

Contribution of Indian Diaspora in Singapore during India's Freedom Struggle

Atanu Mohapatra* and Aparna Tripathi*

Abstract

Singapore is a multi-cultural state and Indians enjoy their cultural freedom and they have been integrated very well in Singaporean society. They are also very well connected with their roots and 'Indianness'. The native citizens of Singapore have learned to enjoy and admire the Indian culture, for example, Indian songs, folk dance and movies have become very famous everywhere. In Fact, the Indian community in Singapore represents the diversity of India. Singapore as a multi-cultural state accepts every religion and community. Indians have their own marriage rituals, their own caste patterns in Singapore. Ethnicity and Identity are reflected in the Indians in Singapore through their life and activities. There heterogeneity is described by the example of ethnicity. The different Indian communities like Tamils, Punjabis, Malyalis, Bengalis, Telugus and Gujaratis are associated with their community-based groups. These groups perpetuate their ethnic identities in the form of togetherness. Due to their ethnic identities in the Singaporean society, sometimes the Indians seem like an inherent part of the society and sometimes aliens. Therefore, this paper aims to study and understand the formation and integration process of socio-cultural values and beliefs of Indians in Singaporean society and through this analyze the challenges and prospects of Indian community in Singapore.

Keywords: Diaspora, Community, India, Singapore, Multi-cultural, State

Introduction

Indian Freedom Movement is historically relevant and has also brought many consequences for India. It happened as a result of the colonial government's exploitative attitude. During the colonial period, European influence occurred in practically every element of Indian life. Indian people began agitating against the colonial authority as a result

* Prof. Atanu Mohapatra is Chairperson of Centre for Diaspora Studies, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar, Gujarat

* Ms. Aparna Tripathi is PhD Research Scholar at the Centre for Diaspora Studies, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar, Gujarat

of these initiatives. Indian reformers and leaders travelled to foreign countries and witnessed citizen freedom in respective countries. They were surprised to see that the native citizens of these countries were enjoying liberty in every form of their lives. Therefore, they formed campaigns and organisations to free India so that Indians could experience the same level of liberty. Many leaders, such as Gandhi, began their political careers in a foreign country (South Africa) and dedicated their lives to ensuring India's independence. Indian leaders such as Shyam ji Krishna, Lala Har Dayal, and Bhikaji Cama, visited different countries to promote India's independence campaigns. They backed national movements by forming organisations such as the India Home Rule Society, India House Ghadar Party, and Indian National Army.

For nearly two centuries, India has been enslaved by a foreign power. Since the very first struggle of India's freedom struggle which was begun in 1857, also known as the Indian Mutiny. For the freedom of the motherland, a number of battles have been fought both inside and beyond India. Whether using aggressive or peaceful tactics, visible or hidden tactics, civil or military tactics, individual or group tactics, within or outside India, the mission has always been the same: to win our birthright of freedom. The mindset behind this was to bring home to Indians, in a kaleidoscope manner. The Indian Independence Movement, which was begun in East Asia by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. The foundation of organisation named Azad Hind, the Indian National Army (INA), which served as the Government's weapon, and other subsidiary formations were used for the campaign's aforementioned components. On the dawn of freedom, a brief summary of Netaji's momentous effort to India's independence is the most tribute his followers and countrymen can pay him on the anniversary of his birth.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was unquestionably a foresighted and pragmatic leader. He expected World War II to erupt sooner or later as an inevitable result of the Versailles Treaty. He understood that until a military assault was initiated from outside India, our nation could not be liberated. During World War II, he also realised that another campaign could only be gained from Britishers adversaries, not from their allies.

With these fundamental beliefs, he made his way out of India, first to Germany, and then to Japan.

Beginning of Indian National Movement

On July 4, 1943, Netaji arrived in Singapore. Rash Behari Bose, a veteran nationalist exiled in Japan, had already started the East Asian Indian Independence Movement. The outgoing leader passed the baton to a newcomer, Subhas Chandra Bose, better known as 'Netaji'. Within several days of his arrival, Bose had established himself as the link between Japan and the other captured countries of East Asia, and he had absorbed all the Indians who resided there. He emphasised to them the significance of grabbing the fantastic opportunity that had presented itself to Indians in East Asia at the time. His arguments were basic yet effective and as well as unchallengeable and highly persuasive. His dedication to our mission and sincerity in his intentions were evident. Everyone's ears were filled with the words "Netaji will not surrender our homeland to the Japanese." Netaji became the most popular figure in India, as well as in East Asia, as a result of his dynamic personality, daring conduct, sterling character, pleasant demeanour, and childish innocence.

