
UNIT 12: AZAD HIND FAUJ (INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY)*

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12.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- learn about the formation of the Azad Hind Fauj (also known as Indian National Army or INA),
- understand the process through which Subhas Chandra Bose became associated with it,
- explain the development of INA under his charismatic leadership,
- analyse the role played by the INA in the fight against the British, and
- know about the impact of this struggle on broader Indian Nationalist movement.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

During the 1940s, the Indian National Army or Azad Hind Fauj, along with the Quit India Movement, emerged as one of the most important symbols of India's will to fight for independence in the best possible manner, even through violent efforts. There were mainly three attempts to form Indian national armies during the early 1940s in Europe and Southeast Asia. All these attempts were directly or indirectly associated with Subhas Chandra Bose (popularly known as Netaji) who had moved abroad escaping from the British captivity in India. In this Unit, we will discuss about these efforts by Bose and other Indians from outside India to liberate the country from colonial rule. The legend of Netaji cuts across political, religious, linguistic, and regional divides. He became a truly national figure and the INA became a symbol of national unity and of revolt against imperialism.

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12.2 SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE: REVOLT AGAINST BRITISH IMPERIALISM

Bose was a staunch anti-imperialist, but he also recognized that it was the aggressive and expansionist nationalism that was in the centre of imperialism. He was a nationalist in its creative, egalitarian, and fraternal sense. But he did not favour nationalist chauvinism and its grossly discriminatory character. He felt repelled by the racism of Nazi Germany and aggression of Japan. At the same time, he adopted a pragmatic policy of taking the help of these powers to liberate his own country. His strong desire for the freedom of India led him to ignore the grossest human rights violations these countries engaged in at precisely the time he was soliciting and getting their help for his endeavour.

Bose was politically aligned with the socialists in the Congress and had many differences with Mahatma Gandhi. Firstly, while Gandhi resolutely believed in non-violence, Bose was not averse to using violence as a means to free his country. Secondly, Bose thought that industrialism and modernization would bring about regeneration of India, while Gandhi firmly thought that autonomous development of India's villages would be the salvation of the country. Thirdly, while Bose was politically radical and socialist who did not turn away from the possibility of class conflict to ameliorate the conditions of India's poor, Gandhi believed that class struggle, because of its violent character, was unacceptable and he put his faith in the probable trusteeship of the rich to alleviate the dire conditions of the poor and oppressed. Bose was elected as the Congress President in 1938 with support from Gandhi and others. But when Bose decided to contest the election again for this post in 1939, Gandhi and his associates opposed this. Bose won against Gandhi's candidate, Pattabhi Sitaramayya. But later, owing to opposition from Gandhi and others, he resigned his post and parted ways with the Congress.

When the Second World War started, most of the Indians were not in support of the Allies because of their experiences with British colonialism. In fact, Indian leaders and people were much disturbed about not being taken into confidence before Britain declared India to be a combatant. There was also no concrete promise of any future plan for self-government. The Congress ministries resigned in protest. Even a mild-mannered Gandhi made it clear that he saw 'no difference between the Fascist or Nazi powers and the Allies. All are exploiters, all resort to ruthlessness to the extent required to compass their end'.

Bose was firmly opposed to the colonial rule and refused to accept the idea that the British should be supported against the Nazis in the War. Fearing his vocal and active opposition, the British colonial authorities arrested him in July 1940. In November 1940, he began a fast in the prison, after which he was released from the jail and put under house arrest in December 1940. From there he escaped to Afghanistan through the North-west Frontier Provinces, and then, with the help of the Soviet, German and Italian authorities, he travelled to Soviet Union, finally reaching Germany in 1941.

The Second World War was seriously progressing with Hitler overrunning most of Europe outside Soviet influence. There was a pact between Hitler

and Stalin which had led to their dividing the areas of influence in Eastern Europe. Bose's initial confabulations with the German authorities on the possibility of releasing the Indian soldiers who had fallen into German hands after British defeat in North Africa were not successful. Hitler and his cohorts still nurtured hopes for neutralizing England and, therefore, they did not want to take a tough stand against the British and their empire in India. They also refused to declare themselves unequivocally in favour of India's independence. When Bose drafted a declaration for Indian independence in May 1941, both the German and Italian governments kept delaying it under various pretexts.

