



reflection

The Forgotten War

by Sarah E Coghlan

FIFTEEN thousand officers and soldiers of the famed British-Indian Army revolted against that establishment in the early years of the Second World War and allied themselves with the Japanese, forming the Indian National Army (INA).

Once considered Quislings by the British and most of India itself, these men are now viewed as freedom fighters and national heroes and their charismatic leader, Subhas Chandra Bose, elevated to the pantheon of Indian gods.

Subhas Chandra Bose Of the men prominent in the final struggle for Indian independence, Mountbatten would live on for another thirty years before becoming the victim of an act of violence half a world away in the seas off Ireland. Mahatma Gandhi, the frail old proponent of non-violence, fell victim to an assassin's bullet. Jawaharlal Nehru, the Brahmin admirer of socialism, lived on to lead his country through tumultuous, though productive, times. Later years were stained with the blood of both his ruling daughter and grandson.

Also playing a role during this turbulent period was another figure less known to history. A man opposed to Gandhi, bitter foe of Nehru, wager of war against the Earl of Burma, and open promoter of violence and revolution, such was Subhas Chandra Bose. This native son of Bengal, the eastern state of British India, rejected the doctrine of non-violent love and inner strength and presented himself as leader of the large number of Indians who felt that only violence and outright rebellion would secure final independence for their country.

For many years a simple oblique on the maiden (the Central Park of British Bengal cities and military posts) constituted Calcutta's only memorialization of its native son. In 1997, the hundredth anniversary year of Bose's birth, this most controversial of India's independence heroes, was accorded an adulation which observers described as "verbal gymnastics performed by even those political parties that had previously condemned him" and who had viewed him as a politician who could conveniently consider any enemy of India's enemies as a friend of India. Bose's involvement with the Axis Powers, the ene-

The Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army) was founded by a Sikh, from a family that had served the British colonial government for generations. After much contemplation, Mohan Singh decided that he was living his life as a servant of the English and that if he were to fight, it would be for his own country. Also involved in the early phases was an undercover liaison officer of the Japanese, Fajhot Iwaichi Fugiwara, an almost religious missionary dedicated to the liberation of the colonised peoples of Asia. Pruitang Singh, a Sikh long active as an Indian nationalist working among Indian emigres in Canadian and US West Coast cities, was the third of the conspiring party.

mies of England, now appears either forgotten or forgiven, with elaborate ceremonies rehabilitating the deposed former President of the Congress Party to whom the epitaph of "Quisling" had once been applied.

In January of 1977, at the start of the yearlong celebration, a statue of Bose wearing his wartime uniform was unveiled in front of the Parliament Building in New Delhi. A postage stamp commemorates the once despised Bose, fifty years later evidence of his impact upon the winning of independence for India. His name may now be found on parks, roads, public buildings and sports stadiums. Bose statues stand in place of displaced British heroes. He is always in uniform and always rousing his men toward one last glorious charge against the British oppressor.

The Boses of Calcutta

Subhas Chandra Bose was born in Oryia Bazar Cuttack in the state of British Bengal on 23 January, 1897, at the height of Empire and the year of Victoria's Jubilee. He was the ninth child, sixth male of the family, not a particularly notable event in the days of large families among well-to-do Indians. The Boses belonged to that older Hindu elite which had enjoyed power and influence in pre-British India. Boses had long been ministers to Muslim rulers. Land and other privileges were considered their birthright.

Always something of a mystic, Bose had been, despite his eight siblings, a lonely child with parents greatly revered by the community but aloof and reserved to their children. In his biography of Bose, Mihir Bose (no relative) writes that to his grandchildren Jan Knish Bose was "dadabhat": kind, loving, affectionate. But "to his own children — particularly the males — there existed a studied reserve, possibly taking as a model the British with which [the senior] Bose had al-

ways had a close and admiring relationship."

An incipient rebel, by college age Bose had already been expelled from his Indian school for continuous nationalist activities. He eventually finished at Cambridge where he prepared for the Indian Civil Service. Upon hearing of nationalist activities taking place back in India, he resigned what would have been his chance for a life of comfort and recognition and returned to India.

