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Genesis of the Indian National Army

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Abstract: The efforts of Indians to promote the cause of India's independence from abroad occupy a unique place in the history of Indian struggle for freedom. The history of the Indian National Army, under which Indian had struggled for independence of India from outside, is the great story of a revolutionary war against the British colonial Government in India, with the help of the Japanese. It was the culmination of the great struggle for Indian independence from outside the country. Though at times it encountered the difficulties, it was to leave mark of eternal glory under the very able leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose. Its genesis had interested chapter of Indian history.

Keywords: Ghadar, Indian Independence League, Azad Hind Sangh, IGHQ, White Masters

Introduction

The genesis of the Indian National Army (INA) in East Asia is a fascinating chapter of the Indian freedom movement. During the Second World War, an army for the liberation of India, the Indian National Army was raised in South-East Asia by Gen. Mohan Singh with the help of many Indian civilians and prisoners of war. Regarding the genesis of INA, there are interesting facts which needed to be studied. In this paper an attempt has been made to explore in detail all aspects of the genesis of the INA. To write the paper primary sources, especially INA Files, have been extensively consulted.

It was during the latter half of 19th century and in the beginning of 20th century that many Indians left India for greener pastures abroad. A vast majority of them worked as labourers or watchmen and their economic condition was far from being satisfactory. They were treated very badly. This bitter experience of theirs led to organize themselves and worked for the cause. On the other hand, when the British Government of India took a number of repressive measures to control the revolutionaries, they shifted their base to foreign lands and joined hands with Indians, who were already working in this direction. Their attention was to profit by the rivalries of the world powers and oust the British from India with the help of a foreign country. But this could be achieved by creating conducive conditions across the borders in its immediate neighborhood. The countries of South-East Asia with large population of the Indians had assumed significance in this regard.

Indian organizations in South East Asia

Many Indian revolutionaries were working in the South East Asian countries and established the organization for liberation struggle. The Indians in Malaya formed the Central Indian Association and the Indian Youth League with the object to promote and safeguard the political, social and economic interests of the Indian community in Malaya. In China, the principal centers of Indian population were Shanghai and

Hongkong. A Ghadar (revolution) party had been formed in Shanghai under the leadership of Baba Hari Singh alias Osman Khan, an old Ghadarite. This party published a newspaper called 'Ghadar'. It was circulated in all political towns of China, Japan, Burma, Malaya and India. In Japan Rash Behari Bose founded the Indian Independence League in 1924 in Tokyo as its headquarter with branches spread out in South-East Asia in order to promote the cause of Indian independence.¹ Other political organization in Japan, which carried on political propaganda, were Indian National Associations and World Federation Movement. In 1937, the Indian Independence League in Japan called a conference in Tokyo, which was attended by Rash Behari Bose, Giani Pritam Singh, Swami Satya Nand Puri, Hari Singh and others. The conference drew up a plan for political propaganda in Thailand, Java, China, Malaya, Burma and India, especially among British Indian soldiers stationed in these countries.²

Thailand had been a prominent base of the Indian revolutionaries. Before the war there were number of Indian organisations in Thailand both religious and educational in nature— Shri Guru Singh Sabha, Namdhari (Sikh) Committee, Hindu Maha Sabha, Hindu Dharam Sabha, Arya Samaj Committee and the Indian Association of Thailand. There were some ardently nationalist Indians –Swami Satyanand Puri, Debnath Dass, Baba Amar Singh, Giani Pritam Singh etc. – who were ready to take up anti-British activities with the belief that those would help the achievement of Indian freedom. Swami Satyanand Puri founded the Thai Bharat Cultural lodge with the object to spread Indian culture and history among the Indian. Baba Amar Singh came from India after his release from Mandalay Jail in 1937. He was convinced that emancipation of India was possible only with the help of external help. In Thailand he began his revolutionary activities. He found a worthy and helpful companion in the person of Giani Pritam Singh, a Sikh missionary in Bangkok. Both joined the forces and formed the Azad Hind Sangh, an anti-British underground organization, which later came to be known as the Independence League of India. Both of them were instrument in formalizing relations with Japanese military authorities.