When Germany invaded Soviet Union in June 1941, Bose's strategy suffered a serious setback. However, as the Germans and Italians still vouched to support him in his endeavour, he continued to hold hope. There was some progress also as some Indian soldiers were now trained by the German officers to make compact units to fight against the British. It was not easy to persuade the common Indian soldiers to participate in such training as they had taken an oath earlier and they also feared for their families back home. But, despite all handicaps in Germany, Bose managed to raise four battalions, consisting of about 4,000 Indian soldiers, ready to fight against the British by December 1942.

It was with this first national army that he adopted Indian tricolour as the national flag, Tagore's song 'Jan Gan Man Adhinayak' as national anthem, and the 'Jai Hind' as national greeting which would be common to all the Indians irrespective of caste and creed. These were enduring legacies from Netaji towards the unity of the country.

Despite some progress, however, the German response remained lukewarm and there were not enough recruits in Europe to raise an effective fighting force. The entry of Japan in the War in September 1940, and more aggressively in December 1941, however, changed the entire dynamic in Asia. The speedy advance of Japanese forces and defeat of the British and other European imperialist powers in Southeast Asia opened up a new vista for Bose and his strategy geared towards the liberation of India. The fall of Singapore in February 1942 enthused him enormously and he came out, for the first time, to speak on Azad Hind Radio declaring that 'The fall of Singapore means the collapse of the British Empire, the end of the iniquitous regime which it has symbolized and the dawn of a new era in Indian history' [cited in Bose, p. 213]. This radio had been in existence since October 1941 and it became the most important mouthpiece of Indian freedom movement abroad during this period.

A substantial number of Indian soldiers fighting for the British had fallen into the hands of the Japanese. It was around them, as well as the resident Indian population in Southeast Asia and other countries, that Bose's strategy revolved.

From this point, he regularly addressed his country people on the radio stirring them to take action against the British. In the Japanese victories, he found the possibilities of a mortal weakening of British imperialism which could then be pushed over the brink. He also was now very hopeful about the possibility of raising a big force of Indians to fight against the British

for the liberation of India. He was in contact with the Japanese ambassador in Germany making plans to realize his goals. The Japanese were also more receptive and forthcoming about Bose's ideas. Bose wanted to move immediately in order to take advantage of British imperialism being at its lowest point during the War.

In May 1942, Hitler agreed to provide logistical support for Bose's shifting to Japan. But Hitler evaded the idea of a declaration of Indian independence. Bose was not satisfied with his meeting with Hitler but at least he secured the promise of German help in his transfer to Japan. On ideological issues and on the domestic and international policies of the tripartite powers, Bose took a very pragmatic stand. He did not even speak publicly about the extreme racist policies of Hitler. He held that 'In this fateful hour in India's history, it would be a grievous mistake to be carried away by ideological considerations alone. The internal politics of Germany or Italy or Japan do not concern us— they are the concern of the people of those countries' [cited in Bose 221].

Meanwhile, the political scene in India was also changing. Gandhi, apprehensive of the Japanese attacks on India, wanted that the British should immediately relinquish the power so that Indians could negotiate with the Japanese. Gandhi believed that the Japanese had nothing against India but they were hostile to the British. If the British continued to hold reins in India, the Japanese would attack and invade India. So, he wanted the British to immediately leave India and let the Indians manage their own affairs. On 8 August 1942, Gandhi gave the slogan of 'do or die' for the Indians and asked the British to immediately 'quit India' which resulted in country-wide eruptions. This major shift in Gandhi's position coincided with the immediacy and urgency of Bose's thinking about the right time to strike.

