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# The Indian National Army and Japan



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# The Indian National Army and Japan

JOYCE CHAPMAN LEBRA



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

*Singapore*

First published in Singapore in 1971 by  
Donald Moore for  
Asia Pacific Press Pte Ltd  
635-637 East Coast Road  
Singapore 15

First reprinted in Singapore in 2008 by  
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies  
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace  
Pasir Panjang  
Singapore 119614

*E-mail:* [publish@iseas.edu.sg](mailto:publish@iseas.edu.sg)  
*Website:* <<http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>>

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2008 First Reprint

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ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

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Lebra-Chapman, Joyce,  
The Indian National Army and Japan.  
1. Indian National Army  
2. World War, 1939–1945—India.  
3. World War, 1939–1945—Japan.  
4. India—Relations—Japan.  
5. Japan—Relations—India.  
I. Title.

DS442.6 L452                      2008

ISBN 978-981-230-806-1 (soft cover)

ISBN 978-981-230-807-8 (PDF)

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Typeset by International Typesetters Pte Ltd  
Printed in Singapore by Photoplates Private Limited

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# Abstract

## Overview

This is a reprint of *Jungle Alliance: Japan and the Indian National Army*, which was originally published in 1971 by Donald Moore for Asia/Pacific Press. It has long since been out of print and is unavailable. It covers the beginnings of the Indian National Army, as part of a Japanese military intelligence operation under Major Iwaichi Fujiwara, and moves forward to the arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose and the enlarged INA and Free India Provisional Government under his direction from 1943 until the collapse of Japan and the INA in August 1945.

## Specific Aspects

Chapters relating to the origins of the INA in the interaction between Fujiwara and a young Sikh Major, Mohan Singh, are covered here as critical to the birth of the INA. The book also deals with the earlier career of Subhas Chandra Bose, including his stay in Berlin and the Indian Legion there.

## How This Book Differs From Others

This is still the only volume dealing with the interaction between the Japanese Army and the Indian National Army that also deals with Japanese sources. No other book in English has replaced this book, which is why a reprint edition is required at this time.

## Foreword

It is a quarter of a century ago that Japanese armed forces left Southeast Asia, yet even now our knowledge about the occupation years can be likened to a jigsaw puzzle in which far too many pieces are still missing. Happily, the number of researchers devoting themselves to the study of wartime Southeast Asia is increasing. More than that, many if not most of them are better trained than the handful of scholars who preceded them. Thus, though there are entire countries about which we know as yet lamentably little, others, or parts of others at least, have emerged into ever-clearer perspective. This is particularly true of what might be called “macro-political” studies, which focus on the centres of political and administrative power, if not also on the largest, or dominant, population groups. Far less is known about regional and local developments beyond the capital cities, about smaller ethnic groups and, at least equally important, about racial minorities. It is surely remarkable that no monograph on the Chinese in wartime Southeast Asia has yet appeared, and that in spite of the highly complex relationships between Nanyang Chinese and Japanese.

The more fortunate, then, that we now have before us the first detailed study by a Western scholar of the second largest alien Asian minority in Southeast Asia, the Indians. It most ably supplements and complements K. K. Ghosh’s *The Indian National Army: Second Front of the Indian Independence Movement*, published in India in 1969. Indeed, Dr Lebra’s major concern is not with the Indian communities in Malaya, Burma and Thailand as such. Rather, it is with a peculiarly fascinating and turbulent chapter in modern Indian history—a history that happened for the greater part to take place in Southeast Asia (some of it of course also in Japan and one agonizing moment even in India proper). And though several prominent Indian residents in the region played a far from negligible part in the events

of the 1940s, which also involved tens of thousands of their local compatriots, the real leadership lay with others. In order of appearance in the unfolding historical drama, there were, first, some of the officers of the British-Indian Army who went over to the Japanese and founded the Indian National Army as the Allied defences in Malaya crumbled; second, Rash Behari Bose, long-time Tokyo resident; and there was, finally, the towering figure of Subhas Chandra Bose, who, as soon as he reached Southeast Asia from self-imposed exile in Berlin, became the undisputed *Netaji*—head not only of the INA, but also of *Azad Hind*, the Provisional Government of Free India.

