

THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN 1940s

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Second World War and Nationalist Response

The Second World War broke out on September 1939, when Germany attacked Poland. When the war broke out in Europe and the Congress was still vacillating in its response, its renegade leader Subhas Chandra Bose was arguing that the Indians were losing a rare opportunity, for they must take advantage of the empire's weakest moment. He was convinced in 1939, when disciplinary action was taken against him, that it was the result of "Right consolidation"; and now this hesitation to initiate a mass movement against the Raj was because of the same right-wing leaders. He, therefore, travelled alone across India to stir a movement, but did not get much enthusiastic response.

Back in Bengal, he forged a link with Muslim League, and decided to launch a Civil Disobedience Movement to destroy the **Holwell monument** that stood in Calcutta as a remainder of a Black hole tragedy which most people believed did never happen and was invented only to tar the memory of Siraj-ud-daula, the last independent ruler of Bengal. It was a campaign that had an obvious appeal to the Muslims and thus could further strengthen the Hindu-Muslim pact in Bengal. But before it could further strengthen, he was arrested by the British on 3 July 1940 under the Defense of India Act. The Holwell monument was later removed, but Bose remained incarcerated until he threatened to start a hunger strike in December. He was then released unconditionally, but kept under constant surveillance.

Congress position before war was clear as it had repeatedly declared that it would oppose any effort to use Indian men, money and resources in a war to serve British imperialism. The Congress' hostility to Fascism, Nazism, Militarism and Imperialism had been much more consistent than the British record. But the Indian offer to cooperate in the war effort had two basic conditions:

1. After the war, a constituent assembly should be convened to determine political structure of a free India
2. Immediately, some form of a genuinely responsible government should be established at the centre.

The offer was rejected by Linlithgow, the viceroy. The Congress argued that these conditions were necessary to win public opinion for war.

CWC Meeting at Wardha (September 1939)

Different opinions were voiced on the question of Indian support to British war efforts-

- Gandhi advocated an unconditional support to the Allied powers as he made a clear distinction between the democratic states of Western Europe and the totalitarian Nazis.
- The Socialists argued that the war was an imperialist one since both sides were fighting for gaining or defending colonial territories. Therefore, the question of supporting either of the two sides did not arise. Instead, advantage should be taken of the situation to wrest freedom by immediately starting a civil disobedience movement (supporting Bose views).

- Nehru made a sharp distinction between democracy and Fascism. He believed that justice was on the side of Britain, France and Poland, but he was also convinced that Britain and France were imperialist powers, and that the war was the result of the inner contradictions of capitalism maturing since the end of World War I. He, therefore, advocated no Indian participation till India itself was free. However, at the same time, no advantage was to be taken of Britain's difficulty by starting an immediate struggle.

The CWC resolution condemned Fascist aggression. It said that

- India could not be party to a war being fought for democratic freedom, while that freedom was being denied to India;
- If Britain was fighting for democracy and freedom, it should prove it by ending imperialism in its colonies and establishing full democracy in India;
- The government should declare its war aims soon and, also as to how the principles of democracy were to be applied to India.

The **Muslim League** viewed the war situation as one from which it could profit. Although its ultimate aim independence, yet it did not demand as a pre-condition for its support, immediate fulfillment of these aims, except merely an assurance from the Government that it would not be bypassed or ignored in any post war settlement between Congress and the British over India's future.

Government Response

Government's Response was entirely negative. By brushing aside the pro-British sympathies and warning of consequences, Linlithgow, in his statement tried to use the Muslim League and the Princes against the Congress. The government

- Refused to define British war aims beyond stating that Britain was resisting aggression;
- As a part of future arrangement, it would consult the representatives of several communities, parties and interests in India, and the Indian Princes as to how the Act of 1935 might be modified;
- It would immediately set up a **consultative committee** of Indian princes representatives and Politician with no real executive power whose advice could be sought whenever required.

The Government's **Hidden Agenda** was to take advantage of war to regain the lost ground from the Congress by provoking the Congress into a confrontation with the Government and then using the extraordinary situation to acquire draconian powers portraying Congress as Pro-Japan and Pro-German. Even before the declaration of the war, emergency powers had been acquired for the centre in respect of provincial subjects by amending the 1935 Act. Defense of Indian ordinance had been enforced the day the war was declared, thus restricting civil liberties. British Indian reactionary policies received full support from Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

When the Second World War started, Viceroy Linlithgow unilaterally declared India a belligerent on the side of Britain, without consulting the elected Indian representatives. In opposition to Linlithgow's action, the entire Congress leadership resigned from the local government councils.

The resignation of the Congress ministries proved unfortunate in many respects. Withdrawal by the Congress led to autocratic rule in many provinces. Also it gave an opportunity to the government to rely more and more on the support of the Muslim League and adopt an indifferent attitude towards the Congress. In fact, Jinnah and the Muslim League celebrated the occasion as a “**day of deliverance**”; dalit leader Ambedkar also supported them.

