

JAPAN AND THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY DURING WORLD WAR II

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JAPAN IN HER DRIVE INTO SOUTHEAST ASIA DURING WORLD WAR II found an ally in the Indian National Army (INA) and the Indian Provisional Government organized by Subhas Chandra Bose. The resulting cooperation was from the Japanese standpoint an attempt to use the Indian National Army and Free Provisional Government for the aims of the campaign in Burma and for the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and from the standpoint of the Indian National Army a search for a powerful ally in the drive to liberate India from the common foe, Great Britain. It is the purpose of this preliminary study to consider some of the motives and methods which characterized the cooperation between the Japanese and the Indian National Army, with emphasis on the Japanese aspect.

The cooperation was engendered within a broader context of a long-developing Japanese Pan-Asianism, which dated back to the end of the nineteenth century. Indian nationalists for their part since the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 had looked to Japan as the archetype of success against the West. Japan was emerging as champion of all Asians against colonial aggression and as protector of revolutionary expatriates from all parts of Asia. Japan had fostered this image since the early years of the twentieth century by harboring Asian revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen, Kim Ok-kiun, and Rash Bihari Bose, who was forced to flee India after reportedly tossing a bomb at the British Viceroy in 1912. The Japanese also welcomed such non-political leaders as Rabindranath Tagore. Further, some Japanese ultra-nationalists were very receptive to aspects of Hindu philosophy.

The Japanese-INA cooperation was an uneasy alliance from the beginning. It became apparent that Japanese expansion in Southeast Asia and Indian nationalist aspirations were heading toward a confrontation which rendered the anti-British sentiments of both a tenuous foundation for a wartime alliance.

The Japanese Government and supreme command attempted to use the Free India Provisional Government and Indian National Army to implement Japanese wartime policies in Southeast Asia. Initially, during 1941 and 1942, however, there was disagreement within General Staff Headquarters over the question of whether India should be included within the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. During this time the opinion of the Operations Bureau prevailed; India was not included. There was agreement, however, on the general objective of fomenting anti-British sentiment within India. With the arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose in Asia in 1943, Tokyo Headquarters took a more positive stance. Even after this change of heart, however, there was no decision as to when and what measures to take toward India.¹

Some of the methods employed by Japan were simply diplomatic. For example, two days after the establishment of the Free India Provisional Government in Bangkok in October, 1943, it was accorded recognition by Japan. Shortly thereafter, an official invitation was extended to the nascent government to send an observer to Tokyo for the November 5-6 meeting of the "Free Nations of Greater East Asia." At the conference Premier Tojo made the startling announcement that the Japanese government would transfer the captured Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the Provisional Government.²

First official contact between Japan and Indians in Southeast Asia was the liaison arranged by the "F *Kikan*"³ in September 1941 in Bangkok with the Indian Independence League (IIL) under Pritam Singh. Chief function of the F *Kikan* under the young Major Fujiwara was to organize counter-intelligence activities among Indians in the British Army. The way was paved for contact between the IIL and F *Kikan* by Military Attaché Tamura in

¹ Fujiwara, General, Unpublished statement to K.K. Ghosh, Tokyo, Oct. 11, 1963. Elsbree, Willard H., *Japan's Role in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements, 1940-1945* (Harvard University Press) 1953.

² *Gaimushō kiroku, Dai toa senso kankei ikken, Indo mondai* (Foreign Ministry records, A matter concerning the Greater East Asia War, The India problem) (1942); pp. 18-21.

³ "Kikan" may be translated as "agency" and in this context of course, it was a liaison agency. It was designated as "F. Kikan" under General Fujiwara, "Iwakuro Kikan" under General Iwakuro, and "Hikari Kikan" subsequently.

Bangkok, acting on orders from Tokyo in anticipation of the spread of war to Malaya.⁴

It was through Pritam Singh that the F *Kikan* contacted Indian soldiers behind British lines. From the outset Tamura assured Pritam Singh that Japan would maintain respect for the independence of the IIL and that Japan had no aspirations for control of India—military, political, economic, cultural or religious. It was mutually agreed that the IIL would organize an Indian army as an arm of the independence movement and further that the IIL would advance into Thailand and Malaya with the Japanese Army. Japan in return would render assistance and cooperation in the use of propaganda (radio) facilities, funds and other items on request of Pritam Singh.⁵ Major Fujiwara reiterated to Pritam Singh Japan's sincere desire for friendship, peace, and Indian liberation. The British surrender at Singapore on December 14 was the occasion for Japanese overtures by the F *Kikan* to Mohan Singh and other captured Indian officers of the British Army. Thus the first steps were taken toward the organization of the INA and its liaison with the Japanese Army.

