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NETAJI SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE AND THE INA-JAPANESE CAMPAIGN IN NORTHEAST INDIA DURING WORLD WAR II

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Abstract:

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose played a crucial role, particularly during World War II, in the Indian freedom struggle from British rule. For two decades, Subhas Chandra Bose was associated with the Indian National Congress and served the organisation in various capacities. He twice became the president of the INC, and ultimately, Bose formed his party called the Forward Bloc. Bose's revolutionary thoughts inspired millions of Indians; therefore, he quickly became very popular among the youth. He believed in the Armed struggle to end the British Raj; consequently, when World War II broke out in Europe, he wanted to take advantage of the war in favour of India's struggle for independence by allying with Germany. He escaped from India to reach Germany, where he launched Propaganda for India's freedom through various radio broadcasts. Later, he joined hands with Japan and launched a massive campaign against Allied Forces from Southeast Asian and Northeast India. The movement of the INA, under the leadership of Bose, shook the foundation of British rule in India.

Key Words: World War II, British Rule, Indian National Congress, Allied Forces and Indian National Army.

Introduction:

The paper attempts to analyse the role and contributions of Subhas Chandra, an important figure in Indian history, popularly known as Netaji. His contribution towards inspiring people to take up armed struggle against the might of the British Empire has generated veneration and respect across generations among the people. He was born on January 23, 1887, in a Bengali family in Cuttack, Odisha. Born and brought up in an affluent family, he lacked no resources to achieve success within the colonial structure; however, his sense of commitment towards his land made him throw away all his luxuries of life, and he joined the struggle to free the motherland from the shackles of foreign subjugation, politically as well as socially. After withdrawing his name from ICS, he decided to get involved in nationalist politics.

Methodology:

The research, based on a qualitative method, involves analysing primary and secondary sources such as government reports, police records and reports, private papers and correspondence, books and articles. The study was primarily carried out by analysing the secondary sources.

Let me begin the discussion on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his involvement in the INA's campaign in Northeast India. When Bose came to India from London after withdrawing his name from the probationary ICS, he met Mahatma Gandhi. On the suggestion of Mahatma Gandhi, Bose met Chittaranjan Das, a prominent leader of Congress from Bengal. At their very first meeting, Bose was impressed by C.R. Das's positive attitude regarding the future course of political activities.ⁱ After Bose became a full-time political worker, C.R. Das assigned him the task of serving as the Principal of the Bengal National College and also as the organiser in the National Volunteer Corps. In 1921, Mahatma Gandhi launched the Nationwide Non-Cooperation Movement against the exploitative policies of the British. In Bengal, under the guidance of C.R. Das, Bose led the non-cooperation movement. To carry out the revolutionary activities, Bose formed the 'All Bengal Youth League' of which he was chosen as the President. The organisation aimed to prepare and build the youth of the country physically, mentally, spiritually, intellectually, and psychologically for the ultimate task of bringing about a revolutionary transformation of Indian society and to build a new India.ⁱⁱ

At the end of 1923, Subhas Chandra Bose became the General Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. In 1924, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was appointed the Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. At



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the Madras session of the Indian National Congress in December 1927, Bose was appointed as the General Secretary of the All-India Congress Committee. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was jailed many times, and he was even sentenced to two years in prison in Mandalay in Burma (Myanmar).ⁱⁱⁱ Mandalay at that time was a very unhealthy place, which caused the high death rate due to epidemics such as plague and smallpox. Bose went to Europe for medical treatment in 1932, where he played the role of an unofficial ambassador of Indian Nationalism. Despite the restriction imposed upon him, he toured many European countries as the spokesman for India's freedom. Despite his recurring health problems, Bose toured tirelessly for the next three years, rousing Indian students studying abroad, establishing associations to promote friendship between India and various European countries.^{iv}

As soon as Bose reached Bombay from Vienna after regaining his health, he was taken into custody on April 8, 1936. The Congress President, Jawaharlal Nehru, called on the entire country to observe All-India Subhas Day on May 10, 1936, to pressurise the government to release Subhas Bose; consequently, Bose was released in March 1937. On 18 January 1938, then Congress General Secretary Acharya J.B. Kripalani announced that Subhas Chandra Bose had been duly elected President of the Congress.^v In February, the fifty-first session of the INC was held in Haripura, a village in present-day Gujarat. In his presidential address at the Haripura Session, Bose analysed the weaknesses and strengths of the British Empire and its method of ruling non-European countries. Bose pointed out the 'divide and rule' policy adopted by the British government to rule over the Indians.

