Indian Muslims & Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose: Contributions to India's freedom struggle

Shalimar Publications & Papers, a subsidiary of Shalimar Group, 2025

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16 September 2025

Abstract

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, a pivotal figure in India's struggle for freedom, collaborated with numerous Muslim individuals across various capacities during his leadership of the Indian National Army (INA), also known as Azad Hind Fauj, and his international missions. This article explores the roles of these Muslim personalities, from high-ranking officers and personal aides to financial supporters and helpers in clandestine operations. Drawing from historical accounts, it highlights their contributions in India, Germany, Japan, Rangoon, and other locations, emphasizing their impact on communal harmony and the broader independence effort. The analysis underscores Bose's vision of unity beyond religious divides, showcasing how these collaborators advanced the cause of a free India.

Keywords

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Indian National Army (INA), Azad Hind Fauj, Muslim freedom fighters, Hindu-Muslim unity, World War II collaborations, Provisional Government of Free India, Submarine journey, Burma campaigns, Red Fort trials

Introduction

Subhash Chandra Bose, fondly known as Netaji, emerged as a radical leader in India's fight against British colonialism, diverging from the non-violent path advocated by Mahatma

Gandhi to pursue armed resistance. Escaping house arrest in 1941, Bose sought alliances with Axis powers in Germany and Japan, revitalizing the Indian National Army (INA) in Southeast Asia to challenge British forces. His efforts spanned continents, involving travels to Berlin, Tokyo, and Rangoon, where he established the Provisional Government of Free India (Azad Hind Sarkar) in 1943. Central to Bose's strategy was fostering Hindu-Muslim unity, as evidenced by his formation of a Communal Harmony Council and inclusive recruitment in the INA, which comprised around 40,000 soldiers from diverse backgrounds.(b5ee15) Muslims played crucial roles in this endeavor, serving as officers, aides, and supporters, often at great personal risk. This article delineates these individuals under thematic subheadings, illustrating their involvement in Bose's domestic and international missions, the INA's operations, and his personal entourage. Their stories reveal a shared commitment to India's liberation, transcending communal barriers and contributing to the eventual transfer of power in 1947.

High-Ranking Officers in the Indian National Army

Muslim officers formed a significant backbone of the INA's leadership, commanding regiments, leading offensives, and ensuring operational efficiency during campaigns in Burma and Northeast India.

Major General Shah Nawaz Khan: A prominent commander, Khan led the Subhas Brigade, an independent unit of three infantry battalions, during the U-Go offensive, protecting Japanese flanks.(44103f) He commanded forces attacking British territories in Arakan, Nagaland, and other frontiers, persuading British Indian Army POWs to join the INA.(74d17e) Khan was one of three accused in the Red Fort trials (1945-1946), symbolizing religious diversity as the Muslim representative alongside Hindu and Sikh officers.(09ace1) Post-independence, he served as Minister of State for Railways in India's first cabinet.

Major General Mohammed Zaman Kiani: As Chief of the General Staff under General Mohan Singh, Kiani later commanded the INA's 1st Division, comprising the Nehru, Azad, and Gandhi regiments.(8b833d) He oversaw operations on the Burma front and was entrusted with army command when Bose departed Singapore.(60e2dd) Kiani, a graduate

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of the Indian Military Academy, received the Netaji Medal posthumously for his contributions.

Colonel Habib ur Rahman: Co-founder of the INA with Mohan Singh, Rahman served as Bose's chief of staff in Singapore, Deputy Quartermaster General, and commander of the 4th Guerrilla Regiment (Nehru Brigade).(36d6ec) He led expeditions to Burma, managed training schools, and accompanied Bose on his final flight from Taipei to Tokyo in August 1945, witnessing the plane crash in Taihoku.(0e3694) His travels included deployments to Penang, Ipoh, Jitra, Thailand, Mergui, Tavoy, Bangkok, Rangoon, and the Pegu Yomas jungles.(en.wikipedia.org)