The war at this stage was still distant from the shore of Indian, yet many Congress leaders were alive to the issue of resisting fascism and therefore were keen to support British war efforts, and indeed the British Indian Army is the largest volunteer force, numbering 2,500,000 men during the war provided some constitutional concessions were promised.

Especially during the Battle of Britain in 1940, Gandhi resisted calls for massive civil disobedience movements that came from within as well as outside his party, stating he did not seek India's independence out of the ashes of a destroyed Britain. Similarly Nehru considered the Allied powers as imperialists and his philosophy and political perception leant towards the idea of an early struggle but that would have undermined the fight against Fascism. He finally went along with Gandhi and the Congress majority.

Pakistan Resolution-Lahore (March 1940)

The Muslim League passed Pakistan Resolution calling for grouping of geographically contiguous areas where Muslims are in majority (North-West, East) into independent states in which constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign and adequate safeguards to Muslims where they are in minority.

August Offer

Hitler's advances and the fall of Belgium, Holland and France put England in a conciliatory mood. To get Indian cooperation in the war effort, the Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow, made the August Offer (August 1940) which proposed:

- A fresh proposal promising the expansion of the Executive Council to include more Indians.
- The dominion status as the objective for India.
- The establishment of an advisory war council.
- Giving full weight to minority opinion.
- The recognition of Indians' right to frame their own constitution (after the end of the war).

In return, it was hoped that all parties and communities in India would cooperate in Britain's war effort. The declaration marked an important advance over the existing state of things, as it recognized at least the natural and inherent right of the country to determine the form of their future constitution, and explicitly promised dominion status.

However, the Congress Working Committee meeting at Wardha on 21 August 1940 rejected this offer, and asserted its demand for complete freedom from the imperial power. Gandhi viewed it as having widened the gulf between Nationalist India and the British ruler. It was also rejected by Muslim League. The Muslim League asserted that it would not be satisfied by anything short of partition of India. The following proposals were put in:

- After the war a representative Indian body would be set up to frame a constitution for India.
- Viceroy's Executive Council would be expanded without delay.
- The minorities were assured that the government would not transfer power "to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in Indian national life."

In July 1941, the viceroy's executive council was enlarged to give the Indians a majority of 8 out of 12 for the first time, but the whites remained in charge of defence, finance and home. Also, a National Defence Council was setup with purely advisory functions.

Individual Satyagrahas

The Government had taken the adamant position that no constitutional advances could be made till the congress came to an arrangement with the Muslim leaders. It issued ordinance after ordinance taking away the Freedom of Speech and that of the press and the right to organize associations.

The Congress was in a confused state again after the August Offer. The radicals and leftists wanted to launch a mass Civil Disobedience Movement. Gandhi was ambivalent: at one stage he believed that war was against his principle of non-violence; then he promised the viceroy all support in his war efforts, and for that became a target of criticism from his own followers in the Congress. Ultimately, at the Ramgarh Congress in May 1940, he agreed to launch civil disobedience; but this would be Individual Satyagraha. The Individual Satyagraha was not to seek independence but to affirm the right of speech. The other reason of this Satyagraha was that a mass movement may turn violent and he would not like to see the Great Britain embarrassed by such a situation. This view was conveyed to Lord Linlithgow by Gandhi when he met him on September 27, 1940. The non-violence was set as the centerpiece of Individual Satyagraha. This was done by carefully selecting the Satyagrahis.

The first Satyagrahi selected was Acharya Vinoba Bhave, who was sent to Jail when he spoke against the war. Second Satyagrahi was Jawahar Lal Nehru. Third was Brahma Datt, one of the inmates of the Gandhi's Ashram. They all were sent to jails for violating the Defense of India Act. This was followed by a lot of other people. But since it was not a mass movement, it attracted little enthusiasm and in December 1940, Gandhi suspended the movement. The campaign started again in January 1941, this time, thousands of people joined and around 20 thousand people were arrested.

Two developments in the latter half of 1941 changed the Indian situation. After overrunning a big part of Europe, Hitler invaded Russia on 22 June 1941. In the East, Japan attacked the

American Naval fleet at Pearl Harbour and quickly swept the British from Malaya, Singapore, Indonesia and Burma, posing a serious threat to the security of India.

The German invasion of Russia confronted the Indian Communist with a dilemma. While the British Policies in India remained repressive and reactionary as ever, Britain now was an ally of Russia against Germany. In January 1942, the Communist Party of India called for full support to the anti-fascist "People's War".

The Congress leaders, released in December 1941, were anxious to defend Indian territory and go to the aid of the Allies. The CWC overrode Gandhi's and Nehru's objections and passed a resolution offering to cooperate with the Government in the defense of India, if

- Full independence was given after the war.
- Substance of power was transferred immediately.

It was at this time that Gandhi designated Nehru as his chosen successor.