The election was held for Congress President in which Bose filed his candidature for another term; on the contrary, Gandhi put forward the name of Pattabhi Sitaramayya. On 29 January 1939, Bose was elected Congress president for a second consecutive term by securing 1580 votes against Sitaramayya's 1375.^{vi} Gandhi took the re-election of Bose as a personal defeat, but Bose wanted to improve the strained relationship with Gandhi. In the last week of April 1939, AICC assembled in Calcutta to resolve the deadlock between AICWC and Bose. Negotiations were breaking down, and on 29 April, ultimately, Bose tendered his resignation.^{vii} Bose's resignation was not the end of his political career, but an opportunity for a new beginning. He formed a separate group or block within Congress, called the Forward Bloc, on May 3, 1939, to serve as a forum for more radical elements of Congress. When Britain declared war against Germany, Bose saw it as an opportunity for Indians to liberate themselves from the clutches of British imperialism. To Hindu-Muslim unity, Bose called for the observance of Siraj-ud-daula Day, the last independent nawab, on July 3, 1940.^{viii} At another occasion, Bose led a movement to remove the Holwell monument from Dalhousie Square. Bose considered the monument a symbol of slavery and humiliation; the movement was successful, but Bose was arrested.

When Netaji was under house arrest, he secretly left his home on January 18, 1941. Netaji reached Berlin on April 2, 1941, by travelling through Russia and submitted a memorandum to the German government on India's freedom movement and a plan of cooperation between India and Germany during World War II.^{ix} While in Germany, Subhas Chandra Bose initiated radio broadcasts, most prominently through Azad Hind Radio, National Congress Radio, and Azad Muslim Radio, to inspire Indians and promote the cause of independence from British rule.^x In East Asia, Japan gained the upper hand in the war against the Allied forces and occupied most of the territories previously under the control of imperialist powers, such as Britain and France. Bose closely watched the advancing Japanese forces in Southeast Asia. He saw a new opportunity to raise the struggle against the British. In May 1942, Bose met with Adolf Hitler for the first time, where he shared his idea about the journey to Southeast Asia, and Hitler also agreed to provide logistical support for Bose's travel by submarine. Finally, on 9th February 1943, Bose, along with Abid Hasan, boarded the German submarine and set off for East Asia.

The arrival of Bose in South-East Asia was a significant event in the history of the Indian National Army, in particular and the Indian freedom struggle in general. Bose did not get much enthusiasm from the German administration headed by Hitler and turned towards Japan. Japan achieved significant success in its campaigns in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. The considerable number of Indian diasporas in Southeast Asia was crucial for the Japanese to protect their territorial possession in the region, which largely relied on Indian troops. On 10 January 1943, for the first time, Bose met with Japanese Prime Minister Tojo and was impressed by the attitude of the Japanese Premier. Bose was invited to attend a session of the Imperial Diet as a guest, where Tojo declared his unconditional support for the cause of Indian's Independence.^{xi} After a successful



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meeting with Tojo, Bose visited Singapore, an important base of Indians in South-East Asia. He received an enthusiastic welcome, and on 4th July 1943, the transfer of leadership of the Indian Independence League took place, where veteran freedom fighter Rash Behari Bose handed over the leadership of the movement to young revolutionary Subhas Chandra Bose. The very next day, Bose addressed some twelve thousand soldiers of the Indian National Army or *Azad Hind Fauj*, where he gave the famous battle cry '*Chalo Delhi*'.

The INA was initially formed on 17 February 1942 by Mohan Singh with the support of Japanese Major Fujiwara Iwaichi after the fall of Singapore into the British hands. INA comprised the Indian Prisoners of War captured by Japanese forces in Malaya. Indian war prisoners enthusiastically accepted the proposal of the Japanese Major. Bose formed the women's regiment of the INA and gave it the name 'Rani of Jhansi' regiment because Lakshmibai, the warrior Rani of the Princely state of Jhansi, was the most suitable name, as she had fought against the British in the revolt of 1857 and, following her death in battle, had become the folk heroine after the revolt. Dr Swaminathan was given charge of the '*Rani of Jhansi*' regiment, and she tirelessly worked for recruiting women in the regiment. Women's regiment of the INA involved themselves in providing medical treatment to the injured soldiers of the INA, especially during the Imphal-Kohima Campaign. Bose saw new hope for the Indians when Burma gained independence from the British with the support of Japan.

