

STRATEGIC ROLE OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY IN INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE: THE LEADERSHIP OF SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE

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ABSTRACT

This review paper presents a comprehensive meta-analysis of scholarly literature examining Subhas Chandra Bose and the emergence of the Azad Hind movement during India's independence struggle. Through systematic examination of historical documents, biographies, and academic research spanning eight decades, this study synthesizes diverse perspectives on Bose's revolutionary ideology, his break from the Indian National Congress, and the formation of the Indian National Army (INA). The paper critically analyzes existing scholarship on the Forward Bloc establishment, Bose's wartime collaboration with Axis powers, and the Azad Hind government's international recognition. Drawing from primary sources including declassified intelligence reports, INA trial records, and contemporary accounts, this meta-analysis identifies recurring themes in historical interpretation while highlighting methodological gaps in existing research. The review examines how historiographical perspectives have evolved from nationalist narratives to more nuanced interpretations incorporating geopolitical contexts, postcolonial theory, and comparative revolutionary studies. Particular attention is devoted to scholarly debates regarding Bose's political philosophy, the military effectiveness of the INA, and the movement's impact on India's path to independence. This comprehensive survey reveals significant disparities in regional scholarship, with Southeast Asian perspectives remaining underrepresented in mainstream historiography. The study concludes by proposing future research directions, including deeper investigation into Bose's transnational networks, the socio-economic impact of the INA campaigns, and comparative analysis with contemporary anti-colonial movements across Asia.

Keywords: Subhas Chandra Bose¹, Azad Hind², Indian National Army³, Indian Independence Movement⁴, Anti-Colonial Resistance⁵, Forward Bloc⁶, Revolutionary Nationalism⁷.

I. INTRODUCTION

The historiography of India's freedom struggle has traditionally centered on the non-violent resistance movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. However, scholarly attention has increasingly shifted toward understanding the parallel revolutionary traditions, particularly the armed resistance movement spearheaded by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. This review undertakes a systematic meta-analysis of

existing scholarship on Bose's political evolution and the Azad Hind movement, examining how historical interpretations have transformed across different temporal and geographical contexts. The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive synthesis of diverse scholarly perspectives, ranging from hagiographical accounts to critical postcolonial analyses, thereby providing a holistic understanding of Bose's contribution to India's independence struggle [1]–[4].

A. Historical Context and Significance

Subhas Chandra Bose emerged as a prominent nationalist leader during the 1920s and 1930s, representing a radical faction within the Indian National Congress that advocated for complete independence rather than dominion status. His ideological divergence from Gandhi's non-violent methodology culminated in his resignation from the Congress presidency in 1939, followed by the establishment of the Forward Bloc in 1940. The subsequent formation of the Azad Hind government and the Indian National Army during World War II marked a significant departure in India's anti-colonial resistance strategy [5]–[8]. Scholarly investigations into this period reveal complex negotiations between nationalist aspirations, geopolitical realities, and the exigencies of global warfare.

B. Scope and Objectives of the Review

This meta-analytic review examines scholarly literature published between 1945 and 2025, encompassing historical monographs, biographical studies, archival research, and contemporary academic analyses. The primary objectives include: identifying dominant theoretical frameworks employed in Bose scholarship; analyzing methodological approaches across different historiographical traditions; evaluating the evolution of historical interpretation regarding Bose's collaboration with Axis powers; assessing the military and political impact of the INA campaigns; and synthesizing diverse perspectives on the Azad Hind movement's legacy in postcolonial India [9]–[12].

C. Research Questions and Analytical Framework

The review is structured around several key research questions: How have historical interpretations of Bose's political ideology evolved over time? What methodological approaches have scholars employed to assess the effectiveness of the INA military campaigns? How do regional historiographies differ in their treatment of the Azad Hind movement? What role did transnational networks play in sustaining Bose's revolutionary activities? To address these questions, this study employs a systematic literature review methodology, categorizing existing scholarship according to temporal period, geographical origin, methodological approach, and theoretical framework [13]–[15].

II. SURVEY OF LITERATURE

The scholarly literature on Subhas Chandra Bose can be broadly categorized into five distinct phases, each reflecting the evolving historiographical concerns of its time. The immediate post-independence period (1947–

1960) witnessed predominantly hagiographical accounts that celebrated Bose as a martyred hero, with limited critical analysis of his political strategies or ideological positions. Prominent works from this era, including those by Dilip Kumar Roy and Sisir Kumar Bose, emphasized Bose's patriotic fervor while downplaying the controversial aspects of his wartime alliances [16]–[19]. The second phase (1960-1980) marked the emergence of more scholarly rigorous analyses, as historians gained access to British government archives and INA trial documents. Leonard Gordon's groundbreaking biography provided the first comprehensive academic treatment of Bose's political career, situating his revolutionary activities within the broader context of Bengali nationalism and anti-colonial resistance movements across Asia. This period also saw increased attention to the organizational structure of the INA and the Azad Hind government, with Hugh Toye's work offering detailed military history perspectives [20]–[23].

The third historiographical phase (1980-2000) coincided with the rise of postcolonial theory and subaltern studies, leading to more critical examinations of Bose's political ideology and the class composition of the INA. Scholars such as Sugata Bose began exploring the transnational dimensions of Bose's activities, particularly his engagement with Southeast Asian nationalist movements and the Indian diaspora communities in Malaya, Burma, and Singapore. This period also witnessed increased scrutiny of Bose's collaboration with Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, with historians debating whether such alliances constituted pragmatic *realpolitik* or ideological compromise [24]–[27]. The contemporary phase (2000-2025) has been characterized by unprecedented access to declassified intelligence documents, including files from the Intelligence Bureau, British MI5, Soviet NKVD, and American OSS. These revelations have prompted scholarly reassessments of several longstanding assumptions, particularly regarding Bose's death in Taiwan, his relationship with Soviet intelligence, and the extent of his knowledge regarding Japanese atrocities in Southeast Asia. Recent works by Anuj Dhar and Chandrachur Ghose have leveraged these newly available sources to construct more nuanced narratives of Bose's final years [28]–[30].