However, it was only by mid-January 1943 that the plans for his submarine journey to Japan could be arranged. In February 1943, he left the German shore to launch his fight in Asia. By then, however, the German advance was halted both in Africa against the British and in the Soviet Union. Soon, there would be a turn-around, but Bose moved towards his goal undaunted. He still posed a threat to the British, even under the changed situation, when the Quit India Movement was crushed and the Allied forces had halted the advance of Germany.

12.3 FOUNDATION OF THE FIRST INA

The rapid advance of the Japanese forces in Southeast Asia uprooting the European colonial powers, such as the British, Dutch and French, led to a completely changed situation when the Indians in these countries as well as the captured Indian soldiers who had fought in the British army began to be mobilized and organized to fight for Indian freedom.

The total Indian population in this region was about 20 lakhs with significant concentration in Burma, Malaya, Thailand, Indonesia, Hongkong and Indo-China. In 1941, the Japanese strategists devised plans to tap the nationalists in Southeast Asia, including the Indians, to cooperate with them. Major Fujiwara was appointed to work as liaison person to establish links with

the Indians. Fujiwara contacted Giani Pritam Singh of Indian Independence League (IIL) which started cooperation between both sides. It was agreed that some members of IIL would accompany the conquering Japanese forces into Malaya as part of propaganda units where both would work for establishment of an Indian national army which would assist the Japanese forces for achieving freedom of India.

They contacted Captain Mohan Singh, one of the most senior Indian officers, to organize an army of Indian soldiers who were now in Japan's captivity. Pritam Singh also held meetings with other Indian soldiers and asked them to fight for India's independence. Many rounds of discussion were held and finally Mohan Singh was convinced, particularly when the administration of Indian prisoners of war was left to him.

The British officers had abandoned the Indian soldiers to fend for themselves. This was considered as betrayal by the Indian soldiers and officers. The promise of being under control of Indian officers, rather than the Japanese, was probably the best offer they could get under the circumstances. The army was to be based on Indian soldiers only, to be led by Indian officers, and only for the purpose of India's independence.

More Indian soldiers were entrusted to Mohan Singh's responsibility in early 1942 when Malaya and Singapore fell into Japanese hands. Besides looking after the Indian prisoners, Mohan Singh, along with IIL, also got in touch with Indian civilians in Thailand, Malaya, and Singapore. The brisk withdrawal of the British from these countries generated a deep sense of being betrayed among Indians as well as others in these countries. There were also complaints of racial discrimination when the European evacuees claimed all the privileges for escaping from Japanese attack by taking best ships and other provisions and means of transport. Moreover, the Indians in Malaya and other countries were quite deeply imbued with nationalist ideas. This made the job of Pritam Singh and Mohan Singh easy as the Indian civilians as well as the soldiers enlisted with certain enthusiasm and branches of IIL opened in most localities inhabited by Indians.

Thus, the reasons for Indian willingness to join their forces with the Japanese were three-fold: i) there was a deep nationalist sentiment, at least among the intelligentsia; ii) there was a feeling that the British had dishonourably abandoned them and had exercised racial discrimination while fleeing; and iii) there was an element of fear also as they witnessed the cruel Japanese treatment of the soldiers and civilians in the area, particularly the Chinese who were massacred in hundreds by the Japanese.

When the Indian civilians and soldiers in this region realized that the IIL not only provided them protection from the Japanese but also promised to include them in the fight for Indian freedom, they were quite willing to join. A meeting with the veteran revolutionary, Rash Behari Bose, was arranged in Japan. Pritam Singh and Satyanand Puri, who were flying from Bangkok, died when their plane crashed. But five other leaders reached Tokyo.

In the meeting, a draft constitution was prepared and it was decided that later the delegates from the newly conquered countries of Burma and Indonesia should also be invited. The delegates returned to their bases to further mobilize and organize the Indians for the cause of Indian freedom.

The Japanese were also in touch with Subhas Chandra Bose who was in Berlin and was making his radio broadcast from there exhorting the Indians to rise against the British. In June 1942, a large conference of Indian delegates from all over South-east Asia took place for which Netaji also sent a message.