The Azad Hind Sangh had following political objects:

- i) To achieve India's complete independence.
- ii) To have close collaboration with the Japanese.
- iii) To stir up anti-British feelings propaganda by broadcasting.³

On the other hand the Japanese were collecting information about the Indian soldiers posted in far East and were trying to create anti-British feeling in them. In May 1941, the Second Bureau at the Imperial General Headquarter (IGHQ) sent Major Fujiwara Iwaichi, a senior officer, to visit South-East Asian countries in disguise to know about the composition and location of the British army in the region⁴ and collaborate with the Indian nationalists and establish propaganda centers for promoting goodwill and cooperation between the local population and the Japanese army in the event of war. IGHQ had instructed Major Fujiwara to work with the leaders of the IIL in Bangkok, especially Giani Pritam Singh, who wished to form a volunteer force from among the soldiers of British Indian Army and other Indians in South-East Asia.⁵ On his arrival at Bangkok in October 1941, Major Fujiwara contacted Giani Pritam Singh for a plan of action and negotiations between Giani

Pritam Singh and Major Fujiwara continued for about a week. In course of these discussions it became evident that Giani Pritam Singh was not ready to work for the Japanese army merely for its own sake. After a series of secret meetings Fujiwara and Pritam Singh reached an agreement in the first week of December 1941, they agreed on the following points:

The Independence League of India would fight the British Power with a view to achieve independence fully completely, and it would be given over all support by Japan. Japan had no political, economic, territorial, military ambitions in India.....⁶

Giani Pritam Singh would organize an Indian voluntary army from amongst the expected prisoners of war of the British Indian army and the local Indian civilians. Giani Pritam Singh's intention to raise an Indian voluntary army derived from his apprehension that advance of the Japanese army into India would not be relished by the Indian in that case an Indian army should be available to fight the British. It proved to be the seed of the Indian National Army.

The agreement had more than one implication i.e. the British power was to be cut by shaking the loyalty of the British Indian soldiers in Malaya, if possible they were to be won over and re-employed against British. On the Indian point i.e. Japanese military assistance to Indian Freedom Movement, there was no enthusiasm at that time in IGHQ. It was an initial step to organize the Indian Independence Movement in South- East Asia with the help of Japan by Giani Pritam Singh, Baba Amar Singh, etc. with bold objectives and designs.

Second World War

The Japanese declared war against British and United States on 8 December 1941 and Japanese army started their advance in the Malaya border. Giani Pritam Singh and his organization started their activities. The Indian Independence League was yet to be formally established. It was the declaration of war, which provided the opportunity for its inauguration. Consequently, on December 9, 1941 a few Indian worker of Giani Pritam Singh's party gathered in their own meeting place and proclaimed the inauguration of the Independent League of India. Giani Pritam Singh made the following declaration:

The whole of Japanese nation unanimously in a single voice has taken a pledge to stake her fate for the fulfillment of her incomprehensible spiritual aim of liberating the whole of Asia from the British yoke. We welcome this God given opportunity that the Indians have been waiting for since 1904...We appeal to all our Indian brethren, wherever they are, to refrain from helping the British war efforts, and to stand up together to attain the glorious Indian Freedom. All Indians should fight to eliminate the Anglo-Saxon from the whole of Asia whatever energetic endeavors and sacrifices they have to make.⁷

The League issued a notice to the Indians that the IIL "had already been established" with the objective of trying "utmost for the liberty of India."⁸ They hurriedly formed a number of branches of the Indian Independence League in cities of Thailand as these were overrun by Japan. Giani Pritam Singh and his companions had to labour hard day and night for several days continuously to save the Indians in East-

Asia from the impending disaster. Giani Pritam Singh wrote, printed and circulated the propaganda leaflets among the Indians. These leaflets were written in Gurmukhi, English and Hindustani. Giani Pritam Singh issued an appeal to the Indians to refrain from helping the British war efforts and stand up together to attain the glorious Indian Freedom. A small group of Indians started visiting all battle fronts and infused a new spirit and national awakening in the heart of Indian civilians and British Indian forces. The Japanese and the IIL propaganda on the eve of war played a pivotal role in causing the quick transformation of the British Indian forces. By December the British forces were completely disorganized.