Under Netaji's command, the INA was categorised into three sections. On October 21, 1943, he established the Interim Government of Azad Hind, which included a Council of Ministers and counselors. On October 24, 1943, as Head of the Provisional Government, he announced attack against British government in order to free forty crores of India's citizens. The National Flag (Tri-Colour) of the Congress was chosen as the flag of the Interim Government. In order to meet this objective a new national anthem was created for all Muslim brothers and sisters. "Chalo Delhi" was the battle slogan and "Jai Hind" the recognised salute. The expressions of elation seen during the outbreak of battle in front of a large public and military assembly in Singapore were incredible, spectacular and unforgettable. "Father of our nation, we need your blessing and direction at this vital juncture, when we have launched on this important step towards the attainment of freedom for our motherland," Netaji broadcast to Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian people shortly after the declaration of war. Netaji held high admiration

for all of our national leaders, especially Mahatma ji, whom he regarded as his friend, philosopher, and constant advisor.

Many new institutions were formed to aid in the conduct of the campaign. For instance, "Azad Hind Dal, Rani of Jhansi Regiment, Indian Independence Leagues, Balak Sena etc (Chandra et al, 1998)." Material resources were abundant, and crores of rupees came into the National Bank of Azad Hind's coffers. In reality, everyone willingly sacrificed their "Than,' 'Man,' and 'Dhan'" for the sake of freedom. In many training sites, troops were recruited and trained simultaneously (Chandra et al, 1998).

Contribution of Indian Diaspora in Singapore during Pre-Independence Period

'Neta ji' as Subhas Chandra Bose, a renowned Indian nationalist leader and two-time President of the Indian National Congress, led the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia from July 1943 to the Japanese surrender in August 1945. This period is remembered in history texts and popular memory as the pinnacle of Indian enthusiasm among Singaporean Indians. The notion of being on a path to rescue motherland from imperialism sparked a level of "Indianess" and patriotism among Indians that had never been witnessed before. So many Indians in Singapore were personally involved in the campaign to independent India from English control under Subhas leadership. Many young citizens joined the Indian National Army, and many of them were positioned on the Burma-India border. Finally, struggle of INA proved a military defeat, but it is considered as a glorious moment and is remembered as a heroic chapter in the annals of the Indian diaspora in Singapore (Cohen, 1963).

Voices of Subalterns

The emergence of the INA, and particularly Subhas involvement in the formation of a revolutionary force, has been the focus of historical studies on the Indians in colonial times. While these are crucial aspects of the Indian narrative. The 'voices' of subalterns touched by these changes have received relatively little attention. Many people felt compelled to liberate India from British dominance. According to their

accounts, the conditions placed on them were harsh, and the pan-Indian identity encouraged was not always the result of a true shift in perception, but rather was enforced on them. Although, the study's central emphasis is about why so many Indian citizens entered the struggle at that time is a primary focus. The study also addresses the limitations of the movement, particularly after 1944 onwards, when word of the INA's military failure spread (Fay, 1995).

Indeed, the Japanese Occupation's most terrible period occurred over these two years. The economic situation gradually deteriorated. Indians, as well as many other ethnicities in Singapore, were plagued by lack of supply, hunger, and medical delivery delays, all of which contributed to a significant rise in mortality rates in the port city. At the same time, countless Indians being subjected to forced labour on Japanese projects including deadly 'Thai-Burma Death' Railway and many have never returned. Several Indians had motivated to transfer to new towns where conditions were challenging. As a result of relocation initiatives required to deal with resource scarcity in the metropolis. The Indian experience during this crisis left a strong mark on the diaspora's socio-political growth in the port city, with long-term ramifications (McCoy, 2013).