Following his return, Bose concentrated on developing ultra-national programs. Even apart from the communist or terrorist trends prevalent in the Twenties, there was a general restiveness in the rising generation which produced a variety of student and youth organizations. Throughout this period of his career Bose was financially and emotionally supported by his elder brother, Sarat Chandra Bose, a Congress party politician. Gandhi's non-cooperation movement had by this time caused the Indian National Congress to take on the aspect of a powerful non-violent organization. Bose, agreeing with this approach in the early years of his career, worked in his native Bengal as youth educator, journalist and leader of the Bengal Congress volunteers. The next few years found Bose in and out of jail, suspected of secret revolutionary movements which were by now far removed from the Mahatma's tenants of non-violence. Many of the young members of Congress were eager to take up arms against the British and considered Gandhi an agent of imperialism.

Bose's Relationship with Gandhi and Nehru

In 1924 Bose was appointed chief executive officer of the Calcutta Corporation (Bengali term for city government) with the apparent compli-

ance of the British. He was soon, however, deported to Burma, then under British rule, suspected again of secret revolutionary connections. His ties with Gandhi and Nehru grew more tenuous as he moved towards ever more violence. Churchill would have felt a closer kinship with Bose than with Gandhi whom he viewed as a shrewd politician using religion as a most propitious way to arouse the Indian people, Gandhi, Churchill considered "a seditious Middle Templar posing as a half naked fakir of a type well known in the East."

"The Bose-Nehru relationship," again according to biographer Bose, "forms one of the most fascinating 'lives' cherished by the Indian left. 'If only the two could have worked together. If only...' Both courted socialism, but their practical interpretations were so different that an ideological divide was inevitable. Though Bose continued to make overtures to Gandhi, he never forgave Jawaharlal Nehru."

Following a year's detention in 1930 Bose was released, partly due to worsening health, and allowed to proceed to Europe where he remained for six years. His movements during this period are difficult to track except for the publication of his book, "The Indian Struggle." He continued pleading India's cause with European leaders, returning to India after a six-year absence with a European wife who shares the scene for several years and then seems to disappear. It is probable that they met in Vienna while he was seeking confirmation from the Germans. Emilie Schenk was with him when he moved on to Rome. The marriage probably took place somewhere about this time, though no documentation exists to that effect. That he fathered a child, Anita, is documented even to the extent of at least one existing picture. Anita visited the land of her father in

1961, but after that she, too, drops from view.

Seeking Axis Aid

Jailed once more in 1940, Bose escaped house arrest in woman's clothing, going to Kabul and then on to Berlin seeking German support. Only vague promises were forthcoming. Support seemed more likely in Italy, but nothing actually materialized there either.

War in the East

The fall of Singapore, following the incredible drive down the Malay peninsula after the landing at the port of Kota Baharu (planned to coincide with the attack on Pearl Harbor) became the catalyst for the formation of the Indian National Army. Singapore was one of the most heavily fortified naval bases in the world with more than a hundred thousand Allied troops (half of which were of the British Indian Army) on the island at the time of the surrender. The guns of the world's most powerful naval force were locked in place, aimed at the only considered avenue of approach — the sea. Surely this must be one the saddest pages in modern military history. The Japanese simply continued their advance down the peninsula, on through the Straits of Johore, entering Singapore through the wide-open back door. The impact of this disaster was overwhelming, and the surrender shocking to the Indian as well as the British troops. Gathered together in Singapore's Farrer Park, the Indians were turned over from one master to another. The feeling of being mere chattels intensified, as did the questioning: Why have I been sacrificing for another country than my own?

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living his life as a servant of the English and that if he were to fight, it would be for his own country. Also involved in the early phases was an undercover liaison officer of the Japanese, Fajhot Iwaichi Fugiwara, an almost religious missionary dedicated to the liberation of the colonised peoples of Asia. Pruitang Singh, a Sikh long active as an Indian nationalist working among Indian emigres in Canadian and US West Coast cities, was the third of the conspiring party.

Of the 50,000 Indian troops that surrendered to the Japanese, approximately 25,000 accepted the Japanese offer to join forces against the British,

thus becoming the core of the newly constituted Indian National Army. Enthusiasm was so great that, in the then Malaya, several hundred women from traditional Indian homes from which the woman barely stirred, formed the Jhansi Regiment — armed and prepared to die for the cause.