Cripps Mission

At International level, Roosevelt raise the question of Indian political reforms with Churchill, Chiang-kai Shek on a visit to India in February 1941 expressed sympathy towards 'India's aspirations for freedom'. The labour leaders of Britain also put pressure on Churchill to seek active cooperation of the Indians in the war.

The Cripps mission was an attempt in late March 1942 by the British government to secure full Indian cooperation and support for their efforts in World War II. The mission was headed by Sir Stafford Cripps, a senior left-wing politician and government minister in the War Cabinet, who had actively supported the Indian national movement.

Main Proposals

- An Indian Union with a dominion status would be set up; it would be free to decide its relations with the Commonwealth and free to participate in the United Nations and other international bodies.
- After the end of the war, a Constituent Assembly would be convened to frame a new constitution. Members of this assembly would be partly elected by the provincial assemblies through proportional representation and partly nominated by the princes.
- The British Government would accept the new constitution subject to two conditions:
 - I. Any province not willing to join the Union could have a separate constitution-making body and the British Government would negotiate a treaty to effect the transfer of power and to
 - II. In the meantime, defense of India would remain in British hands and the governor-general's powers would remain intact.

minorities.

Differences from the Past Proposals

- The making of the Constitution was to be solely in Indian hands now (and not "mainly" in Indian hands- as contained in the August Offer).
- A concrete plan was provided for the constituent assembly.
- Option was available to any province to have a separate constitution- a blueprint for India's partition.
- Free India could withdraw from the Commonwealth.
- Indians were allowed a large share in the administration in the interim period.

Reasons for its Failure

The Cripps Mission proposals failed to satisfy Indian nationalists and turned out to be merely a propaganda device for US and Chinese consumption. Various parties and group had objections to the proposals on different points.

The Congress objected to -

- The offer of dominion status instead of a provision for complete independence.
- The representation of the states by nominees and not by elected representatives
- Right to provinces to secede as this went against the principle of national unity.
- Absence of any plan for immediate transfer of power and absence of any real share in defense; the governor-general's supremacy had been retained, and the demand for governor-general being only the constitutional head had not been accepted.

Gandhi said that Cripps' offer of Dominion Status after the war was a "post-dated cheque drawn on a crashing bank".

The Muslim League objected to -

- Criticised the idea of a single Indian Union.
- Did not like the machinery for the creation of a constituent assembly and the procedure to decide on the accession of provinces to the Union.
- Thought that the proposals denied to the Muslims the right to self determination and the creation of Pakistan.

Other groups also objected to the provinces' right to secede. The liberals considered the secession proposals to be criticized the basis of the right to secede. The depressed classes thought that partition would leave them at the mercy of the caste Hindus. The Sikh objected that partition would take away Punjab from them.

Other Reasons -

- The incapacity of Cripps to go beyond the Draft Declaration and the adoption of a rigid, "take it or leave it" attitude added to the deadlock.
- Cripps had earlier talked of "Cabinet" and "National government" but later he said that he had only meant an expansion of the executive council.

- Cripps had designed the proposals himself, but they were too radical for Prime Minister Churchill and the Viceroy, and too conservative for the Indians; no middle way was found. The Cripps did not get either the cooperation of the viceroy or the support of his prime minister.
- It is also argued that Churchill did not sincerely wish the Mission to succeed; he merely wanted to show the world- and more particularly, his allies- that something was being done to resolve the Indian Political imbroglio.

There was little trust between the British and Congress by this stage, and both sides felt that the other was concealing its true plans. The failure of the Mission, as we have noted earlier, prepared the ground for a total confrontation between the Raj and the Congress. Congress moved toward the [Quit India](#) movement whereby it refused to cooperate in the war effort, while the British imprisoned practically the entire Congress leadership for the duration of the war.

Quit India Movement

The failure of the Cripps Mission plunged the country in to despondency and anger. The fuel that fed this was supplied not only by the hypocrisy of the British Government, but also by a host of other factors. The war situation was worsening day by day. After the fall of Singapore on 15 February, Rangoon on 7 March and Andamans on 12 March, 1942, the Imperial Japanese Army advanced closer to India with the seas around India were dominated by the Japanese. Indians perceived an inability upon the part of the British to defend Indian soil breaking the myth of British invincibility-particularly on the seas. To many optimists it seemed that the end of the British Empire was imminent.

Also, Stafford Cripps returned home leaving behind a frustrated and embittered Indian people, who, though still sympathising with the victims of Fascist aggression, felt that the existing situation in the country had become intolerable and that the time had come for a final assault on imperialism.

Gandhi was not slow to feel this popular mood of militancy and realized that the moment of his final engagement with the Raj had arrived. "Leave India to God", Gandhi wrote in May 1942. "If that is too much, then leave her to anarchy. This ordered disciplined anarchy should go, and if there is complete lawlessness, I would risk it."

In 1942, there was a remarkable change in Gandhi's attitude and he seemed to be in unusually militant mood. As the possibility of a Japanese invasion become real, Gandhi refused to accept that the Japanese could be the liberators and believed that India in the hands of the Indian was the best guarantee against fascist aggression.