The work started with all seriousness and progressed well. The failure of Cripps Mission and heightened political activities in India had given much hope of a rising which took place by the beginning of August in the form of 'Quit India' Movement. Enthusiasm among the Indians in this region was high and by the end of August 40,000 soldiers had joined the INA. The first INA division of 16,300 soldiers was ready by 10 September 1942 to go into action. Mohan Singh was ambitious and told the Japanese that he wanted to raise an army of 250,000 soldiers which would be recruited largely from the civilian population. He also wanted formal public recognition by the Japanese of the Indian National Army and facilities for training his troops in batches. But the Japanese response was not very encouraging towards these proposals.

The cold Japanese response towards their resolutions and Japanese interference in their activities upset the leaders of the IIL and INA. Many of them were also upset with Rash Behari Bose, the president of the IIL, for not being effective in pursuing the matter. The Japanese interference was general and was being resisted. The question of evacuee Indian properties in Burma became the most contentious element. The Japanese refused to give the control of these properties in Indian hands which the INA and IIL wanted in order to mobilise resources for training and equipping their soldiers. The Japanese reluctance to allow the expansion of Indian national army in Singapore and Malaya also upset Mohan Singh enormously. Moreover, he and other leaders realized that the Japanese were surreptitiously as well as openly not allowing the IIL and the INA to take control of all Indian prisoners of war. The Indians, therefore, began to suspect the Japanese intentions.

The situation became worse, and Mohan Singh plainly conveyed to the Japanese that if they tried to take the place of British in India the Indians would fight them also. He also pointed out their oppressive and racist behaviour in Malaya. He refused to provide INA soldiers for Japanese military campaign in Burma, and then decided to disband the INA by the end of December. Rash Behari, on his part, wanted to save the situation. He proceeded to dismiss Mohan Singh and take control of the activities of Indians there. Mohan Singh was held and isolated by the Japanese along with some of his colleagues. The INA was now effectively non-functional and it was Subhas Chandra Bose who resuscitated it after his arrival in this region.

12.4 NETAJI'S ARRIVAL IN EAST ASIA AND THE FORMATION OF AZAD HIND FAUJ OR THE SECOND INA

Subhas Chandra Bose arrived in Singapore on 2 July 1943 and assumed the command of the INA from Rash Behari. He altered the policy of recruitment

by starting to recruit Indian civilians. About 30,000 people joined the ranks of INA in various capacities from the Indian civilians in the region. He also established Azad Hind League which was in charge of approaching Indian community in this region. By July 1944, the Azad Hind League had 72 branches with 200,000 members. Besides this, Bose also formed an all-women regiment named as 'Rani of Jhansi Regiment' in which about a thousand women joined as soldiers. Lakshmi Swaminathan, a Tamil woman, became the commander of this regiment.

In the first INA, there were multiple centres of authority. Mohan Singh was in charge of military training and operation, but he and the INA was under the IIL's Council of Action with regard to the policy matters, whose head was Rash Behari. All these were placed under the overarching control of the Japanese. On the other hand, the second INA remained committed only to Netaji.

Right since the first INA, the British policy of segregated recruitment and organization policy was given up. There was no longer any talk about the 'martial races' and all soldiers from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds were put together into single units. Bose continued this policy even further by recruiting even civilians along with trained and professional soldiers.

Now all efforts were made to subsume ethnic and regional loyalties under overarching national sentiments by forming mixed regiments and by imparting political training to the INA soldiers. This was done to wean them away from the colonial tradition of forming separate regiments and creation of imagined traditions of valour and martial pasts. The effort now was to Indianise and nationalize the fighting forces.

Even during the first INA, the mixed regiments were named after the nationalist leaders rather than after certain communities and regions. Thus, there were Gandhi, Azad, and Nehru brigades. Subhas Bose persisted with this tradition. He also viewed his struggle as well as that of INA as part of the wider nationalist struggle taking place in India.