The activities of the F *Kikan* in Southeast Asia preceded the Tokyo meeting in March 1942, at the instance of Tokyo headquarters, of Rash Bihari Bose and Indians brought from the IIL and INA in Southeast Asia to Tokyo. At this meeting plans were laid for a conference in Bangkok a few months later.

Policy pronouncements toward India were made at top levels in Tokyo on January 10, 1942. At this time a General Staff Headquarters liaison conference adopted the policy objective of strengthening propaganda to encourage anti-British sentiment within India. To implement this policy it was decided to appoint Colonel Iwakuro to head the Iwakuro *Kikan* in Bangkok, replacing the F *Kikan*. The Iwakuro *Kikan* was charged specifically with promoting the Bangkok meeting and with strengthening the IIL. The *Kikan* was to train Indians for special projects, including going into India by parachute and submarine, to maintain military liaison with the INA, and finally to drop leaflets from planes and to beam radio broadcasts from Singapore, Saigon, and Rangoon.⁶ It was further

⁴ Gaimushō Ajiakyoku, *Subhas Chandra Bose to Nihon*, (Subhas Chandra Bose and Japan), pp. 62-64. Pritam Singh and his organization were at the time already in contact with Subhas Chandra Bose in Berlin.)

⁵ Gaimushō, *Subhas Chandra Bose to Nihon*, pp. 67-69.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 84-85.

determined that Rash Bihari Bose should contact Indian prisoners of war captured at Singapore and encourage the establishment of an Indian National Army.⁷

R. B. Bose, it was felt, understood the Japanese viewpoint and could be trusted; he had been one of the first Indian revolutionaries to seek refuge in Japan, and he had a Japanese wife and a son who was to die in action in the Japanese Army. Accordingly, in July 1942, R. B. Bose met in Bangkok with Indians from various parts of Asia. At this conference the Indian Independence League was reorganized with Bose as president and headquarters in Bangkok. The aim of the League was to coordinate the independence movement. The League adopted the 40-article Bangkok Resolution calling on Japan for aid in the supply of weapons and funds and for liaison with the Japanese Army. When the Bangkok Resolution was transmitted to Tokyo, however, there was no reply forthcoming from Tojo to the specific requests, but rather a general order for cooperation was issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. As a result suspicion and distrust were engendered among members of the IIL. Colonel Iwakuro's assurances in the name of the Iwakuro *Kikan* did not dispel the general malaise of the Indians concerning Japan.⁸

This type of exchange was to become characteristic of relations between the INA-IIL and Japan throughout the duration of the War. The demands of the INA were generally more specific and heavier than the Japanese General Staff could concede in view of its limited propaganda objectives toward India and Japan's dwindling resources.

In the same month, July 1942, the Indian National Army was formed with 15,000 Indian prisoners of war captured at Singapore by the Japanese. These men were supplied with weapons and uniforms through the Iwakuro *Kikan*. However, the crisis within the Indian Independence League continued as Tokyo failed to respond to the Bangkok Resolution. This problem was intertwined with the problem of leadership of the Indian National Army. The conflict was on two levels: first, between Rash Bihari Bose and the new Army Commander-in-Chief Mohan Singh, who felt that Bose was a tool of Japan, and second between Singh and his subordinates, Colonels Gill and Bhonsle, who had out-ranked him

⁷ Gaimushō, *Indo mondai*, pp. 1-2.

⁸ Gaimushō, *Indo mondai*, p. 3; *Subhas Chandra Bose to Nihon*, p. 86. Sen Gupta, Bejon Kumar, *India's Man of Destiny*, Calcutta, p. 176.

in the British Army and felt his conduct in his new rank was intolerable.⁹

Singh's position was that, without recognition of the Bangkok Resolution by Tokyo, there could be no cooperation. Bose, who was more sympathetic toward Japan, advocated unconditional cooperation. Singh resigned in protest and attempted to disband the INA. Meanwhile, Bose declared Singh removed from command of the INA. At this juncture Col. Iwakuro imprisoned Singh. Iwakuro and other Japanese on the spot continued to feel that they could deal with R. B. Bose.¹⁰ Bose, however, was now sole remaining member of the steering committee of the IIL, and the future of the Indian independence movement in Southeast Asia appeared uncertain. Bose's long exile from India and close personal ties with Japan made it impossible for him to unite the Indian movement in Southeast Asia. This problem was recognized within the Japanese General Staff in the suggestion that Bose be recalled to Tokyo.¹¹

Hopes for Indian independence were revived through the arrival in Southeast Asia of Subhas Chandra Bose¹² from Berlin, where he had fled in exile from the British. This charismatic leader had represented a heterodox political tradition in India, outside the political main stream of the Congress Party. The difference was one not so much of aim as of method. While Indian emancipation and independence was the single goal of all Indian nationalists, Gandhi and Nehru refused to condone resorting to violence, which Bose felt was the only feasible method of dealing with the British.