When the British remained unresponsive, Gandhi and the Indian National Congress began planning a major public revolt, the [Quit India](#) movement, and the British withdrawal from India.

On 8 August 1942, the Quit India resolution was passed at the Bombay session of the All India Congress Committee (AICC). The draft proposed that if the British did not accede to the demands, a massive Civil Disobedience would be launched. However, it was an extremely

controversial decision. At Gowalia Tank, Mumbai, Gandhi urged Indians to follow a non-violent civil disobedience. Gandhi told the masses to act as an independent nation and not to follow the orders of the British.

The British, already alarmed by the advance of the Japanese army to the India–Burma border, responded the next day by imprisoning Gandhi at the Aga Khan Palace in Pune. The Congress Party's Working Committee or national leadership was arrested all together and imprisoned at the Ahmednagar Fort. They also banned the party altogether. All the major leaders of the INC were arrested and detained. As the masses were leaderless the protest took a violent turn. Large-scale protests and demonstrations were held all over the country. Workers remained absent en masse and strikes were called.

The movement also saw widespread acts of sabotage, Indian under-ground organisation carried out bomb attacks on allied supply convoys, government buildings were set on fire, electricity lines were disconnected and transport and communication lines were severed.

As the time passed, underground activities came to be channeled into three streams, with a radical group under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan organizing guerrilla warfare at India-Nepal border, a centrist group led by Congress Socialist like Aruna Asaf Ali mobilizing volunteers throughout India for sabotage activities, and a Gandhian group led by Suchetra Kripalani and other emphasizing non-violent action and constructive programme.

The disruptions were under control in a few weeks and had little impact on the war effort. The movement soon became a leaderless act of defiance, with a number of acts that deviated from Gandhi's principle of non-violence. In large parts of the country, the local underground organizations took over the movement. However, by 1943, Quit India had petered out.

Parallel government established at many places

- Ballia (in August 1942 for a week) - under Gandhian Chittu Pandey. He got many Congress leaders released
- Tamluk (Midnapore from December 1942 to September 1944)- which undertook cyclone relief work, sanctioned grants to schools, supplied paddy from the rich to the poor, organized Bidyut Bahinis etc
- Satara(mid 1943 to 1945)- named "Prati Sarker", was organized under leaders like Y.B.Chavan, Nana Patil, etc. Village libraries and Nyayadan Mandals were organized, prohibition campaigns were carried on and 'Gandhi marriages' were organized.

Reaction of other Parties

All the other major parties rejected the Quit India plan, and most cooperated closely with the British, as did the princely states, the civil service and the police. The Muslim League supported the Raj and grew rapidly in membership and in influence with the British.

Jinnah's Muslim League condemned the Quit India movement and participated in provincial governments as well as the legislative councils of the Raj. It encouraged Muslims to participate in the war. With this cooperation, the British were able to continue administering India for the duration of the war using officials and military personnel where Indian politicians could not be found. This would not prove to be feasible in the long term, however.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of the dalits, who had joined the viceroy's executive council as a labour member just before the onset of the campaign, also did not support it. But once again, although many of his supporters did not join, evidence of dalit participation in the quit India movement in various regions and cross-caste unity cannot be denied.

Hindu Mahasabha too condemned the Quit India movement as "Sterile, unmanly and injurious to the Hindu cause" and stalwart Hindu leaders like V.D. Savarkar, B.S. Munje and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee whole heartedly supported British war efforts that were allegedly being wrecked by the Congress campaign. The other Hindu organization, RSS, which until now had its main base in Maharashtra, remained aloof as well.

The Communist Party of India, following the involvement of Russia in the war in December 1941, became another important Political group which did not support Quit India movement because of their "Peoples' War" Strategy.

Mass Participation

Despite of that, Mass Participation was on many levels -

- **Youth**, especially the students (acting as couriers) of schools and colleges remained in the forefront.
- **Women**, especially school and college girls, actively participated, and included Aruna Asaf Ali, Suchetra Kripalani and Usha Mehta.
- **Businessmen** - through donations, shelter and material help,
- **Workers** went on strike and faced repression.
- **Peasants** of all strata were at the heart of movement. Even some zamindars participated. These peasants concentrated their offensive on symbols of authority and there was complete absence of anti-zamindar violence.
- **Government officials**, especially those belonging to lower levels in police (who passed on secret information to activists) and administration, participated resulting in erosion of government loyalty
- **Muslims** helped by giving shelter to underground activists. There were no communal clashes during the Movement.
- **Communists**, despite their anti-war line, felt the irresistible pull of the movement.