Surrender of the Army

Never before in the history of the British rule had the Indian soldiers so demoralized as they were in Malaya and subsequently at other places in South-East Asia. Once such soldier, Capt. Mohan Singh of 1/14 Punjab Regiment, decided not to rejoin the retreating British Army. He began to search his soul. These were some of the questions that he put to himself:

Why were we Indian fighting? To what purposes was the flower of our youth being sacrificed? Is the Indian soldier only destined to die a dog's death for his White Masters? If the brave Indian soldiers is brave enough to fight for the freedom of his White Masters, or the White Devils as the Japanese called them, shouldn't he make an attempt to fight for his own freedom? It was certainly not Japan- it was Britain, the real enemy of world peace.⁹

As a result he convinced himself that Indian soldiers had no course to fight for the British instead he should fight the British along with the Japanese. "I should contact the Japanese, find out their true motives as regards India and then if assured, make common cause with them and fight our enemy."¹⁰ He thought to convert British Indian Army into a strong patriotic force and employ it for the liberation of our motherland.

He felt confident and approached the Japanese with his plan that they would certainly not stand in his way, to raise a truly Indian Army to fight the British. A message had been sent on 14 December to the Japanese military authorities at Alor Star that a party of men at Kaula Naranga wished to surrender. On the 15th morning Major Fujiwara accompanied by Giani Pritam Singh met Capt. Mohan Singh and his men. Giani Pritam Singh explained briefly his plan for India's independence with Japanese help. He also gave a brief description of IIL and its objectives. Capt. Mohan Singh and his men surrendered.

On 24 December, 1941, a meeting took place between Capt. Mohan Singh, Giani Pritam Singh, Mohammad Akram, Major Fujiwara and Lt. Gen. Yamashita, Japanese Commander of the Malaya campaign. Lt. Gen. Yamashita gave the assurance that Japan had no territorial, economic or political ambitions in India and that Japan was prepared to go all out to assist India to attain independence. It was unanimously decided that Capt. Mohan Singh should be appointed officer-in-charge of Indian prisoners of war.¹¹ Capt. Mohan Singh started thinking about the organization of India's liberation army and later on formed and organized the Indian National Army.

On 15 February 1942, after bitter fighting, the Imperial Japanese Army captured

Singapore. 73 thousand troops of the Malayan Command of whom 45 thousand were Indian surrendered the Japanese. The British Indian troops were ordered to collect in Farrer Park in Singapore. In Farrer Park, a British Officer Col. Hunt handed over them to the Japanese Government; Major Fujiwara received the surrender of the Indian soldiers and dramatically declared that all the Indian P.O.Ws would be under the control of Capt. Mohan Singh who would have the supreme authority over them.

Capt. Mohan Singh had indicated the trend of his mind to his compatriots at Farrer Park. He held a preliminary discussion with Indians in Malaya and Burma in a meeting at Singapore on March 9th and 10th, 1942. Rash Behari Bose, attended the meeting and invited a conference at Tokyo. Accordingly a conference was held at Tokyo from 28th to 30th March, 1942 and delegates had decided to form an Indian Independence League to organise an Indian Independence Movement in East Asia. It was resolved that "Independence-complete and free from foreign domination's interference and control of whatever nature - shall be the object of the movement." The conference further resolved that "military action against India will be taken only by the Indian National Army and under the command of Indians, together with such military, naval and air co-operation as may be requisitioned from the Japanese authorities by the Council of Action of the Indian Independence League to be formed."¹²