In Berlin Bose had contacted Ambassador Oshima, who however had been instructed by the *Gaimushō* (Foreign Ministry) to avoid making a definite commitment to Bose. Army Headquarters, however, felt that Bose in Asia could greatly facilitate Japan's objectives in Southeast Asia. This difference between the Army and the *Gaimushō* was overcome, and Bose was taken first by a German then a Japanese submarine to Japan on May, 1943. Bose's arrival in Asia was followed shortly by establishment of the Free India Provisional Government recognized immediately by Japan,

⁹ *Gaimushō, Indo mondai*, p. 4. Iwakuro, Gen., Personal Conversation, Aug. 21, 1964, Tokyo.

¹⁰ Iwakuro, Gen., Personal Conversation. Ghosh, Jitendra Nath, *Netaji Subhas Chandra* (Calcutta, 1946), p. 113. Palta, K. R., *My Adventures with the INA*, Lahore (1946), pp. 37-48.

¹¹ *Gaimushō, Subhas Chandra Bose to Nihon*, p. 90.

¹² Subhas Chandra Bose was no relation to Rash Bihari Bose.

and by reorganization of the Indian National Army under Bose's command.

Bose's reception in Tokyo was less cordial than he had expected. He wanted first of all to meet Tojo. Instead he was allowed to confer with the Chief of Staff, Foreign Minister and Navy Minister. Bose felt dissatisfaction with what he regarded as mere formalities. The Japanese cabinet members for their part were startled by Bose's shouted greeting: "The war will be decided in victory for Japan!" (Japan had already suffered reverses at Guadalcanal), and by Bose's direct question, "Will Japan send soldiers to India or not?" Undeterred by general replies, Bose explained his plan for advancing into India through Chittagong. Before Bose left Tokyo in June, Tojo consented to meet him, was immediately impressed by his fervor and sincerity,¹³ and gave assurances of cooperation.

After Bose's first visit to Tokyo to establish liaison with the government, he became convinced of the sincerity of Japan's policy toward Asia in general and toward the Indian National Army and Provisional Government in particular. Bose at least publicly discounted the possibility of selfish motives on the part of Japan. "If she had them why should she recognize the Provisional Government of Free India? Why should she decide to hand over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands?" Bose asked, "Japan would be happy if the Indian people could liberate themselves through their own exertions. It is we who have asked for assistance from Japan," he continued.¹⁴ And, at the Tokyo conference of Asian nations in November, Bose expressed the hope that the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere would pave the way toward a Pan-Asiatic Federation, which in turn would eventually lead to a world federation.¹⁵

Bose's arrival in Tokyo in May 1943 also precipitated the reorganization of the Iwakuro *Kikan*. The new head of the *Kikan* was Col. Yamamoto, former military attaché in Berlin who had arranged Bose's trip East and actually accompanied him. The name of the organization was now Hikari *Kikan*. Both the administrative and propaganda sections, which had deferred somewhat to Indian initiative, were abolished, and the power of the military section was increased. The *Kikan* was staffed from this time on chiefly

¹³ Gaimushō, *Subhas Chandra Bose to Nihon*, pp. 98-100.

¹⁴ Bose, Subhas Chandra, *Blood Bath*, (Lahore, 1947), pp. 51-53.

¹⁵ Gaimushō, *Indo mondai*, p. 7.

with military men, which reflected the increasing importance of its military role. Colonel Yamamoto reported to Commander-in-Chief Terauchi of the Southern Army in all political, military, and diplomatic matters.

On arriving in Southeast Asia and assuming the dual role of Commander of the INA and head of the Provisional Government, Bose sought an immediate increase in the strength of the INA by 20,000 men. From the standpoint of the *Hikari Kikan* this meant also an immediate demand for more military equipment. Bose was dissatisfied with the Japanese response, which was inevitably in arrears of his demands.

There were other military disagreements. Bose had originally consented to put the INA under Japanese command. Later, however, Bose raised objections; a similar problem arose at the time of the Imphal campaign.¹⁶ There was no room in Bose's thinking for an evaluation of Japan's actual military position in late 1943 and 1944. He excluded from his view Japan's defeats and had unlimited faith in Japan's military capacity. There was for Bose the sole aim of India's liberation from British rule, and from Bose's point of view the only consideration was Japan's proclaimed policy of cooperation.

