



Sacrificial Patriotism of the Unsung Heroes of Jammu in the Indian National Army

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Abstract

The paper highlights the contribution of the unsung heroes of the Jammu region in the Indian National Army. Their supreme sacrifice and selfless struggle remained behind the scene – unrecognized and unappreciated. The soldiers from the middle-class family background of the Jammu region shifted their loyalties from the British Indian army towards INA and sacrificed their life for the cause of the nation. This work is an attempt to bring forth their persistent sacrifices and martyrdom to instill reverence for the unsung heroes of the freedom struggle in the hearts of the younger generation.

Key Words - Regular Divisions of INA, Intelligence and field propaganda Unit, Sacrificial patriotism, Provisional Government, Burma Front.

The Cambridge educated Subhas Chandra Bose had plunged in to the freedom struggle after resigning from the ICS in 1921. He sacrificed his brilliant career for the country's service, suffered various imprisonment, twice became the president of the Congress and by sheer courage he reached Kabul by giving slip to the guard put over him by the government. He passed through European countries and reached Japan. Later, collected scattered army of brilliant young men from all communities and dared to battle the mighty government.

In the subsequent two decades of mass agitation against the Colonial rule, the soldiers in the British Indian army had remained insulated from the political discontent of Indian civilians. They were deployed everywhere according to the needs of the British imperial interest. Subhash Chandra Bose effort made possible to replacing their loyalty from the British to new allegiance for the cause of Indian Independence.

The opportunity was provided by the Second world war and the Indian soldiers in the British army were taken as prisoners of war by the enemies of the British. Though the INA could not succeed in its immediate objectives of bringing about the final dissolution of the British raj but under its banner it gathered together men of all religion and races of India. As an uncompromising anti-imperialist, a brave man prone to take enormous risks and had a mission of freedom of India from bondage.

At the time of outbreak of the World War 2nd in South-East-Asian region, some forty thousand soldiers of British Indian army in Japan's Malayan campaign after the fall of Singapore, captured as prisoners of war. From these prisoners of war, the first Indian national army was formed under Mohan Singh, an officer in the British Indian army who was captured in the Malayan campaign. Further, his ally with Fujiwara (a member of the Japanese royal family) provided him considerable Japanese aid and support. Moreover, the ethnic Indians in South-East-Asia also supported the cause of Indian independence and had formed local Leagues in Malaya like Indian Independence League, that was set up by Rash Bihari Bose. Further, in a series of meeting between

INA leaders and Japanese officials in 1943, Subhash Chander Bose, a highly nationalist leader, was considered to be the right person and was invited by the Japanese to lead the Indian National Army. Bose reached Tokyo by submarine in January 1943, where his radio broadcasts exhorted the Indians in South-East-Asia to join the fight for independence. His influence was notable and his appeal reinvigorating, when he famously proclaimed *“Give me blood and I will give you freedom.”*

The first guerrilla regiment known as Subhas brigade INA first division arrived in Burma by Nov. 1942. Strategic aim of Japanese forces saw invasion as a preemptive strike to forestall British attempt to reconquer Burma by Nov 1942. INA on the other hand saw its role as a catalyst for civilian uprising against British rule and capture of Imphal and Kohima would open way for its advance to the rest of Assam and Bengal. In addition of the three-regular division of the INA, the intelligence and field propaganda units had been organized into three groups

The Bahadur group would penetrate behind every line, the intelligence group would subsist the loyalty of British Indian troops on the battle field and reinforcement group would be in charge of political education of Indian prisoner before joining the INA

1944 Bose recruited civilians in Burma for the INA, raising resources from the wealthy Indians for his war chest. Women joined Rani of Jhansi regiment. On 26th Sept 1946, a ceremonial parade and prayers were held in Rangoon at the tomb of last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Jafer to signal India’s determination to march to the Red Fort of Delhi. Men from Tamil and Telegu community in Burma swelled the rank of INA.

Furthermore, INA Papers recorded unprecedented sacrifices of soldiers from the Jammu region who made an exemplary deed, faced intense challenges for the cause of the nation. Bahadur Singh, born in middle class Dogra family in a small village of Jammu filled with the passion for armed forces joined 2/17 Dogra regiment of the British Indian Army. He fought for allied forces during the Second World War. Following the Japan’s spectacular campaign against the allied forces at Malaya and Singapore on Feb 1942, Bahadur Singh was one among the thousands of Indian troops who had to surrender at Singapore and were captured as prisoners of war. However, Japan did not want to hold Indian soldiers as prisoners of war and rather helped preparing in the formation of Indian National Army to wrest India’s freedom from the British rule. Furthermore, the ideologues of INA like Rash Behari Bose and Mohan Singh had also persuaded and won many soldiers of the British Indian Army at their side.

