing House, Bombay: 1949. p. 542.

⁷² Sucheta Mahajan: *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India..* Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, New Delhi: 2000. P. 100.

⁷³ Sumit Sarkar: *Modern India, 1885-1947*. The Macmillan Press Limited, London: 1983. p. 423.

⁷⁴ See Section 2.3.

4. Conclusion

What the RIN mutiny and the INA efforts have in common is violent confrontation with the authorities. Thus, at a deeper level, their role involves making us consider alternative ways to attain independence than a non-violent one – after all, both succeeded at distressing the British decision makers.

Weaknesses were observed in the historical sources available when it comes to dealing with the INA and the RIN mutiny. Interpretation trends have evolved in the course of time: older works tend to assign them with a greater role in the British withdrawal than contemporary interpretations. Indeed hindsight has allowed for more holistic accounts of the British withdrawal, but at the same time there is a tendency to neglect the role of the INA and the RIN mutiny. There exists a historical gap: some sources undermine their roles by neglecting them while others resort to glorifying. This exists with INA historians that are inclined to generate great man theories by raising Subhas Bose's name and ignoring the contribution of the ones who acted as his buttresses.⁷⁵ Any actual influence on British decision-making was exerted only after the disintegration of the INA - it was the popular consciousness and its accompanying rioting that led to British leniency.

Another limitation noted in historical accounts is the tendency to see the INA and the RIN mutiny as rival non-Gandhian efforts. Historians have an inclination to claim either effort as “the greatest threat of all” instead of perceiving them as parts of a continuum of unrest. Indeed, the RIN mutiny was the latter non-Gandhian effort in terms of timing, but was partly inspired by the INA's contribution to the tense political atmosphere.

Despite these limitations, in the light of a sequence of non-Gandhian movements that generated an atmosphere of unrest, as well as the concessions made by the British, it should be recognized that India's struggle for independence was a contribution of not only the non-violent Gandhian efforts or the constitutional negotiations of the mid-1940 between the British and the Congress. Furthermore, the British decision to transfer power was not merely and mainly a response to the immediate situation prevailing in the winter of 1945-1946, but a result of the realization that their legitimacy to rule had been irrevocably eroded over the years.

⁷⁵ The INA was a mass effort that involved thousands of volunteers as well various skilled commanding officers.

A comprehensive explanation of British withdrawal from India would include British constitutional reforms, the Congress's Gandhian campaigns, the impact of World War II on Britain, and the closer co-operation between the British and the Indian groups that came about during WWII. Within this framework there would also be a place for non-Gandhian efforts, including the INA and RIN mutiny.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Gourgey, Percy S. *The Indian Naval Revolt of 1946*. Chennai: Orient Longman Limited, 1996.

Singh, Satyindra. *Under Two Ensigns, the Indian Navy 1945-1950*. New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., 1986.

Tuker, Francis. *While Memory Serves*. London: Cassell, 1950.

Wavell, Archibald. *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal*. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Secondary Sources

Bose, Pradip. *Subhas Bose and India Today: A New Tryst with Destiny?* New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1999.

Chand, Tara. *History of the Freedom Movement in India*. New Delhi: Publications Division, 1972.

Chattopadhyay, Gautam. "The Almost Revolution", *Essays in Honour of S.C Sarkar*. New Delhi: India People's Publishing House, 1976.

Copland, Ian. *India 1885-1947*. London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001.

Dutt, Rajani Palme. *India Today*. Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1949.

Gopal, Ram. *How India Struggled for Freedom*. London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1967.

Gupta, Subhadra Sen. *A Flag, a Song, and a Pinch of Salt*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Limited, 2007.

Mahajan, Sucheta. *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd., 2000.

Mangat, G.S. *Indian National Army: Role in India's Struggle for Freedom*. Ludhiana: Gagan Publishers, 1991.

Misra, Maria. *Vishnu's Crowded Temple: India since the Great Rebellion*. London: Penguin Books Limited, 2007.

Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India, 1885-1947*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1983.

Toye, Hugh. *Subhash Chandra Bose: The Springing Tiger*. Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House, 1957.

Wolpert, Stanley. *India*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991.