The chief object of INA cooperation with Japan was the launching of a campaign into India which would spearhead India's liberation. As early as mid-1942 the *Iwakuro Kikan* had established a branch in Burma preparatory to initiating the campaign into India. Indian soldiers were trained, broadcasts were beamed to India, and the *Kikan* cemented liaison between the Japanese Southern Army and the Indians. However, the *Kikan* concluded that there were too many problems—an insufficient number of Indian troops and an unfavorable climate among those who were being trained, inadequate supply lines, and British deterrent strength in the Akyab sector through early 1943—and consequently the plan to invade India was postponed.¹⁷

Bose was well aware of the limitations of the INA for an Indian campaign. For this reason he was persistent in his demands toward the *Hikari Kikan* and Tokyo headquarters during his visits to Japan. But from Bose's viewpoint the Japanese response was never adequate.

¹⁶ Gaimushō, *Subhas Chandra Bose to Nihon*, p. 126.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 169.

The Japanese response was conditioned by several factors. First, the chief virtue of collaboration with the INA lay in its propaganda value, since Japan had no clearly defined military objectives toward India. Second, by the spring of 1943 Japan had already suffered crushing defeats at the Coral Sea, Midway, and Guadalcanal, and India was by this time a peripheral consideration, low on the priority list for logistic support of Japan's diminishing resources. For Bose there was a single consideration: the campaign to liberate India. For the Japanese General Staff there were the demands of a total war in which Japan's resources had already proven deficient.

Evidence of this divergence of objectives was apparent at the British War Crimes Trials of INA officers in Delhi after the war. The Japanese witnesses testified that from the Japanese standpoint the Imphal campaign was a campaign for the defense of Burma, whereas from Bose's viewpoint the campaign was a step toward the liberation of India. This testimony was designed to support the contention of the defense that the INA was an independent army acting under Bose's command and that the Provisional Government was a sovereign state.¹⁸

Before the Imphal campaign in Burma could get under way, relations between the Hikari *Kikan* and the INA were disintegrating in disagreements over tactical operations and Japanese support. Bose was free in his criticism of the Imphal strategy in the planning stages. The Burma campaign had already been an extravagant consumer of Japanese supplies and Indian patience. And from the standpoint of the Japanese command, the Regional Army in Burma was, apart from its propaganda value, more an encumbrance than an asset. Bose was unaware of this attitude in Tokyo and was hoping to be able to circumvent the *Kikan* and to deal directly with the Burma Regional Army.¹⁹ Further, the Commander of the Burma Army was opposed to the use of INA troops in frontline combat; Bose was thus beset with obstacles on every hand.

There were also disagreements between the Japanese and Bose at the strategic level. Bose, viewing Bengal as the home of the Indian revolution, favored an advance through Chittagong. From the standpoint of the Burma Regional Army, however, this route

¹⁸ *Kōseishō* hikiage engokyoku (Welfare Ministry, Repatriates Relief Bureau), *Isoda Saburo Chujo kaisōroku*, (Recollections of Lt. Gen. Isoda Saburō) (Tokyo, 1954), p. 7.

¹⁹ *Gaimushō, Subhas Chandra Bose to Nihon*, p. 173.

not only would complicate the supply problem but would also necessitate considerable naval and air support.²⁰ Lack of adequate air support had already plagued the entire Burma operation.

At the operational level there were further difficulties. The Japanese still tended to regard the recently released Indians as prisoners of war. Among the Indian troops, on the other hand, there was some residual respect for the British army. Bose repeatedly explained to his troops the need for an allied army to fight the British.²¹ There was also the troublesome problem of military protocol: which side should salute first? Bose's attitude on this point was unrelenting; there should be complete equality in matters of military protocol. Bose also protested against extension of the authority of the Japanese military police to INA troops; Tokyo at length conceded on this question. And at a higher level there was the question of command. Since the strategy was basically Japanese, the command of necessity had to be; Bose was never reconciled to this.

The Imphal campaign was conceived by the Japanese high command as a holding operation against the enemy in Burma. By this time there could be no question of a military goal in India. This was evidenced by the Japanese agreement that any territory captured during the campaign was to be put under the authority of the Indian Provisional Government. This agreement was reaffirmed in a pronouncement by Tojo in March, 1944.²² This agreement was interpreted by the INA as a guarantee of the probity of the Japanese commitment to the liberation of India.