Bose declared in Singapore on 21 October 1943 the formation of Azad Hind Government. He himself penned the declaration. It called upon the Indian people 'to rally round our banner and strike for India's freedom'. It further declared that the 'Provisional Government' would guarantee 'religious liberty, as well as equal rights and equal opportunities to its citizens. It declares its firm resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation equally and transcending all the differences cunningly fostered by an alien government in the past' [cited in Bose: 254-5].

The radical change of loyalty by over 40,000 (out of a total of about 45,000) soldiers of the British Indian army in South-east Asia was of momentous importance. This happened in a short time and this evolved into a motivated force which fought against their former employers and trainers, almost similar to that of 1857 Revolt. The most important motivation, of course, was the feeling of nationalism. Another very important factor was Subhas Bose's wide popularity, his charismatic personality, his persuasive powers, his clear and deep commitment to the cause of Indian freedom, and his

passionate attachment to the idea of Indian unity across the boundaries of religion, caste, region, and language.

His engagement for the next two years can be divided into two periods. In the first year of his stay in this region there was great enthusiasm among the Indians there about the possibility of breaching the British defences in India by the Indian National Army, with help for the Japanese, which would lead to nation-wide anti-colonial uprising. In the second period, after the Allied forces became dominant from the mid-1944 and the combined forces of Indian National Army and the Japanese military had to retreat from North-east India as well as from the countries of South-east Asia, Bose played a different role of a leader who would desperately try to keep the morale of his retreating forces high and to find other ways of attaining freedom. He, however, never left the hope of winning freedom for India.

By the late 1943, the response to his call to the people was overwhelming. Thousands of Indian soldiers and civilians volunteered to fight as well as help with money and materials. Netaji exhorted his audiences to prepare well and support in every way the struggle because ‘Indians outside India, particularly Indians in East Asia, are going to organize a fighting force which will be powerful enough to attack the British army of occupation in India. When we do so, a revolution will break out, not only among the civilian population at home, but also among the Indian Army, which is now standing under the British flag. When the British government is thus attacked from both sides— from inside India and from outside— it will collapse, and the Indian people will then regain their liberty’ [cited in Bose: 245-46].

Bose decided that Burma would be crucial to his strategy military manoeuvre. When the Japanese Field Marshal suggested that the INA should work only as field propaganda unit, Bose immediately rejected it and demanded that INA brigades should be used as advance fighting units. The Japanese agreed to initially put one division of INA consisting of about 10,000 soldiers into action. Mohammad Zaman Kiani assumed the command of this unit. This division was further divided into three regiments which had been named after Gandhi, Nehru, and Azad signifying oneness with the nationalist movement at home. Out of these the best soldiers were taken out to form a guerrilla unit under Shah Nawaz Khan which would first go into action. The soldiers named this unit ‘Subhas Brigade’.

For raising the morale of the soldiers, Bose visited them in their camps and also shared his meals with them. Soldiers of all castes and communities were persuaded to eat commonly which led to a common bond between them crossing religious and linguistic boundaries. This display of national unity was important, even though it was taking place on foreign soil, because increasingly sharp communal division was shearing the Indian body politic at home.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss the activities of Subhas Chandra Bose in Europe.
- 2) How was the first INA formed? What was the problem in its operation?
- 3) Discuss the main features of the Azad Hind Fauj or the second INA.

12.5 AZAD HIND FAUJ: FIGHT FOR INDIA'S LIBERATION

On October 23-24, 1943 in the midnight, the Azad Hind Government declared war on Britain and USA. The latter was included because there were American forces on Indian soil, although the USA was in fact sympathetic to the demands for Indian freedom.

Within a year, lakhs of Indian expatriates signed oath of citizenship in Southeast Asia by declaring:

'I, a member of the Azad Hind Sangh [Indian Independence League], do hereby solemnly promise in the name of God and take this holy oath that I will be absolutely loyal and faithful to the Provisional Government of Azad Hind, and shall be always prepared for any sacrifice for the cause of the freedom of our motherland, under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose' [cited in Bose: 259].