Critical Appraisal of the Movement

There is no doubt that the Quit India Movement was crushed, but it proved to be of epic proportion. The movement was conspicuous by a high level of popular participation and sympathy for the national cause. It removed the illusion that the British Empire was morally justified and that the majority of the Indian masses were loyal and demanded continuation of British Rule. It was realized by the British that they were no longer wanted in India. In a letter to the Prime Minister, Wavell pointed out that it would be impossible to hold India by force after the war, given the likely state of the World opinion or the British popular opinion or even the army attitudes. The decision to start negotiations after the war was not the gift of the Labour Government but was influenced by the observation of Wavell. The Quit India movement placed the demand for independence on the immediate agenda of the national movement. All talks of

dominion status were consumed in the fire of revolt. India could have nothing short of independence. After the movement, there was no retreat.

The worst fall-out of the movement was that the Congress, on account of the arrest of its leaders, was isolated from grass-root realities and the Constitutional politics. While the Congress leaders were languishing in Jails, the league was consolidating its position and establishing itself as a major force. The reorganization of the League reached fruition during this period. The league like congress also introduced two *anna* membership and began to build up bases in villages. It promised not only an Islamic state but also Peasant Utopia where Muslims peasant will be as prosperous, as Hindu Moneylenders, Landlords or Zamindars. On the whole, this process made the demand for Pakistan seem realistic.

Effect of World War on India including Famine of 1943

The Economic impact of War was initially beneficial to various groups of Indians. As Commodity prices rose, it benefited industrialist, merchants and rich peasants producing for the market; it took away the bad effects of the depression and for the peasants, it reduced the pressure of rent.

But in 1942 the main problem caused by the war was what Max Harcourt has described as “a **scarcity crisis**”, resulting from mainly a shortfall in the supply of rice. Between April and August the price Index for food grains rose by sixty points in north India. This was partly because of bad seasonal conditions and partly due to the stoppage in the supply of Burmese rice and the stringent procurement policy of the British. This Crisis resulted into Catastrophe in the form of **Bengal Famine**.

Estimates are that between 1.5 and 4 million people died of starvation, malnutrition and disease, out of Bengal's 60.3 million population, half of them dying from disease after food became available in December 1943. As in previous Bengal famines, the highest mortality was not in previously very poor groups, but among artisans and small traders whose income vanished when people spent all they had on food and did not employ cobblers, carpenters, etc. The famine also caused major economic and social disruption, ruining millions of families.

The food situation in India was tight from the beginning of the Second World War with a series of crop failures and localized famines which were dealt with successfully under the **Indian Famine Codes**. In Bengal in 1940-41 there was a small scale famine although quick action by the authorities prevented widespread loss of life. Food prices increased throughout India, and the Central Government was forced to undertake meetings with local government officials and release regulations of price controls.

The proximate cause of the famine was a **reduction in supply** with some increase in demand. The winter 1942 ‘aman’ rice crop which was already expected to be poor or indifferent was hit by a cyclone and three tidal waves in October. A fungus causing the disease known as “brown spot”, hit the rice crop and this was reported to have had an even greater effect on yield than the cyclone.

Bengal had been a food importer for the last decade. Calcutta was normally supplied by Burma. The British Empire had suffered a disastrous defeat at Singapore in 1942 against the Japanese military, which then proceeded to invade Burma in the same year. Burma was the world's

largest exporter of rice in the inter-war period. By 1940 15% of India's rice overall came from Burma, while in Bengal the proportion was slightly higher given the province's proximity to Burma. After the Japanese occupation of Burma in March 1942, Bengal and the other parts of India and Ceylon normally supplied by Burma had to find food elsewhere. However, there were poor crops and famine situations in Cochin, Trivandrum and Bombay on the West coast and Madras, Orissa and Bengal in the East. It fell on the few surplus Provinces, mainly the Punjab, to supply the rest of India and Ceylon. India as a whole had a deficit, but still exported small quantities to meet the urgent needs of the British-Indian Army abroad, and those of Ceylon.

Administrative and policy failures

The Famine Inquiry Commission (1945) documents a large number of administrative, civil policy and military policy failures. The failure to set up a food administration in 1939 and prepare for rationing was the key failure. The failure to enforce an India-wide food policy with an equality of sacrifice was another. Without this, the administrative controls must prevent any meaningful intervention. Political and administrative failures to set up a system for seizing surplus food in surplus areas also contributed (it was acceptable in deficit areas). There were many others which added to local shortages or otherwise increased the death rate, (e.g. Boat Denial Policy, Rice Denial Policy, various purchasing policies) but were not causes of the famine.

In December 1942 there was a shortage in Calcutta itself. Therefore government focused on getting supplies to Calcutta by trying to buy surplus stocks in the region. The quantities that District Officers were able to locate and purchase were considered too small to end the famine, so the Government introduced free trade in rice in Eastern India, hoping that traders would sell their stocks to Bengal; however this measure also failed to move large stocks to Bengal. In April and May there was a propaganda drive to convince the population that the high prices were not justified by the supply of food, the goal being that the propaganda would induce hoarders to sell their stocks. When these propaganda drives failed, there was a drive to locate hoarded stocks. Bengal's Minister of Civil Supplies, announced that there was no shortage of rice in Bengal and introduced a policy of intimidating 'hoarders': this caused looting, extortion and corruption but did not increase the amount of food on the market. When these drives continually failed to locate large stocks, the government realized that the scale of the loss in supply was larger than they had initially believed.