From rich published and unpublished sources in Japan and India, no less than from personal interviews, the author has distilled a story of absorbing interest. She knows how to hold her readers' attention by shifting from analyses of larger movements, policies and strategies to fascinating close-ups of incidents and major *dramatis personae*, especially those on the Japanese side. To mention the best example, Major (now Lieutenant-General) Fujiwara Iwaichi, the founder of the almost legendary *F Kikan*, up to now a dimly perceived marginal figure, emerges in Dr Lebra's pages as a full-blooded, dedicated—and in the end frustrated—"ugly Japanese" of the purest vintage. With the obvious exception of Dr Ba Maw's highly colourful autobiography, such portraiture is all too rare in the literature of occupied Southeast Asia. Almost equally rare is Lebra's objectivity. She takes both Japanese and Indians seriously, looks at them dispassionately and tries with success, as far as I am able to judge, to view their purposes and actions in the frameworks appropriate to their specific situations and personalities. We are at long last getting away from the stereotypes of evil, or at best clumsy, Japanese unsuccessfully trying to manipulate clever, patriotic, if not heroic, "subjects".

In at least one major respect the story told in these pages is, of course, unique: unlike the countries of Southeast Asia, India played at most a marginal role in Japanese thinking, for it was never envisaged as part of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Few at most were the Japanese enthusiasts who, like Fujiwara, wished to make the cause of Indian independence that of *Dai Nippon*; at no time did they succeed in converting high-level policy makers to their point of view. Nor was the ill-begotten foray into Imphal in 1944 planned as the opening act of a Japanese move into the

subcontinent but as a defensive move to protect Burma against British counter-attacks. Thus the juxtaposition between Japanese and Indian aims was wide, indeed, and Bose's position far weaker than that of leaders representing peoples and lands actually occupied by Japanese forces. Dr Lebra rightly observes the very severe limitations which Tokyo imposed on such ostensible gestures of support as the pseudo-recognition of Bose's Provisional Government. True enough, yet one wonders whether any of the regimes "recognized" by Japan (and her Axis partners) enjoyed a much higher degree of real international stature in the eyes of the Imperial Government.

Be that as it may, the author makes us realize the fantastic personality of Bose, chief of state without a state and commander-in-chief of a token army, and hence a leader with virtually no bargaining power. But for him, Tōjō and his cabinet colleagues might never have done as much as they did to help the cause of Indian independence, albeit indirectly and symbolically rather than substantively. (How important Tōjō rated personalities and how deeply he, in turn, impressed some of the wartime spokesmen of the occupied countries can be gleaned from passages in the present book, as well as from Ba Maw's *Breakthrough in Burma*.) But for the *Netaji*, too, the Indian independence struggle in the *Nampō* might have completely disintegrated amidst debilitating personal and factional feuds and disputes. Had Subhas Chandra Bose not crashed to his untimely death four days after Japan's surrender to the Allies, Indian history might well have taken a somewhat different course. Ironically, the weakest of Japan's "collaborators" may well have been the strongest among her "allies", a man far less likely to have disappeared from centre stage than did, say, Ba Maw and Jose Laurel, who yet had seemed, for a few fleeting moments, to wield more real power than Bose.

Others, with special knowledge of Japanese and Indian history, will no doubt find even greater satisfaction in reading this fascinating book. Perhaps, too, they may find points of detail and interpretation to quarrel with. Whether this was the main reason why Dr Lebra preferred to entrust me with the writing of some introductory lines I cannot know. But let me, a specialist in modern Southeast Asian history, say that I have benefited from her account and that I hope others will emulate her painstaking research and graceful style.

New Haven, Connecticut  
October 1970

HARRY J. BENDA

## Preface

In the decades intervening between the publication of the first edition of this book in 1971 (*Jungle Alliance: Japan and the Indian National Army*, Singapore: Asia/Pacific Press) and this present edition, the outpouring of volumes on Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army has continued. None of these studies in English focuses on the relationship between the Imperial Japanese Army and the INA and also uses Japanese sources. For this reason this work is being reprinted.