Bangkok Conference

With large number of delegates the Bangkok Conference was held under the chairmanship of Rash Behari Bose from 15th June to 23rd June, 1942. In conference Rash Behari Bose was elected the President of the Indian Independence League. The Council of Action was formed with Rash Behari Bose as President and K.P.K. Menon and N. Raghavan as civilian members and Capt. Mohan Singh and Col. G.Q. Gilani as military members. It was resolved that the Indian National Army, when raised, would be under the command of Capt. Mohan Singh. It was further resolved that the Japanese Government made a further clarification of their policy towards this movement as well as towards India. The Bangkok Conference was the first real step to consolidate the Indian Freedom Movement from abroad. It added to the awakening of the political consciousness of Indians throughout East Asia. The Indian independence movement had got beyond the stage of underground organization. It gave the proper direction to India's course of action.

The Bangkok Conference was followed by great enthusiasm among all the classes of Indians in East Asia. Indians geared up the activities to promote the cause. Capt. Mohan Singh was engaged in the most important and arduous task to organizing and equipping the INA. He wanted to make a force as could successfully contract even the Japanese, when contingency arose. Capt. Mohan Singh addressed the officers and soldiers in different camps and explained to them the Bangkok resolutions and the role that had been assigned to them. Capt. Mohan Singh had laboured a lot to mould the defeated and demoralized soldiers of the British army into members of a patriotic army. By vigorous propaganda Capt. Mohan Singh had been able to get promise from more than forty thousand POWs for joining the INA. By the end of August 1942, 45000 officers and men out of a total number of 60.000 Indian POWs ultimately volunteered to join the INA.

Formation of the INA

Capt. Mohan Singh was keen to expand and organize the INA. He wanted to raise three divisions as early as possible and submitted his program to the Japanese. The Japanese liaison agency (Iwakuro Kikan) gave its consent to raise and arm one division of soldiers from the Indian POWs with captured arms. On 1st September 1942 the Indian National Army was official declared.¹³ The First Division of the INA comprising about 17,000 soldiers was raised. That was the date when soldiers had actually armed, equipped and paraded in the uniform. Capt. Mohan Singh was promoted the rank of General Officer Commanding (GOC). The composition of the INA consisted of (a) Headquarters, (b) Hind Field Force Group, (c) Guerilla Group Consisting of Gandhi, Azad and Nehru Brigade, (d) Intelligence Group, (e) Re-Inforcement Group, (f) Propaganda and Welfare Group, (g) Special Service Group. All British ranks were surrendered and new INA ranks were given to persons concerned.

Conclusion

In fact the activities by the patriot Indians in South East Asia resulted in the genesis of the INA, which may be reckoned as a significant landmark in the annals of India's struggle for independence. Formation of First Division of the INA was real step towards Indian Independence Movement in South East Asia. The movement had gone beyond the stage of underground. This was a great effort made for the mother country by the patriots i.e. Giani Pritam Singh, Rash Behari Bose, General Mohan Singh, Baba Amar Singh, Mohammad Akram and others. Their spirited involvement at the initial stage proved successful to organize the Indian freedom movement in abroad. The INA was a patriotic army which was ready to liberate India. Its formation posed a challenge to British Raj. It was inspired by lofty ideals of unity, faith and sacrifice and every soldier had taken a solemn pledge to sacrifice his all for the honour of his motherland making it a unique movement in the history of India. Even the appearance of Subhas Chandra Bose in Singapore in July 1943, would have proved too late for the purpose. A primary factor that prompted Subhas Chandra Bose to risk submarine voyage to South East Asia from Germany at the height of World War II must have been the news of the creation of the INA, spurred by ardent entreaties of Giani Pritam Singh, Gen. Mohan Singh, Rash Behari Bose and other leaders of the INA and the IIL. Subhas Chandra Bose took the command of the INA and re-organized it. In fact it was army organized, officered and led wholly by Indians and had given the battle to Alien Powers on Indo-Burma front. By defeating British Army, the INA crossed the Burma border and stood on the soil of India. This army was none other than that genesis in South East Asia.

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