Even before it began the campaign was a fiasco. It was delayed and finally undertaken in the midst of heavy monsoon rains, which hindered the supply lines. Bose pressed the Japanese army to strengthen the advance, but it was a futile request. Had the Southern Army Headquarters been fully cognizant of the actual plight of the campaign, the order to halt might have come sooner. Bose was unable to persuade the Burma Army Commander to continue the Imphal campaign after the July 8 order for retreat.

With the replacement of Premier Tojo by Koiso in July, 1944, the new Premier issued an assurance that "until our common

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176.

²² *Isoda Saburo Chūjō kaisōroku*, p. 12.

enemy is crushed and India's complete independence is attained, Japan will fight beside her ally with unfaltering resolution."²³ But when this assurance was not followed by concrete action, Bose decided that the time had come for another visit to Tokyo. He wished: 1) to ascertain the new cabinet's policy toward the Provisional Government, 2) to conclude a loan agreement, and 3) to request the sending of a Japanese diplomatic envoy. Bose was received in audience by the Emperor and in interviews by the new Premier, Foreign Minister, Army and Navy Ministers and Chiefs of Staff. Both the Foreign Ministry and the Greater East Asia Ministry agreed to the sending of an envoy, but Bose's requests for planes, tanks and artillery could not be met.²⁴ Bose spoke in Hibiya Hall on the urgency of expanding the INA with Japanese assistance, and his booming voice could be heard outside the Hall. While Bose was in Tokyo the city was bombed by seventy B-29's.

One of Bose's requests, however, was met. Bose had long been hoping for the separation of Japan diplomatic and military liaison and the sending of an envoy, as he was anxious to have direct communication with the Japanese Government, without interruption by the military. In November, 1944, it was decided to send Hachiya Teruo as minister to the Provisional Government. Hachiya himself suggested that he be accredited as ambassador, but there were objections from the Chiefs of Staff, since this would have put Hachiya on a higher level than the *Hikari Kikan*.²⁵ When Hachiya finally arrived in Rangoon in mid-March, 1945, Bose refused to receive him, since the *Gaimushō* had not supplied him with proper credentials. Before the end of April the INA and Bose had retreated from Rangoon; there was never an opportunity to establish regular diplomatic relations. Bose's demand for the reorganization of the *Hikari Kikan* had also gone unheeded at the end of the war.

While Bose was in Tokyo he broached with Foreign Minister Shigemitsu the possibility of his approaching the Soviet Union to proffer his good offices for a Soviet-Japanese agreement. This suggestion met a cold reception. Bose in fact made overtures for an interview with the Soviet Ambassador in Tokyo; there too he

²³ *Gaimushō, Subhas Chandra Bose to Nihon*, p. 199.

²⁴ *Isoda Saburo Chūjō kaisoroku*, pp. 21-23.

²⁵ Personal conversation with Mr. Hachiya, August 20, 1964, Tokyo.

was unsuccessful.²⁶ Most probably Bose was motivated in these efforts chiefly by a hope of securing Soviet aid to liberate India from the north. This suggestion had ostensibly been made to Bose privately by Colonel Yamamoto in July 1944.²⁷ Although Bose could get no official Japanese support for this project (Tokyo regarded Bose's proposal as a betrayal), it was with this hope in mind that Bose was flying toward Manchuria when his plane crashed on Taiwan at the close of the war, killing Bose and several others aboard.

Many of the problems Japan encountered elsewhere in her Southeast Asian advance did not have occasion to arise in the alliance with the INA. There was no opportunity to develop a policy analogous to the stress on the brotherhood of Buddhists in Burma or to the enhancing of Islam in Indonesia. INA leadership was already out of the mainstream of Indian political life. Nor did Japan ever appear as occupying power in territory held by the Free India Provisional Government.

But there were other problems. Indian demands for ever-greater Japanese support continually met rebuff as Japanese resources dwindled. This in turn fostered the suspicion already in the minds of Bose and his followers, who saw all too clearly the possibility of Japan replacing Britain in India. Although there was some similarity of objective between the Japanese and the INA toward India and more particularly toward Britain, their aims were not identical, and the means they proposed at times diverged even further. While Bose publicly expressed his trust in the sincerity of Japanese assistance, privately among his Indian officers he repeatedly vowed not to allow the Japanese to replace the British imperialists in India. It was an uneasy alliance, predicated chiefly on the existence of a common enemy. The logic of Pan-Asianism and opposition to Western imperialism were not enough to guarantee the success of the joint ventures of the Japanese and the Indian National Army. In many ways the conflict between Japanese Pan-Asianism and Indian nationalism continually vitiated the effectiveness of the cooperation.

²⁶ Gaimushō kiroku, *Indo mondai*, pp. 28-29.

²⁷ Gaimushō, *Subhas Chandra Bose to Nihon*, p. 200.