With the exception of the book by Peter Fay (*The Forgotten Army*, 1993), most of these studies of the INA contain no more than a passing mention of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, if that. This women's regiment, part of the Indian National Army, was composed primarily of teenage girls from Malaya and Burma who had never seen India, yet were eager to volunteer in response to Bose's summons, to donate not only their jewellery but also their lives in the struggle to liberate India.

A companion volume to this new edition of the 1971 publication will therefore be published, *Women Against the Raj: The Rani of Jhansi Regiment*. It is designed to address the academic vacuum on the subject.

JOYCE CHAPMAN LEBRA

Singapore  
2008

## Acknowledgements

FOR financial support of the research for this study I am indebted to a Fulbright grant to India (1965-6), and to a University of Colorado Grant-in-Aid (summer 1964 and 1968) for support of travel to Tokyo. Libraries which made their facilities available to me are: in India the *Netaji* Research Bureau, Calcutta; the Indian School of International Studies Library, New Delhi; the National Archives, New Delhi; the Historical Section, Ministry of Defence, Government of India; and in Japan the Foreign Ministry archives; the War History Library, Defence Agency; the National Diet Library; and the Keiō University Library.

Those who lent their advice, encouragement and suggestions over the four-year period of this research are too numerous to chronicle here. The names of a few without whom this study would not have been completed must be mentioned: Dr Girija Mookerjee, Dr Bimla Prasad, Dr K. K. Ghosh, Dr S. K. Bose, Dr S. N. Prasad, Mr Y. Horie, Mr N. Kurokawa, Professor Tanaka Toshio, Lieutenant-General Fujiwara Iwaichi, Mr Maruyama Shizuo, Mr Maruyama Makoto, Professor Mori Katsumi, Mr Nakano Keiji, Dr Charles Geddes and Dr R. P. Cuzzort. Thanks are due to my mother, Mrs Helen Chapman, for preparation of the maps. I am grateful also to Generals Fujiwara Iwaichi and Isoda Saburō for the loan of photographs.

It goes without saying that responsibility for errors of fact or interpretation is the author's alone.

JOYCE CHAPMAN LEBRA

Boulder, Colorado  
1968

# Introduction

FOR over two decades following the end of World War II, Japan's goals and tactics in wartime Greater East Asia have remained buried in government and military archives and in the memories of wartime leaders still living. The image, fostered through the proceedings of the International Military Tribunal in Tokyo, of Japan as one of the world's most rapacious militarist powers has long prevailed on both sides of the Pacific. Difficulty of access to private and official archives of the war years has helped perpetuate the darkness which still obfuscates many aspects of the Pacific War. Japanese historians still remain reluctant to scrutinize the concepts, goals, and implementation of Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in Asia.

American scholars have only recently pioneered in re-examining Japan's war aims and have begun the work of revising earlier assumptions. This task has been facilitated by the appearance of the first volumes of the Japanese official history of World War II, edited by the staff of the War History Office of the Defence Agency.

The war, according to some American revisionists, was not simply a Japanese version of the capitalist pattern of imperialism described by Lenin and demonstrated by Western powers. It was more significantly a war for preservation and defence of vital interests threatened by the advance of Western imperialism in Asia. Similarly, the traditional image of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere as the grand design for Japanese empire in Asia can also be questioned. For one thing, the borders of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere were nebulous and elastic. The concept crystallized in the minds of various individuals, some civilian but mostly military, by late 1940. But the forerunners of the Sphere—the East Asia Co-operative Body and the New Order in East Asia—were advanced even earlier, during the Manchurian Incident. For some,

by early 1941, the Greater Sphere, or sphere of influence, would sweep across Asia to embrace India, Australia and New Zealand within its compass. The goal of economic self-sufficiency provided the rationale for political and cultural arrangements. The concept of the Sphere grew as more of Southeast Asia fell under Japanese military occupation.