The significant historical event that took place in Southeast Asia was the formation of the Provisional Government on 21 October 1943 in Singapore. The Provisional Government was recognised by nine countries, namely Japan, Germany, Croatia, Manchukuo, Nanking, the Philippines, Thailand and Burma.^{xii} The Provisional Government consisted of five ministers, eight representatives of the INA, and eight civilian advisers representing Indians in South-East Asia. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was the head of the government and also the supreme commander of the INA; he also held the office of Foreign Affairs and the War Ministry. '*Jai Hind*' was chosen as the common greeting or salutation when Indians met one another, and '*Hindustani*', a blend of Hindi and Urdu written in the Roman script, became the national language of the *Azad Hind* government. The Provisional Government declared war on Britain and the USA at midnight on 23 October 1943.

For the legitimacy of the Provisional Government, Bose laid claims to Indian territory and the allegiance of India's overseas citizens. The Provisional Government gave Indians domiciled abroad the option of accepting Indian citizenship. In the last week of October, Bose met Japanese Prime Minister Tojo to present his demands for financial support. During the meeting, Bose also proposed that certain Indian territories under Japanese control be transferred to the Provisional Government of India. Japan accepted Bose's proposal and decided to transfer the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the Provisional Government. After he escapes from India, Bose, for the first time, set foot on Indian soil in December 1943, where he hoisted the tricolour in Port Blair. Bose also paid tribute to Indian revolutionaries who had been jailed and suffered there. Apart from that, Netaji also renamed Andaman as Shaheed, which means 'martyrs' Island, and Nicobar as Swaraj, which means 'Freedom'.^{xiii} In January 1944, Bose had shifted the headquarters of the provisional government from Singapore to Rangoon as a preparatory step to the advance of the INA towards the Indian frontier. In September 1943, the INA's guerrilla regiment named Subhas had moved to Burma. The first division of INA, deployed initially as a light screen for flank protection, intelligence and subversion units or mostly in the follow-on support role.^{xiv}

INA, with Japanese support, launched the operation against the British from the Burmese frontiers. Bose intended to march towards the mainland of India through the plains of Assam and to instigate a massive revolt against the British. During the operation, Bose had to deal with the local Japanese commanders, who were not certain about the combat performance of the INA despite the full cooperation of the Japanese administration. The INA took its first battle on the Arakan front, and the INA proved its superiority over the enemy. The Japanese Commander-in-Chief in Burma wanted to use the INA regiment as field propaganda units by dividing it into small groups, but Bose refused to do so. The first division of the INA was deployed in the Indo-Burmese frontline, and Bose himself was present to boost the morale of the soldiers. The regiments of the INA were named after prominent nationalist leaders of India; the motive was to unite Indians against the British. There were regiments named after Gandhi, Nehru, Rani of Jhansi and Subhas. The Japanese agreed to have one battalion of the Subhas brigade take part in the fight against the British West African Division in the Kaladan valley.^{xv}



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Bose tirelessly spent his time gathering civilian recruits from Burma for the INA and raising funds from wealthy Indians to carry forward the war. The Japanese three divisions seized the Arakan front and isolated both the British 5th and 7th infantry divisions. The Japanese expected them to surrender, as earlier in Malaya and Burma, but British divisions formed an admin box that was wholly supplied from the air and held out grimly. The Imphal- Kohima offensive or INA- Japan's Northeast campaign was a major and vital offensive for the INA because it was the gateway to enter the mainland of India through the Brahmaputra valley of Assam and Bengal. The Imphal offensive was launched on March 8, 1944, and Bose sought to have the administration of territories in India that fell to the INA under the control of the Provisional Government. Bose appointed A.C. Chatterjee as the Chief Administrator of the liberated territories. The *Azad Hind Dal*, a civil affairs group, was formed to take control of the administration within India.^{xvi} INA moved into North-Eastern India on March 18, 1944, towards Imphal and Kohima with the slogan of 'Chalo Delhi'. They crossed the Burmese frontier and launched the armed struggle onto Indian Soil.

The Japanese 15th Infantry Division under the command of General Yamuchi, along with the INA first division, had launched the main thrust in the Imphal sector. Bose closely kept his eyes on the Imphal Campaign of the combined forces of the INA and Japan. He shifted his headquarters from Rangoon to Maymyo, a small hill town near Mandalay. Japanese General Mutaguchi also established his base at Maymyo due to its proximity to the war front, which enabled him to obtain key information about the war front and facilitated a rapid move to Imphal. INA - Japanese forces obstructed the Imphal-Kohima Road, as British forces were unable to move towards the Dimapur railhead and the route to Ledo. The 33rd Japanese division was held up at the key position of Bishenpur. Initially, the Japanese commander was regarded as their best, but later was blamed for the failure to progress operations northwards with speed and was replaced.