Yet the choice was not easy. A person may have many and overlapping allegiances, but a soldier is sworn to but one — fidelity to his country. For the colonial soldier, what is his country? Is it that to which he swore fealty when he joined its army, or to the land of his fathers of which, in this case, there was no real entity as the British presence dissolved before their very eyes. Singh did not survive long as leader of the INA. The Japanese arrested, imprisoned and exiled him when he sought an unconditional Japanese.

To maintain his lead in the Arakan, General (eventually Viscount and Supreme Allied Commander of Ground Troops in Southeast Asia) William Slim had to commit his reserves — part of the original Japanese strategy. While the British General's forces were thus dispersed, the Japanese in the north crossed the Chindwin River and attacked Imphal.

The INA committed some nine thousand troops to this final assault on India (Imphal-Kohima) launched by the Japanese in March of 1944. INA officers and men envisioned occupying the front lines, marching to liberate their homeland. Of these nine thousand, only a few really saw action. Some served as guides but the three INA divisions were employed mostly in the rear.

To be continued

essay

The Cost of Living

By Arundhati Roy

THERE are no official assessments of the cumulative impact Big Dams have had on the environment.

What we do know is that a study of 300 projects done by an Expert Committee on River Valley Projects reported that 270 of them — that's 90 per cent of them — had violated the environmental guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Environment. The Ministry has not taken action or revoked the sanction of a single one of them.

The evidence against Big Dams is mounting alarmingly — irrigation disasters, dam-induced floods, the fact that there are more drought-prone and flood-prone areas today than there were in 1947. The fact that not a single river in the plains has potable water. The fact that 250 million people have no access to safe drinking water. And yet there has not been an official audit, a comprehensive, honest, thoughtful, post-project evaluation of a single Big Dam to see whether or not it has achieved what it set out to achieve. Whether or not the costs were justified, or even what the costs actually were.

"This is exactly why the Sardar Sarovar Project is different," its proponents boast. They call it the 'most studied project' in the world. (You'll notice as we go along, that the story of the Narmada Valley is full of this sort of superlative — the most studied project, the most ambitious river valley project, the best rehabilitation package... etc.) One of the reasons the Sardar Sarovar is so 'studied' is because it's also so controversial.

In 1985, when the World Bank first sanctioned a

450-million-dollar loan to fund the project, no studies had been done, nobody had any idea what the human cost or the ecological impact of the dam would be. The point of doing studies now can only be to justify what has become a fait accompli. So costs are suppressed and benefits exaggerated to farcical proportions.

The huge discrepancy between the Government's estimate and the NBA's has to do with the definition of who qualifies as 'Project Affected'. According to the Government, the only people who qualify as Project Affected are those whose lands and homes are submerged by the reservoir. But when you tear up the fabric of an ancient, agrarian community, which depends on its lands and rivers and forests for its sustenance, the threads begin to unravel in every direction. There are several categories of displacement that the Government simply refuses to acknowledge.

Valley", led by Arundhati Roy, at Patradh village in Madhya Pradesh, on a bank of the Narmada.

The politics of the Sardar Sarovar Dam are complicated because the Narmada flows through three States — ninety per cent of it through Madhya Pradesh, it then merely skirts the northern border of Maharashtra and finally flows through Gujarat for about 180 kilometres before it reaches the Arabian Sea.

In order for the three States to arrive at a water-sharing formula, in 1969 the Central Government set up a body called the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal. It took ten years for it to announce its Award. Geographically, the Sardar Sarovar Dam is located in Gujarat. Its reservoir submerges 245 villages, of which only 19 are in Gujarat. All the rest are in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. What this means is that the social costs are borne by Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, while the benefits go to Gujarat. This is what has sharpened the controversy around it.

The cost-benefit analysis for the Project is approached in a friendly, cheerful way. Almost as though it's a family board game.

First let's take a look at the 'costs'.

In 1979, when the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal announced its award, the official estimate for the number of families that would be displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Reservoir was about 6,000. In 1987 the figure grew to 12,000. In 1992 it surged to

27,000. Today it hovers between 40,000 and 42,000 families. That's about 200,000 people. And that's just the official estimate. According to the NBA, the actual number of affected families is about 85,000. Close to half a million people.