In actuality, military strategy was never devised to push the boundaries of the Sphere much beyond Burma. Protection of the Burma border and disruption of China-India lines of communication took the Japanese Army in 1944 into Imphal in the state of Manipur, India. Militarily, the campaign was ill conceived; it was a fiasco in execution.

Politically, however, India was included in the vision of the Japanese sphere of influence, even before the outbreak of hostilities in the Pacific. The propaganda goal of "Asia for the Asiatics" served Japan well in Southeast Asia. Japan adopted a policy aim of encouraging anti-British sentiment throughout Southeast Asia and particularly in Burma, Malaya and Thailand. Intelligence missions were sent inside the borders of India. The Imphal campaign of 1944 was designed in part to encourage Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army, and thereby to incite revolution within India. In Japan's military fiasco at Imphal the immediate political goal was also defeated.

From the Indian viewpoint, the struggle throughout Asia was for independence. The roots of Indian nationalism extend back into the nineteenth century under the British Raj. During the early decades of the twentieth century the political mainstream of Indian nationalism followed the Gandhian doctrine of non-violent disobedience. But there was another tradition, a heterodox political vision with equally ancient roots, which turned toward violence. Subhas Chandra Bose became leader of this militant wing of the nationalist movement, splitting with Gandhi and Nehru over the issue of the use of force against the British. Despite the opposition of Gandhi, however, Bose was elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1938 and again in 1939.

Bose was a Bengali revolutionary. Nurtured in a Kshatriya family on reformist doctrines prevalent in Bengal at the turn of the century, he advocated the use of force as the only means to rid the motherland of the British imperial power. Placed under house arrest in 1940, he eluded the authorities, escaping to Afghanistan and then to Nazi

Germany, where he sought aid in his campaign to liberate India from without. With the German defeat at Stalingrad, Bose turned east to Japan for help. Coming to Southeast Asia in the summer of 1943, he assumed leadership of the Indian National Army and Indian Independence League, which had already rallied civilians and Indian POWs to the struggle for independence.

This study is concerned with the interaction between Japan and the Indian independence movement in Southeast Asia. The logic of the alliance was the existence of a common enemy, Britain. A limited co-operation evolved from the confrontation between Japan's pan-Asian push southward and Indian nationalism. There was some initiative on both sides: on the Indian side by Subhas Chandra Bose and his revolutionary predecessors, Mohan Singh and Pritam Singh, and on the Japanese side by a young major sent by Imperial General Headquarters to Bangkok on an intelligence mission. Major Fujiwara brought India to the attention of IGHQ and helped organize the INA. Fujiwara established the initial sincerity and credibility of Japanese aid for the Indian independence struggle. Captain Mohan Singh, a young Sikh POW from the British-Indian Army, co-operated with Fujiwara in the inception of the INA.

Disagreement and a disjunction in aims also became apparent between the Japanese and Indians. For Japan there were strategic considerations of a total war in which her resources were proving deficient and in which India was a peripheral concern. For the Indian National Army and *Azad Hind* (Free India) Government there was the single goal of independence which took precedence over all other considerations. From these divergent viewpoints arose obstacles to the working out of effective co-operation. Japan was willing to grant the form but not the substance of independence to the *Azad Hind* Government. Japan was ready to assault Imphal together with the INA, but with the INA only as guerrilla or special services units ultimately under Japanese command. The INA co-operated because without Japanese aid there was no real hope for effective military action against Britain. But Japan could not satisfy INA pressure for material and military support. It was an uneasy alliance, but some of the Japanese who activated it were alert to the need to maintain the delicate balance.

The political repercussions of the wartime struggle of the INA are still being felt within India today. British withdrawal in 1947 was in part precipitated by the trial of INA officers for treason and

the popular protest against the court martial of INA patriots. Nor did the story of the INA end with India's independence. Out of the legacy of the struggle of the INA and *Azad Hind* Government an attempt was made to create a new political party dedicated to Bose's ideals, the *Azad Hind Sangh*.

The lessons learned during World War II provided the groundwork for Japan's extraordinary success today (1970) in Southeast Asia. In the words of one former general, Japan has quietly achieved in the "new Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" the goals she sought by other means in World War II.