Additionally, due to the persuasion of Subhash Chandra Bose and his nationalist call for patriotic duty, like many others, Bahadur Singh voluntarily joined India’s army of liberation as a soldier in the 2nd Guerrilla Regiment also called as the Gandhi Brigade under Colonel Inayat Kiyani.

Similarly, Chandi Ram, Ram Singh and Narottam Singh from the Dogra community of Jammu district were of the 2/17 Dogra regiment also joined Indian National Army as a soldier in the 2nd Guerrilla Regiment called as the Gandhi Brigade in the similar circumstances. They along with other soldiers fought on the Burma front against the British army. At Burma front, monsoon broke out early and compounded the defects in transport and supply. Due to the blockade of the supply line, Chandi Ram, Ram Singh and the other soldiers of the brigade had to subsist on jungle grass. Being ravaged by the outbreak of the deadly malaria epidemic and without any proper arrangement of health care and medical facilities, they were forced to face intense challenges. Though Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose set up supply board in Rangoon and tried to buy local produce for the INA, but all in vain. Besides, the torrential rain had washed away all the tracks and turned the entire terrain on the Indo-Burma border into a river of green mud.

The Gandhi brigade fought ferociously against the British soldiers, but it was dangerously encircled and decimated. However, Chandi Ram and the other soldiers in the brigade fought meticulously and were somehow managed to counter the attack bravely even during the critical situation.

Despite all the shortcomings, Sepoy Ram Singh Bahadur Singh and Chadi Ram along with the other soldiers of INA though committed for the expulsion of British from India but the rough weather conditions not only prevented the army to make any further advance but also made the withdrawal an uphill task for the soldiers. It was during the retreat that Ram Singh, Bahadur Singh and Chadi Ram were killed in an encounter with the British led allied forces and got martyred in 1944.

Further, the 3rd Guerrilla Regiment of INA was formed called Azad brigade under Colonel Gulzara Singh, to fight the British forces on the Indo- Burma Border.

Ayub Khan of village *Nahr* in district Poonch. carried away by the ideals of armed forces and patriotism, joined the 4/9 Jat regiment of the British Indian Army. Later when Subhash Chandra Bose gave a call for patriotic duty, Ayub Khan joined the INA as Lieutenant in the 3rd Guerrilla Regiment, the Azad brigade under Colonel Gulzara Singh, and fought the British forces on the Indo- Burma Border.

When the Azad brigade reached Tamu Moreh town on the Indo-Burma border in the middle of May and set up its base at place called Narum; a Pitched battle was fought all along Tamu- Moreh Palel – Imphal road during the month of May in which Azad brigade of INA fought on the right flank of the Japanese forces. The 3rd Guerrilla Regiment on Indo-Burma border, during the Imphal offensive posed a serious threat to the allied cause. However, Ayub Khan lost his life during Imphal offensive.

Similarly, Inder Singh of village *Jhubian Brahminadian*, in *Ramgarh* area of Jammu, deflected from the British Indian army, and volunteered his services to the INA in Malaya as a soldier in its 3rd guerrilla Regiment. Burma and Malaya were considered as the spring board for INA's march into India, hence for the defense of Burma, Inder Singh along with many other soldiers was sent there to confront the allied forces. Unfortunately, owing to the shortage of logistical support and unfavorable weather conditions caused due to heavy torrential rains during the monsoons, INA suffered heavy casualties from the allied planes. In the pitched battle that followed, Inder Singh during the exchange of fire, laid down his life for the greater cause of nation's liberation from alien rule.

In addition to the three regular divisions of the Indian National Army, the Intelligence and Field Propaganda unit, had also been organized. The Bahadur group was recruited for penetrating behind enemy lines while the Intelligence and Field Propaganda units would subvert the loyalty of the British Indian troops on the battle field and the Reinforcement Group was to be in charge of the political indoctrination of Indian prisoners of war before they joined the INA.

A brave soldier Khushal Singh, from village Julianwala in Mirpur district of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, with a zeal to serve his nation recruited as jamadar in 1/13 frontier Forces; crossed over to the INA in the early weeks of fighting in Arakan and were welcomed by Bose. Khushal Singh as a captain in the Reinforcement group meticulously did his job and provided the required political indoctrination which motivated a number of British Indian soldiers in deserting and changing their loyalties for the cause of the nation. Later, while fighting on Burma front in March 1944, in an encounter with British forces he attained martyrdom in the service of the nation.