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For example:

The Sardar Sarovar Project envisages bending the last 180 km of the Narmada and diverting it about 90 degrees north, into a 75,000-sq-km network of canals that planners claim will irrigate a command area of 1.8 million hectares. The government has acquired land for the canal network. 200,000 families are directly affected. Of these 23,000 families, let's say about 100,000 people, are seriously affected.

They don't count as project affected. Not in the official estimates.

In order to compensate for the submergence of 13,000 hectares of prime forest, the Government proposes to ex-

pand the Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary near the dam site. This would mean that about 40,000 Adivasi people from about 101 forest villages with in the boundaries of the park will be 'persuaded' to leave. They don't count as project affected.

In addition to the sanctuary, the other mitigating measure is the extraordinary process known as Compensatory Afforestation in which the government acquires forest and plants three times as much forest as has been submerged by the reservoir.

The people from whom this land is acquired do not count as project affected.

In its plans for what it is going to do with its share of the Narmada water, the Gujarat Government has allocated no water at all — 0 million acre feet — for the stretch of river downstream of the dam. This means that in the non-monsoon months there will be no water in the last 180 km of the river. The dam will radically alter the ecology of the estuary and affect the spawning of the Hilsa and freshwater prawns. 40,000 fisherfolk who live downstream depend on the river for a living.

They don't count as project affected. In 1961, the Gujarat Government acquired 1,600 acres of land from 950 Adivasi families for the infrastructure it would need for starting work on the dam. Guest houses, office blocks, housing for engineers and their staff, roads leading to the dam site and a warehouse for construction material.

Overnight, the villagers became landless labourers. Their houses were dismantled and moved to the periphery of the colony, where they remain today, squatters on their own land. Some of them work as servants in the officers' bungalows and waiters in the guest house built on land where their own houses once stood. Incredibly, they do not qualify as project affected!

In its publicity drive, the other sleight of hand by the proponents of the Sardar Sarovar is to portray costs as benefits. For instance, there's the repeated assertion that Displacement is actually a positive intervention, a way of relieving acute deprivation. That the state is doing people a favour by submerging their lands and homes, taking them away from their forests and river, drowning their sacred sites, destroying their community links and forcibly displacing them against their wishes. Anybody who argues against this is accused of being an 'ecoromantic', of wanting to deny poor and marginalised people the 'fruits of modern development'. Of glorifying the notion of the Noble Savage.

If the well-being of Adivasi people is what is uppermost in the Planners' minds, why is it that for fifty years there have been no roads, no schools, no clinics, no wells, no hospitals in the areas they live in? Why is it for all these years they didn't take any steps to equip the people they care so deeply about, for the world they were going to

be dumped in? Why is it that the first sign of 'development' — a road — brought only terror, police, beatings, rape, murder? Why must the offer of Development be conditional, that is: You give up your homes, your lands, your field, your language, your gods, and we'll give you 'development'?

As part of the best rehabilitation package in the [Image] world, the Gujarat Government has offered to rehabilitate all the officially 'project affected', even those from Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The Madhya Pradesh Government has filed an affidavit in court declaring that it has no land to rehabilitate people displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Reservoir. This means that all the displaced people from Madhya Pradesh have no choice but to move to Gujarat — not a State known for its hospitality towards 'outsiders'. It's like displacing people in England and forcing them to live in France. Notwithstanding its feigned generosity, in point of fact the Government of Gujarat hasn't even managed to rehabilitate people from the 19 Adivasi villages in Gujarat that are being submerged by the reservoir, let alone those from the rest of the 226 villages in the other two States. The inhabitants of Gujarat's 19 villages have been scattered to 175 separate rehabilitation sites. Social links have been smashed, communities broken up. Not a single village has been resettled, according to the directives of the Tribunal.

Some families have been given land, others haven't. Some have land that is stony and uncultivable. Some have land that is irredeemably waterlogged or infested with pernicious daab grass. Some have been driven out by landowners that sold land to the Government but hadn't been paid yet.

To be continued

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