The Indian Army and allied troops acted only after Wavell became Viceroy and got permission from the Bengal Government. They had vehicles, fuel, men and administrators, which the civil authority did not, so they were much more effective than the civil authority in getting food to the starving outside Calcutta. The distribution was difficult and continued for five months after the November/December 1943 crop was harvested. However, they did not have much food to distribute.

Another Effect of World War on India was the creation of a popular mentality of Panic, as British power clearly seemed to be desperate and on the verge of imminent collapse. This was confirmed by the streams of refugees who came back from Malay and Burma, bringing with them horror stories of not only Japanese atrocities, but also of how British power collapsed in South East Asia and British authorities abandoned the Indian refugees to their fate, forcing them to traverse hostile terrain on foot, enduring hunger, disease and pain.

There was a widespread fear that if Japan invaded, the British would do the same in India too. And that seemed no longer a distant possibility, as the British initiated a harsh 'denial policy' in coastal Bengal by destroying all means of communications, including boats and cycles paying very little compensation. From May 1942, American and Australian soldiers began to arrive in India and soon became the central figures in stories of rape and racial harassment of civilian population. Rumours were rife, both fed by the Axis propaganda machine, and by Subhas Bose's **Azad Hind Radio**, broadcast from Berlin from March 1942.

Rajagopalachari's Formula

C. Rajagopalachari's formula (or C. R. formula or Rajaji formula) was a proposal formulated by Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari to solve the political deadlock between the All India Muslim League and Indian National Congress on independence of India from the British. The League's position was that the Muslims and Hindus of British India were of two separate nations and hence the Muslims had the right to their own nation when India obtained independence. The Congress, which included both Hindu and Muslim members, was opposed to the idea of partitioning India. With the advent of Second World War British administration required both parties to agree so that Indian help could be sought for the war efforts.

C. Rajagopalachari, a Congress leader from Madras, devised a proposal for the Congress to offer the League the Muslim Pakistan based on plebiscite of all the people in the regions where Muslims made a majority. Although the formula was opposed even within the Congress party, Gandhi used it as his proposal in his talks with Jinnah in 1944.

The proposal

- The League was to endorse the Indian demand for independence and to co-operate with the Congress in formation of Provisional Interim Government for a transitional period.
- At the end of the War, a commission would be appointed to demarcate the districts having a Muslim population in absolute majority and in those areas plebiscite to be conducted on all inhabitants (including the non-Muslims) on basis of adult suffrage.
- All parties would be allowed to express their stance on the partition and their views before the plebiscite.
- In the event of separation, a mutual agreement would be entered into for safeguarding essential matters such as defence, communication and commerce and for other essential services.
- The transfer of population, if any would be absolutely on a voluntary basis.
- The terms of the binding will be applicable only in case of full transfer of power by Britain to Government of India.

Gandhi-Jinnah talks of 1944

Although other Congress leaders were still in prison Gandhi was released on 5 May 1944. After his release Gandhi proposed talks with Jinnah on his two-nation theory and negotiating on issue of partition. The CR formula acted as the basis for the negotiations. Gandhi and Jinnah

met in September 1944 to ease the deadlock. Gandhi placed the CR formula as his proposal to Jinnah. Nevertheless, Gandhi-Jinnah talks failed after two weeks of negotiations.

Criticism of CR Formula

The formulation although conceived the principle of Pakistan, it aimed to show that the provinces that Jinnah claimed as Pakistan also contained in itself large numbers of non-Muslims. Jinnah had placed the claim for British Indian Provinces then regarded as Muslim majority regions (in the north-west; Sind, Baluchistan, the North-West Frontier Province and the Punjab, and in the north-east, Assam and Bengal). Thus if a plebiscite was placed, Jinnah ran a risk partitioning Punjab and Bengal. Moreover, Jinnah considered that the League represented all Muslims and the adult franchise demanded by the formula was redundant.

Furthermore, the decision of Muslims to secede from India, according to the CR formula, would be taken not just by Muslims alone but by a plebiscite of the entire population even in the Muslim majority districts. This might well have diluted the enthusiasm of the people of these provinces about going their own separate way. Hence Jinnah rejected the initiative, telling his Council that it was intended to 'torpedo' the Lahore resolution; it was 'grossest travesty', a 'ridiculous proposal', 'offering a shadow and a husk – a maimed, mutilated and moth-eaten Pakistan, and thus trying to pass off having met out Pakistan scheme and Muslim demand'. While the formula kept most of the essential services together, Jinnah wanted a full partition and any relations would be dealt as a treaty alone.

Failure of the CR formula was seen as Congress' betrayal of the Sikhs by Akali Dal leaders like Master Tara Singh. Since the formula meant vivisection of Punjab, if agreed the Sikh community would be divided into two. Since Sikhs did not make a majority in any single district although being a very significant number in Punjab would have to be scattered between Muslim and Hindu nations.