The second division after the Imphal offensive was organized in 1944, under Abdul Aziz Tajik. On 23rd October 1943, when Indian National Army (INA) declared war against Britain and the United states, its first commitment came with the opening of Japanese offensive towards Manipur-- code named U-Go. INA's own strategy was to avoid set pitched battles, for which it lacked armament as well as manpower. It was planned that once Japanese forces had broken through British defenses at Imphal, the INA would cross the hills of North-East India into Gangetic plains where it would work as a Guerrilla army.

However, in Imphal, the shortage of supplies and additional difficulties caused by monsoon forced the INA volunteers to withdraw. Furthermore, due to allied air dominance, INA had to face a critical situation during the withdrawal. The soldiers were wounded, diseased and ravaged by the sudden outbreak of malaria which became all the more alarming due to the lack of health care and medical arrangements and shortage of food supply. Torrential rain had washed away all the tracks along the route which made it impossible for the volunteers to advance their march.

On 10th of July, 1944, the military position become extremely untenable and there was no option but to withdraw from Imphal. INA lost a substantial number of men in this retreat in which Mansabdar also lost his life in action near Imphal-Manipur in 1944. Netaji's public acknowledgement of the failure of the Imphal offensive in a radio address on August 21, 1944, blamed the set back on early monsoon which compounded defects in transport and supply. It was through this radio announcement that Mansabdar family got the information about this great debacle.

There was shortage of food supply and transportation difficulties. The INA soldiers were ravaged by the fast spreading epidemic of malaria and had no medicines. Though Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose set up supply board in Rangoon and tried to buy local produce for the INA, but all in vain. The tracks and important communication lines were damaged and washed away by the heavy torrential rains.

As the allied forces Burma campaign began, the INA remained committed to the defense of Burma as part of the Japanese defense deployment, INA was tasked with the defense of Irrawady and adjoining areas around Nangyu.

Shiv Ram from the *Agra Chak* of Jammu district joined as an officer in the second division of the INA in Malaya, during Irrawaddy operations. The allied forces were equipped with fighting tanks, hand grenade and bottles of petrol. As a result, the INA soldiers were in a hopeless position and had to surrender to the allied forces due to scarcity ammunition.

Consequently, the surviving units of the second division began to withdraw towards *Rangoon*. Neta Ji Subhash Chandra Bose also walked with the troops and refused to leave them despite the fact that transport was arranged for him. Unfortunately, owing to the hard weather conditions created by heavy torrential rains and in the absence of any logistic support, the withdrawing forces regularly suffered casualties from allied planes. Officer Shiv Ram, during the withdrawal lost his life in the course of British offensive in 1945 and got martyred in this struggle for India's Independence.

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Shalo Singh was born in a small village of *Batala*, in district Mirpur, now in Pakistan occupied Jammu and Kashmir (POJK). Before joining the Indian National Army in Malaya, he was a soldier in 5/14 Punjab regiment of the British Indian Army

Shalo Singh also fought on Burma front against the allied forces. However, owing to unfavorable weather conditions caused by heavy monsoon rains accompanied by the absence of timely logistical support, the Indian National Army could not make any further advance. Moreover, the washing away of the unmetalled track due to torrential rains made the withdrawal all the more difficult. While retreating, the INA had to face a number of casualties in which Shalo Singh also got martyred in action in the battle field in 1944. Oct 21, 1943, Bose proclaimed the formation of provisional government of Azad Hind in Singapore. in early 1944, the head quart in of provisional government moved forward from Singapore to Rangoon

The INA commanded truly a national transcending the divisions deliberately fostered by the alien Colonial Power. Netaji successfully united Hindu Muslim Sikh Christian in the freedom struggle. He won the implicit trust of the minorities as no other political stalwarts had done earlier and commanded stronger appeal. He had subverted the loyalty of the Indian soldiers and instilled in them the cause of India's freedom struggle. India's only soldier statesman of his time. Exactly a week before his assassination Gandhi in his final eulogy to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose pointed out that he knew no provincialism, nor communal differences, he had in his brave army --men and women drawn from all over India without distinction. In memory of that great patriot – Gandhi called upon Indians to cleanse their heart of all communal bitterness.

On July 4th 1943, he rose to accept the leadership of Indian freedom movement in south east Asia and gave his soldiers the slogan *Chalo Delhi*. Whether we live or die, only thing that matters is that India shall be free. Whether we live or die, only thing that matters is that India shall be free. INA's each unit consisted of Baluchis Assamies Kashmiris Malayali -the martial and non-martial; every region of India represented. Each unit being a living tribute to the unity of India.

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