Colonel Shaukat Ali Malik: Commander of the Bahadur Group, Malik captured Moirang in Manipur on April 14, 1944, hoisting the tricolor and establishing civilian administration and intelligence units.(6d20be) Decorated with Tamgha-e-Sardar-e-Jang, he marked the first INA-controlled Indian territory.(3d83fa)

Colonel Ehsan Qadir: Director of Azad Hind Radio, military secretary, and head of the Communal Harmony Council, Qadir managed over 30,000 volunteers in Azad Hind Dal, promoting religious unity within the INA.(60e3bc)

Colonel Inayatullah Hasan: As Director of Azad Hind Radio and head of training, Hasan produced patriotic dramas and trained women, children, and civilians in arms usage.(397aad)

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Colonel Mehboob Ahmad: Liaison between Azad Hind Sarkar and the INA, Ahmad advised Shah Nawaz Khan during Arakan and Imphal campaigns.(227be6)

Colonel Abdul Aziz Tajik: Commanded the INA's 2nd Division, formed post-Imphal, merging regiments for guerrilla operations.(6c92b0)

Personal Staff and Close Aides

Bose's inner circle included trusted Muslim aides who facilitated his travels and missions.

- **Abid Hasan Safrani (Zain-ul-Abideen Hasan):** Bose's secretary and interpreter, Safrani accompanied him on the perilous submarine journey from Germany to

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Japan in 1943.(abc16e) He coined "Jai Hind," led Burma battles, and later served as ambassador post-independence.(973cc0)

- **Colonel Nizamuddin (Saifuddin):** Bose's driver and bodyguard, Nizamuddin drove him through Burma forests (1943-1944), saving his life by taking bullets during combat.(9730fb)

Political and Advisory Figures in Azad Hind Sarkar

Muslims advised Bose's provisional government, ensuring administrative and ideological support.

- **Karim Ghani:** Tamil journalist in Burma, Ghani headed the Indian Independence League in Rangoon before Bose's arrival and served as an advisor in Azad Hind Sarkar.(d522c8)
- **D.M. Khan:** Advisor in Azad Hind Sarkar, contributing to governance decisions.(0ae9aa)

Financial Supporters and Civilian Helpers

Civilian Muslims provided crucial resources for the INA's sustenance.

- **Abdul Habib Yusuf Marfani:** Rangoon-based Gujarati businessman, Marfani donated over Rs 1 crore (including jewelry) to the Azad Hind Bank, earning Tamgha-e-Sevak-e-Hind.(cc029e)
- **M.K.M. Ameer Hamza:** Tamil Nadu trader in Burma, Hamza donated millions to the INA and faced British detention for his support.(78bc59)

Helpers in Escape and Domestic Missions

Muslims aided Bose's early escapes and Indian operations.

- **Maghfoor Ahmad Ajazi:** Arrested with Bose during a 1924 Calcutta protest, Ajazi collaborated in domestic freedom activities.(743036)
- **Akbar Shah and Mohammed Shah:** Assisted Bose's 1941 escape from Peshawar to Afghanistan, enabling his journey to Germany.(6c36e2)

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Other Notable Figures

- **Captain Abbas Ali:** Fought in the INA, inspired by Bose's speeches, and received a life sentence from the British, later revoked.(85fc3c)
- **Burhan-ud-Din:** INA prisoner potentially involved in operations, with deferred trial during Red Fort proceedings.(d8ebcd)

Conclusion

The Muslim collaborators of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose exemplified unwavering dedication to India's independence, bridging communal divides and bolstering the INA's fight against imperialism. From commanding battlefronts in Burma to funding operations in Rangoon and aiding clandestine travels between Germany and Japan, these individuals embodied Bose's ethos of unity. Their efforts not only advanced military objectives but also inspired post-independence harmony, as seen in their roles in free India's governance. By highlighting these unsung heroes, we recognize the inclusive nature of the freedom struggle, ensuring their legacies endure in India's historical narrative.

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