The proposal had been detested by other leaders such as V. D. Sarvarkar and Syama Prasad Mookerjee of the Hindu Mahasabha and Srinivas Sastri of National Liberal Federation. However, Wavell the then viceroy of India, who had earlier insisted on the geographic unity of India stated that the talks based on the CR formula failed because Gandhi himself did "not really believe" in the proposal nor Jinnah was ready to "answer awkward questions" which would reveal that he had "not thought out the implications of Pakistan".

Desai-Liaquat pact

While Mohandas Gandhi and the entire Congress Working Committee had been arrested during the Quit India movement, from 1942 to 1945, Desai was one of few Congress leaders free. While pressing demands for the immediate release of political prisoners, Desai began secretive talks with Liaquat Ali Khan, the second-most important leader of the Muslim League. However this assertion has been seriously challenged by other eminent people like Sir Chiman Lal Setalwad who have stated that Gandhi had full knowledge of the ongoing negotiations. It was their intention to negotiate an agreement for a future coalition government, which would enable a united choice for Hindus and Muslims for the independent Government of India. In this deal, Liaquat

gave up the demand for a separate Muslim state in turn for parity of Muslims-to-Hindus in the council of ministers. Conceding the League as the representative of Muslims and giving a minority community equal place with the majority Hindus, Desai attempted to construct an ideal Indian alliance that would hasten India's path for freedom while ending the Quit India struggle. While Desai was working without the knowledge of Gandhi, Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru or any other Congress leader, Khan had kept the deal a secret from his superior, Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

When a press report leaked the prospective deal in 1945, the respective parties were alarmed. While Desai presented full information to Gandhi, Jinnah and the League outrightly rejected any agreements, and Liaquat Ali Khan denied that such a pact was being negotiated. Desai's assertion that a deal had been reached was ridiculed by the League, while Congress leaders were angry at him for conducting such negotiations without informing them. Bhulabhai Desai would lead a major effort in March 1945 to get the House to defeat the unpopular war budget, but he had **lost political standing** in his own party owing to the **fallout of the Desai-Liaquat pact**. He was not given a ticket to contest elections for the Constituent Assembly of India on grounds of his ill-health, but also due to feelings in the Congress that Desai had been advancing his own power and popularity while the Congress leadership was imprisoned.

Wavell's Plan

Although the war in Europe came to an end in May 1945, the Japanese threat still remained. The Conservative Government in Britain led by Churchill was keen to reach a solution on the Constitutional question in India. The viceroy, Lord Wavell was permitted to start negotiations with Indian leaders. Congress leaders were released from jails in June 1945.

Why the Government was keen on a solution now?

1. The general election in England was scheduled for mid 1945. The Conservatives wanted to be seen as sincere on reaching a solution.
2. There was pressure from the Allies to seek further Indian cooperation in the War.
3. The Government wanted to divert Indian energies in to channels more profitable for the British

The Plan

The idea was to reconstruct the Governor General's executive council pending the preparation of a new Constitution. For this purpose, a conference was convened by the Viceroy at Shimla in June 1945. The Shimla Conference was a meeting between Viceroy Wavell and the major political leaders of India to agree on and approve the Wavell Plan for a potential agreement for the self-governance of India. The plan proposed a federal system with a central government and separate regional governments for the Hindus and Muslims and reduced majority powers for both communities in their majority regions. The main proposal of the Wavell Plan were as follows-

- With the exception of the Governor-General and the Commander-in Chief, all members of the executive council were to be Indians.
- Caste Hindus and Muslims were to have equal representation.
- The reconstructed council was to function as an interim government within the framework of the 1935 Act (i.e. not responsible to the Central Assembly)
- Governor-general was to exercise his veto on the advice of ministers.
- Representatives of different parties were to submit a joint list to the viceroy for nominations to the executive council. If a joint list was not possible, then separate lists were to be submitted.
- Possibilities were to be kept open for negotiations on a new constitution once the war was finally won.

Reasons for Failure

Muslim League's stand - Talks stalled, however, on the issue of selection of Muslim representatives. Seeking to assert itself and its claim to be the sole representative of Indian Muslims, the All-India Muslim League and its leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah refused to back any plan in which the Indian National Congress, the dominant party in the talks, appointed Muslim representatives. The league wanted some kind of veto in the council with decisions opposed to Muslims needing a two-third majority for approval. This scuttled the conference, and perhaps the last viable opportunity for a united, independent India. When the Indian National Congress and All India Muslim League reconvened under the Cabinet Mission the next year, the Indian National Congress was far less sympathetic to the Muslim League's requests despite Jinnah's approval of the British plan.

Congress stand The congress objected to the plan as "an attempt to reduce the Congress to the status of a purely caste Hindu party and insisted on its right to include members of all communities among its nominees"

Wavell's Mistake Wavell announced a breakdown of talks thus giving league a virtual veto. This strengthened the League's position as was evident from the elections in 1945-46 and boosted Jinnah's position.