Japan government promised all kinds of diplomatic and military help to the Azad Hind Government. Bose also persuaded them to regard INA not as a subordinate outfit but as an allied army. The legal control of the Andaman and Nicobar islands was given to the Azad Hind Government by the Japanese, although the latter retained the military control.

The Azad Hind Government headquarters was shifted to Burma from Singapore in January 1944. Bose prepared an alternative structure of government with a full-fledged cabinet and ministers, the Azad National Bank, its own postage stamp, and a national currency.

The advance guerrilla unit known as 'Subhas Birgade' had already moved there. The Japanese army was also now ready for the offensive. Although the Japanese wanted to attach small groups of INA soldiers with larger Japanese units, Bose refused to subordinate Indian soldiers to Japanese command and control, and insisted on an independent role and identity for the INA. He also firmly believed that it was the sacrifice of the Indian soldiers which mattered more for Indian freedom.

It was agreed that one battalion of INA would join the fight against British West African division. After that the INA would move towards Kohima and Imphal in Indian territory. In February some of the INA units successfully fought against the British in Burma. Then in March 1944, the INA, along with the Japanese forces, moved towards Imphal and Kohima by crossing Indo-Burma frontier. The Indian soldiers were very happy and enthusiastic about being in their own country. On this front, around 84,000 Japanese and 12,000 INA soldiers faced about 150,000 British troops. The Japanese troops had not carried much ration with them for speed and they had pinned their hope on the quick capture of Kohima and Imphal. In April 1944, they seemed to be very close to capturing Imphal and Kohima, as they laid seize to Imphal. The INA soldiers were fighting very well and their spirit was very high. They had hoisted the Indian tricolour flag in Moirang, a short distance from Imphal. There was a lot of optimism among the Azad Hind leaders, soldiers, and its adherents in general. A 'free India' seemed to be round the corner.

However, due to the stiff resistance offered now by the British-led forces, the seize was prolonged. During the three-and-half months of seize, under difficult circumstances, their limited ration was getting exhausted. While the British troops were well supplied with ration by continuous American supply by air, the Japanese air support was much restricted and inadequate. Some of the fiercest battles of the World War were fought here in May 1944. The INA brigades were also involved in these fights.

Unfortunately, the monsoon rains arrived early that year. Very heavy rains started which obliterated the tracks and made the whole area muddy. There was nothing much to do on fighting front and the only option was to wait. Already facing problems of transportation and shortages of supplies, the INA and Japanese soldiers were inflicted with malaria and it was difficult to procure medicines being stranded on the forest areas. Yet, the mood among the soldiers as well as other Indians in Southeast Asia was still optimistic. The stalemate continued throughout June and early week of July. Then, on 10 July, the Japanese intimated Bose that it would now be difficult to hold on there and they would now retreat from that theatre of war. The INA units were also much distressed as there was a severe lack of food and medicines along with prevalence of many diseases including malaria. Now retreat was the only option which was taken in the third week of July. Later on 26 July, Japan announced the suspension of campaign in Northeast India. In retreat, a lot of soldiers died due to diseases and starvation, many more were injured and sick.

Bose, in a radio address on 21 August 1944, accepted that INA's bid to take control in North-east India had not been successful. According to him, early monsoon and the problems in transportation were mainly responsible the lack of success. Before the monsoon came the INA and the Japanese soldiers were doing very well, but after that it became difficult to hold on. He did not lose hope and exhorted the soldiers to be prepared for the next round of engagement.

Although the majority of INA troops who took part in action in the North-east were now grounded, another large contingent of soldiers arrived from Malaya in Burma who were ready for action. By then the war had arrived in Burma with the British and American forces trying to drive out the Japanese from there. The INA soldiers were also involved in fighting. They were deployed in Malaya also against the British-American forces.

On the bank of Irrawady in Burma, the INA forces encountered the British forces in February 1945. They inflicted several casualties on the British and blocked their crossing of the river for the time being. Despite the huge air support from the Americans, the British forces did not advance much and stalemate continued even in March 1945.