Unite for the Movement

An ecstatic crowd greeted Subhas Chandra Bose (often referred to as 'Netaji') at the Kallang airport in Singapore on July 2, 1943. Two days later, delegations from the Indian Independence League (IIL), INA, and Japanese troops convened witnessed Rash Behari Bose's formal surrender of the Movement to Netaji at the Greater East Asia Theater. Neta ji gave one of the first incredible speeches in Singapore when he accepted the charge, declaring preparations to form a new constitution of Free India. Netaji worked incredibly hard in the aforementioned period to put in place the measures that would allow the Provisional Government to be formed. His oceanfront residence at 61 Meyer Road 2 in Singapore was regularly was surrounded by visitors including Japan and INA officials, IIL officials,

important Indian people, and numerous more who came solely for a darshan of the famous commander (Sharma, 2018).

Netaji initial mission was to bolster the spirit of INA force. On the 5th of July, he gave the legendary Dilli Chalo! (Onwards to Delhi!) address to INA forces at the Padang. According to eyewitness accounts, Netaji's appearance had an immediate impact on the thirteen thousand strong army. Lieutenant-Colonel Sahgal, who later has become INA's Deputy Commander and Army Secretary, noticed a change among the troops, "A large number of people went out of the INA with Mohan Singh. And morale was naturally low. When Subhas came, the whole thing changed. Subhas Chandra Bose was a known Indian national leader.... Everybody felt he would be [more] acceptable to the people of India than Mohan Singh.... The coming of Subhas Chandra Bose completely revolutionised the whole movement because people had great confidence in him" (Upadhyay, 2014).

Support by the Government and Indians

Netaji's organisation was paraded once again the next day and this time in front of the Prime Minister of Japan. Tojo was alleged to have given instant consent for 'the foundation of the Interim administration of Free India' after being pleased by the show. The attendance of Japan's Prime Minister was a conclusive proof of the Japanese continuing stance for Netaji's leadership. It also highlighted Netaji's political sway in Japan, that had the effect of restricting Japan's meddling in the development of the Movement.

Re-enlistment of Indian POWs who did already quit the INA after 1942 was attempted. It was a challenge. Only two thousand extra people signed up. The fact that a large number of POWs had already been sent to Japanese territory outside of Singapore for indentured servitude. The Hikari Kikan, the Japanese diplomatic agency which had replaced the Iwakuro Kikan, rebuffed Subhas requests for the repatriation of individuals who had been deployed. Because of the restrictions of the

POW recruitment effort, the only way to develop a large INA force was to mobilise civilian volunteers.

Following Netaji takeover, a wave of optimism swept across civilian society. On July 9, 1943, more than sixty thousand Indians witnessed Netaji's maiden public lecture at the Padang. He stated that Indian soil would be successful only if Indian forces and resources in Southeast and East Asia were completely mobilised. He simply wanted all elements of Indian society to support the INA's efforts and develop a 300,000-strong army over time. Men and women of all ages were motivated to join the INA, which had taken precedence over the newly formed Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Junior Military Schools, the Balak Sena, and the Balika Sena training institutes established for the INA's objectives. Boys and girls under the age of eighteen were allowed to participate in military, drill, language, and ideological training in these organisations. Others may be able to work in IIL departments. Netaji emphasised the necessity of the Movement becoming economically self-sufficient, and he requested Indians in East and Southeast Asia contribute generously to this aim. The audience was highly inspired, according to eyewitness testimonies of the event on July 9, 1943 (Mani & Ramasamy, 2006).

Conclusion

Hence, the exploitative nature of the British colonial authority, the Indian national movement arose in India. Because they desired additional economic gains, the British acquired Indian regions. Following the Battle of Plassey, the British gained control of the Indian bureaucracy. The British had a significant number of colonies spread over the globe. Not only was India a significant marketplace for British products, but it also had a large workforce. As a result, the British Indian administration deported numerous Indians as indentured servants to various countries. These overseas Indians had grown economically powerful through time, and they were able to exercise influence on local governments. When these abroad Indians met educated Indian leaders, they became supporters of the Indian national movement.