Indian National Army

In 1940, a year after war broke out; the British had put Bose under house arrest in Calcutta. With progression of War in Europe, Bose believed that Germany was going to win. Although he did not like the totalitarianism or racism, he began to nurture the idea that the cause of Indian Independence could be furthered with the help of Axis powers and started exploring various possibilities.

His Elgin Road residence. Finally, in the midnight of 16

in Calcutta incognito as an upcountry Muslim. He travelled to Kabul and then through Russia on an Italian passport; by the end of March he reached Berlin (Germany) to seek Hitler and Mussolini's help for raising an army to fight the British.

Subhas Bose met Goebbels and Hitler in Berlin, but did not receive much help from them. But there he secured German approval for two of his proposals:

- He would broadcast anti-British propaganda from Berlin
- He would raise "Free India" Unit from the Indian Prisoners of War (POWs) in Germany.

He was allowed to start his Azad Hind Radio and was handed over the Indian POWs captured in North Africa to start an Indian Legion, but nothing beyond that. The second item received an impetus when Germany declared war against Russia. "Free India" units were raised not only in Rome, Italy being an ally of Germany, but also in Paris which was then under German occupation. The full strength of the Legion was 3000.

But he could not get an Axis declaration in favour of Indian independence, and after German reverses at Stalingrad, that became even more difficult. Also, in light of Germany's changing fortunes, a German land invasion of India became untenable.

Meanwhile, a new stage of action was being prepared for him in Southeast Asia, where the Japanese were taking real interest in the cause of Indian Independence. India originally did not figure in the Japanese policy of Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, under which Japanese proposed to help Asians gain independence from western imperialism.

But by 1940 Japan had developed an India Policy and the following year sent Major Fuziwara to Southeast Asia to contact expatriate Indians who were organizing themselves into the Indian Independence Leagues under the leadership of men like Pritam Singh.

The idea of the Indian National Army (INA) was first conceived in Malaya by Captain Mohan Singh, an Indian officer of the British Indian army, when he decided not to join the retreating British Army and instead turned to the Japanese for help and agreed to cooperate with Fuziwara to raise an Indian Army with POWs to march alongside the Japanese to liberate India.

In June 1942, a united Indian Independence League, representing all Indians in Southeast Asia, was born as a civilian political body having controlling authority over the army. To chair this body, Rash Behari Bose, a veteran Bengali revolutionary then living in Japan, was flown in. By September, the INA was formally in existence. But its relationship with the Japanese was still far from satisfactory, as "Japanese duplicity" now became more than apparent. General Tojo, the Japanese prime minister, made a declaration in the Diet supporting Indian Independence. But beyond that, the Japanese were only prepared to treat INA as a subsidiary force, rather than an allied army. As Mohan Singh insisted on autonomy and allied status, he was removed from command and put under arrest. Rash Behari Bose tried to hold the banner for some time, but he was then too aged for the task. By the beginning of 1943 the first INA experiment virtually collapsed.

As Mohan Singh had often mentioned to the Japanese, the INA movement needed a new leader and outside India only one person could provide that leadership, and that was Subhas Chandra Bose. The Japanese now seriously considered the proposition and negotiated with the Germans to bring him to Asia. At last, after the long and arduous submarine voyage, in May 1943 Bose arrived in Southeast Asia and immediately took control of the situation, with Japanese assurance of help and equal treatment.

In October, he formed the [Azad Hind Government](#), a Provisional Free Indian Government in exile, which was immediately recognized by Japan and later by eight other governments including Germany and Fascist Italy. And he became the supreme commander of its army, the Azad Hind Fauj or Indian National Army after its reorganization.

The Indian National Army composed of Indian POWs and volunteering Indian expatriates in South-East Asia, with the help of the Japanese. It had a women's regiment named after the legendary Rani of Jhansi of 1857 fame. Its aim was to reach India as a fighting force that would build on public resentment to inspire revolts among Indian soldiers to defeat the British raj.

The INA was to see action against the allies, including the British Indian Army, in the forests of Arakan, Burma and in Assam, laying siege on Imphal and Kohima with the Japanese 15th Army. During the war, the Andaman and Nicobar islands were captured by the Japanese and handed over by them to the INA.

But due to ill-fated Imphal campaign, which was finally launched on 8 March 1944 by Japan's Southern Army accompanied by two INA regiments, ended in a disaster. The INA failed owing to poor military leadership, disrupted logistics, poor supplies from the Japanese, and lack of training.

The retreat was even more devastating, finally ending the dream of liberating India through military campaign. It surrendered unconditionally to the British in Singapore in 1945. Bose, however, attempted to escape to Japanese-held Manchuria in an attempt to escape to the Soviet Union, which he increasingly viewed as anti-British. But on his way, on 18 August 1945 at Taihoku airport in Taiwan, he died in an air crash.