The Japanese army desperately needed the supplies at Imphal. Imphal was turned into a Stalingrad; the only difference was that Imphal was under the attack of Japanese divisions.^{xvii} British forces under the Command of Field Marshal Slim put all their energy into defending Imphal, and he had also fully grasped the criticality of the Battle of Imphal. Commander Slim now airlifted the British soldiers from the Arakan and kept them in Imphal. The offensive was going well in the Imphal sector in April 1944; the Japanese forces and the INA seemed within an ace of capturing both Imphal and Kohima.^{xviii} The Indian tricolour was hoisted in Moirang near Imphal. The Japanese and INA put themselves in great danger because they decided to travel with limited supplies across long distances through difficult and treacherous terrain.

The Allied forces took great advantage in terms of air power over the Japanese in Burma and North-Eastern India. The Japanese found it impossible to provide air cover and transport passable supplies to the INA as well as their army.^{xix} The commander of the first division of the INA, Mohammad Zaman Kiani, had established his base at Chamol, some thirty-five miles east of Imphal. Kiani wanted two more battalions of the Subhas Brigade deployed in the Chin Hills to re-join his division, to take part in the assault on Kohima and Imphal. According to Shah Nawaz Khan's report, the Nagas extended their support to the INA troops during their operations in the Kohima Sector because they did not want to be ruled either by the British or the Japanese. The Gandhi Brigade, led by Inayat Jan Kiani, mounted an attack on the British airfield at Palel. There, INA encountered Gurkha troops and suffered heavy casualties. The assaults on Palel airfield proved a failure, and the British at Palel had received reinforcements that were airlifted from the Akaran front.

The early monsoon arrival, which had completely restricted all large-scale operations for Japanese-INA forces, the supply route of the Japanese-INA, was washed away by torrential rain. The Japanese and the INA troops were almost on starvation rations, and there was no supply of ammunition as well. The British took advantage of the rains, and they had built up their stocks for the monsoons by using aircraft.^{xx} British forces were well aware of the weakening positions of the INA troops, and they launched repeated raids to retake Mittonghkanu. Eventually, INA was forced to withdraw from Mittonghkanu because of logistical constraints. On 6 July 1944, Bose addressed Gandhi on the radio, that he justified his course of action during the Second World War. He praised Gandhi for launching the Quit India Movement in 1942. Further, Bose also expressed his confidence in a final victory and addressed Gandhi by calling him 'Father of our Nation'.



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In the second week of July, the Japanese informed Bose about their overall military position in Imphal, which had become indefensible, and they had no other option but to order a retreat from Imphal.^{xxi} Japan made a decision public on 26 July to suspend the Imphal campaign, and on the same day, Tojo resigned as Prime Minister for unrelated reasons. Bose publicly accepted the failure of the Imphal campaign in a radio address from Rangoon on 21st August 1944.^{xxii} Netaji blamed the debacle of the mission on the early Monsoon, which compounded defects in transportation and supply. Bose visited Yeu and Mandalay in September 1945 to look at his retreating forces, and the majority of soldiers were hospitalised. Women of the Rani of Jhansi regiment took care of the sick and wounded INA soldiers of the battle of Imphal. The new Japanese Prime Minister, General Kuniaki Koiso, invited Bose to visit Japan for the future course of action.

Conclusion:

Bose left for a meeting at the invitation of the new Prime Minister of Japan, along with M.Z. Kiani, A.C. Chatterjee and Habibur Rahman. Bose demanded full-fledged diplomatic relations to be established with the Azad Hind government by appointing an ambassador. In return, Bose agreed to deploy the INA's third division in the defence of Malaya. Bose very much wanted to resume his march towards Delhi, which had halted with the failure of the Imphal campaign. Bose saw a lesser chance of further help from Japan, and so now he tried to establish contact with the Soviet Union. According to a widely accepted official version, Bose died in an alleged plane crash on 18th August 1944 in Taipei. After the end of World War II, the Allied Powers emerged victorious, and the British treated the prisoners of war of the Indian National Army badly. The British decided to put some leading officers of the INA on trial for treason against the king-emperor and other charges. The first and the main trial was conducted by a military court at the Red Fort in Delhi in November and December 1945. The spirit of revolt generated among the British Indian Armed Forces by the INA and also the people throughout the country, irrespective of class, caste and creed, at the time of the trial in the Red Fort had ultimately shaken the foundation British rule in India, which forced them to grant independence to India within less than three years after the end of WWII.

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