It was then that some officers of the INA deserted to the British. Even more importantly, the Burmese government, sensing the eventual Japanese defeat, turned against them and in favour of the advancing British. This created major problems of Bose who then negotiated with the Burmese government that their soldiers would not fight against each other.

Despite these problems, however, the INA soldiers fought valiantly in April around Mount Popa. But in face of superior British forces, they had

to withdraw after losing a lot of soldiers. It was clear now that INA could not win this war, but it kept on fighting. On 29 April 1945, Prem Kumar Sahgal was captured by the British, and on 18 May Shah Nawaz Khan and Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon were taken prisoners.

12.6 DEFEAT OF JAPAN AND THE END OF WORLD WAR

Although the battle was lost in Burma, Bose had not given up. He sent his forces to fight in Malaya and Thailand. Despite all the reverses, Bose was hopeful for final victory. He now gathered his forces in Thailand and negotiated with the Thai government for help. He still believed that he would be able to launch another offensive for the freedom of his country.

But on 6 and 9 August 1945, two atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan which ended the war in East Asia. Japan surrendered, and now Netaji had to radically revise his strategy. Even after the defeat, Netaji was not pessimistic. He declared to his remaining soldiers that ‘The roads to Delhi are many and Delhi still remains our goal’. He had firm belief that ‘India shall be free before long’ [cited in Bose: 5].

The INA could not succeed militarily due to various reasons. The INA was raised on the basis of nationalist idealism and the belief that they would be quickly able to overwhelm the British forces, at least in North-east India, in conjunction with the Japanese and this will result in a general uprising in India leading to the liberation of the country. Driven by idealistic enthusiasm and Netaji’s charisma, thousands of civilians joined the INA. They did not receive sufficient military training required for a modern professional soldier, nor did they have the patience and stamina to endure such training. This resulted in lack of discipline and even desertions. Moreover, the logistical support and funds for regular salary and food for the troops was never sufficient. Quite often, the soldiers did not receive salary but only pocket money. By 1944 even boots were in short supply. Bose’s temporary arrangements for fund were no substitute for a state-funded professional military system. Thus, the level of maintenance required for combat army was not available for the INA soldiers. This led to various diseases in the ranks. So, it was mostly the idealistic fervour and Bose’s charismatic leadership which motivated the soldiers for acts of bravery. But it could not last for very long and there was decline of morale and motivation among the soldiers as the fighting prolonged.

Bose was also confronted with a broader problem. By the time he reached Japan and then Singapore, Japan’s fortune in war had started turning. Till April 1943, Japan had an upper hand both in the Pacific and in Southeast Asia. But around mid to late 1943, the Allied forces were gaining upper hand in certain areas. By 1944, the Japanese government could not supply sufficient resources even for its own army fighting in remote areas. During the campaign inside Indian territory, the Japanese and Indian soldiers did not receive enough ration and clothing for sustenance which led to diseases and mortality in large numbers. The defeat of the Axis powers in Europe and the Pacific region further created problems for Netaji and the INA.

However, what the INA failed to achieve on military front, it more than achieved on the political front.

12.7 TRIAL OF INA SOLDIERS AND THE NATIONAL UPSURGE

The trial of INA officers and soldiers at Delhi's Red Fort aroused such strong sentiments among the Indians against the British that the INA and its main officers became known in every home in the country. The trial of the INA leaders and soldiers re-energized the nationalist political atmosphere in India to almost fever pitch. The Air Force, Navy, and even the Army soldiers became influenced by the nationalist ideology and held the INA martyrs and surviving soldiers in high esteem. The common people protested in thousands and lakhs all over India, fighting pitched battle with the government forces and getting injured and even losing their lives. The after-effects of INA movement turned out to be far more widespread and potent than its concrete achievements on the battlefield.