Throughout the campaign, Netaji maintained an autonomous mindset in every detail. He was a master of diplomatic and military strategy. All of the resources were indigenous to India, and the INA was trained using

Hindustani commands. The INA wore uniforms that we designed ourselves. The Japanese had no involvement in the movement at any level, including the front-line engagements, except for aviation transport. Of course, because the Japanese possessed sovereignty rights in the occupied countries, we must admit that Japanese liaison was required to bring all facilities under control.

The Interim Government of Azad Hind and the Superior leadership INA transferred their headquarters to Rangoon on January 6, 1944. The brave warriors of the INA entered into the Indian territory on February 4th. The INA had encircled Imphal by June and was pounding away at its outer fortifications. The INA was forced to retire into Burma later due to severe weather. The circumstances of the INA's final surrender to British forces in Malaya on September, 1945 and the INA's subsequent valiant engagements in Burma until the fall of Rangoon on May, 1945 are well documented. The historic military courts martial proceedings of the brave INA leaders and troops, the majority of whom are, regrettably, still imprisoned, re-enacted Netaji's military mission in the Red Fort of Delhi. The 'Unity of India' merits special notice among all the wonderful concepts put into practise throughout the movement's whole era. Religious, communal, and other such divisions were unknown in Netaji's INA, which was formed with the goal of serving as a fine example of future free India. The fact that such solidarity still exists between all members of the INA today, irrespective of their economic difficulties, indicates that it was not fleeting. Belief in the mission and willing to serve through voluntary total self-mobilization were pushed on and readily accepted, resulting in a long-term, realistic perspective. He was aware that the exiled World Nationalist leader had been handed up by all parties involved. To be a shining example to the world, leadership requires absolute courage and determination and absolute sacrifice in the ethos of Samurais, as well as organisational skill and administrative aptitude.

Everyone put in a lot of effort and sacrifice, and there were no regrets when it was all said and done. On August 14, 1945, Netaji, the unflappable leader, spoke to a large crowd in Singapore, saying that although millions of Indians in Asia were slain, the loss would be little comparable to the liberation of motherland and our people for several

years. Netaji then predicted that INA military operation in East Asian region would make an effect on the colonial empire and causing them to become politically aware. Netaji felt that India's ultimate power was the true strength of our East Asian movement. He realised that the military action in East Asia would have enormous propaganda value in our motherland. This reality was vividly demonstrated by the widespread enthusiasm displayed across India during the historic I.N.A. trials.

References

- Chandra, B., Mukherjee, M., Mukherjee, A., Mahajan, S., & Panikkar, K. N. (2003). *India's struggle for Independence, 1857-1947*. Penguin.
- Cohen, S. P. (1963). Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army. *Pacific Affairs*, 411-429.
- Fay, P. W. (1995). *The forgotten army: India's armed struggle for independence, 1942-1945*. University of Michigan Press.
- Mani, A., & Ramasamy, P. (2006). Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army: A Southeast Asian Perspective. In unpublished paper presented at the Seminar on "Forgotten Army in a World War: Subhas Bose's INA and Asia's Independence.
- McCoy, C. R. (2013). *Subhas Chandra Bose: An agent for freedom*. Texas A&M University-Commerce.
- Sahoo, S. C. (2007). Netaji Subhas and India's Independence. *Orissa Review*.<http://magazines.odisha.gov.in/Orissareview/august-2007/engpdf/Page26-39.pdf>
- Schell, R., & Pelinka, A. (2017). *Democracy Indian Style: Subhas Chandra Bose and the Creation of India's Political Culture*. Routledge.
- Sharma, N. (2018). Collaborators! Aftermath of Wartime Support for the INA among Indians in China. *China Report*, 54(3), 325-340.
- Singh, M.K. (undated). *Encyclopaedia of Indian War of Independence*. 3(23).
- Sundaram, V. (2015). Pandit Shyamji Krishna Varma. <https://guy8461.wordpress.com/2015/02/18/18th-february-1905-home-rule-society-of-india-was-established-in-london/>. (11-03-2019)
- Upadhyay, N. (2014). Ghadar Movement: A Living Legacy, *Sikh Formations*, 10(1), 1-3, Doi: [10.1080/17448727.2014.895546](https://doi.org/10.1080/17448727.2014.895546)