The trial of the INA prisoners proved a boon for the nationalist movement which had suffered a setback after the defeat of INA and the suppression of the Quit India Movement. The people were enthused and filled the streets in support of the INA. The nationalist newspapers widely published the heroic stories of the fight carried out by the Azad Hind Fauj. The Congress decided to defend the prisoners in the Court and assigned the task to a veteran nationalist lawyer, Bhulabhai Desai. Other leaders also supported them in various ways, including in legal defense.

The trial of three important INA officers, Sahgal, Shah Nawaz, and Dhillon, commenced on 5 November 1945, but was adjourned and recommenced on 21 November. On this date there were angry and violent protests against their prosecution. There were clashes with the military and police in many cities and several protesters were killed and injured. There was a show of unity between the supporters of the Congress and Muslim League who carried the flags of both the parties together.

The Indians in all the wings of colonial government's armed forces expressed resentment in some form or the other. The Royal Indian Air Force stationed at Calcutta openly sent a message to the Bengal Congress Committee praising the 'noble ideal' of India's brave soldiers, and registered their 'strongest protest against the autocratic action of the Government of India and, in effect, that of the British Government in trying these brightest jewels of India' [Ghosh: 24].

Even in military, it was reported that 'the I.N.A. affairs was threatening to tumble down the whole edifice of the Indian army' [Ghosh: 25]. Most of the Indian officers were against prosecution of INA soldiers.

In Royal Indian Navy (RIN), it took a dangerous turn when Indian ratings of 78 ships stationed in Bombay, Calcutta, Karachi, Madras, Cochin, Vizagapatamm Mandapam, and the Andamans revolted. Only about ten ships remained relatively unaffected. The rebels demanded, among other things, the immediate release of INA prisoners and abandonment of their trials.

Thus, the trials not only created popular nationalist waves of agitation and protests all over the country, but they also generated strong political and nationalist sentiments among the armed forces. The Court sentenced the three prisoners to lifelong deportation, but its decision was reversed by commutation of the sentence by the commander-in-chief of British Indian Army. There was a fear of revolt in the Army and a general upsurge in the country. The three officers were set free and they were received outside by lakhs of people thronging the streets and shouting slogans.

The situation was looking very explosive, and the British now tried to resolve it by putting forward the idea of transfer of power to the Indians by quickly sending the Cabinet Mission to decide the modalities.

12.8 ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE AZAD HIND FAUJ

One of the important achievements of the Azad Hind Fauj was Hindu-Muslim unity at a time of deep communal division in society and politics. Moreover, it also accomplished unity at the caste and regional levels by bringing together people from all regions of India under one banner. It further tried to achieve gender equality by incorporating women not only in administrative roles but also in the army.

The political gains of the INA were enormous. It aroused a tremendous feeling of nationalism among the Indians abroad as well as at home and re-energized them for another possible battle against colonial rulers after the end of the Quit India Movement. Quite significantly, INA became a celebrated cause after its demise and even armed forces were very much affected. It now became quite clear to the British that they could not rely on the loyalty of the Indian soldiers.

In this way, the INA had a huge impact on the process of nation-making as well as decolonization.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Describe the military battles of the INA against British forces.
- 2) What was the impact of the INA on India's freedom struggle?

12.9 LET US SUM UP

The Azad Hind Fauj, formed by Subhas Chandra Bose, popularly known as Netaji, proved to be a major factor in mobilizing and organizing the Indians in Southeast Asia under the nationalist banner. Thousands of Indian civilians, besides the soldiers, joined the army to fight for the liberation of their country. Lakhs of Indians in the region supported it by providing money and sustenance. Its role in integrating the émigré Indians with the home country was phenomenal.

The role of the INA in creating enthusiasm among the Indians at home, even after its military existence was over, was even more significant. It generated tremendous nationalist and anti-colonial feelings not only among civilian population but also among the Indians in the armed forces. This critically weakened the foundations of the colonial government ultimately leading to its end.

12.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See section 12.2.
- 2) See section 12.3.
- 3) See section 12.4.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See sections 12.5 and 12.6.
- 2) See sections 12.7 and 12.8.



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