Alongside these temporal divisions, the literature exhibits significant geographical variations. Indian scholarship has predominantly focused on Bose's domestic political activities and his relationship with the Congress leadership, while Japanese historians have examined the INA campaigns within the broader context of Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Southeast Asian perspectives, though less numerous, have contributed valuable insights into the social impact of INA recruitment, the experiences of Indian prisoners of war, and the legacy of the Azad Hind movement among diaspora communities. Western scholarship has tended to emphasize geopolitical dimensions, analyzing Bose's activities through the lens of World War II strategic considerations and Anglo-American intelligence assessments [1], [5], [9], [16], [24], [28].

III. METHODOLOGY

This meta-analytical review employs a systematic literature review methodology conforming to established protocols for historical scholarship synthesis. The research design encompasses three distinct phases: comprehensive literature identification and selection, critical evaluation of methodological approaches employed by previous scholars, and systematic synthesis of findings across diverse historiographical traditions.

Literature identification involved searching academic databases including JSTOR, Project MUSE, Google Scholar, and specialized South Asian studies repositories, using search terms encompassing variations of 'Subhas Chandra Bose,' 'Indian National Army,' 'Azad Hind,' 'Forward Bloc,' and related revolutionary movements. The critical evaluation phase involved systematic assessment of each included study according to multiple analytical dimensions. Methodological approaches were categorized as archival-historical, biographical-narrative, comparative-analytical, or theoretical-interpretive, with notation of primary source utilization, evidentiary standards, and analytical frameworks employed. Particular attention was devoted to identifying the geographical and temporal origin of scholarship, recognizing that historiographical perspectives are invariably shaped by the political and cultural contexts of their production. Works were further classified according to their treatment of controversial issues, including Bose's collaboration with Axis powers, the circumstances of his alleged death, and the military effectiveness of INA campaigns. This systematic categorization enabled identification of patterns in scholarly interpretation and methodological evolution across different periods and regional traditions [6], [13], [21], [26].

The synthesis phase employed thematic content analysis to identify recurring arguments, evidentiary gaps, and areas of scholarly consensus or disagreement. Key themes extracted from the literature include: ideological evolution of Bose's political thought; organizational development of the Forward Bloc and subsequent revolutionary structures; dynamics of wartime collaboration and geopolitical strategy; military campaigns and tactical decisions of the INA; political legitimacy and international recognition of the Azad Hind government; and postcolonial legacy and contemporary political appropriation of Bose's image. For each theme, the review synthesizes findings across different scholarly traditions, highlights methodological strengths and limitations of existing approaches, and identifies areas requiring further research attention. This comprehensive analytical framework enables both horizontal comparison across contemporaneous scholarship and longitudinal analysis of historiographical evolution [3], [11], [18], [29].

IV. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PAST WORK

Critical examination of existing scholarship reveals several persistent methodological limitations and interpretive biases that constrain our understanding of Bose and the Azad Hind movement. A predominant weakness in early biographical literature stems from excessive reliance on hagiographical narratives that uncritically valorize Bose's actions while minimizing or rationalizing controversial decisions. This tendency toward nationalist mythmaking, while understandable given the political climate of post-independence India, has impeded rigorous historical analysis and perpetuated factual inaccuracies that subsequent scholars have struggled to correct. Recent archival research has demonstrated that many widely accepted 'facts' regarding Bose's European activities, his negotiations with Axis leaders, and the organizational structure of the INA were based on incomplete or unreliable sources [4], [12], [20], [27].

A second significant limitation concerns the persistent Eurocentrism in scholarly treatments of the INA campaigns and the broader Azad Hind movement. Much of the existing literature evaluates the military effectiveness of the INA primarily through comparisons with European or Japanese military standards, thereby

neglecting indigenous military traditions and the specific constraints under which the INA operated. Furthermore, scholarly focus has disproportionately emphasized Bose's interactions with German and Japanese authorities, while paying insufficient attention to his engagement with Southeast Asian nationalist movements, the experiences of Indian diaspora communities who supported the Azad Hind cause, and the grassroots organizational networks that sustained the movement. This Eurocentric bias has resulted in a truncated understanding of the transnational dimensions of Bose's revolutionary activities [7], [15], [22], [28]. Methodologically, existing scholarship exhibits significant gaps in comparative analysis. While numerous studies examine Bose's political ideology in isolation, few systematically compare his revolutionary philosophy with contemporaneous anti-colonial movements in China, Vietnam, Indonesia, or Africa. Similarly, assessments of the INA's military campaigns rarely employ rigorous comparative frameworks that would enable evaluation of tactical effectiveness relative to other colonial military formations or guerrilla movements of the period. The literature also demonstrates insufficient engagement with social history methodologies that could illuminate the experiences of ordinary INA soldiers, the impact of recruitment on Indian communities in Southeast Asia, and the gender dynamics within the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. These methodological limitations suggest promising directions for future research that could significantly enhance our understanding of the Azad Hind movement's multifaceted dimensions [8], [14], [19], [30].

V. DISCUSSION

The synthesis of existing literature reveals that scholarly understanding of Subhas Chandra Bose and the Azad Hind movement has progressed considerably from the hagiographical accounts of the immediate post-independence period to more nuanced, theoretically informed analyses incorporating postcolonial perspectives and transnational frameworks. However, significant interpretive disagreements persist regarding fundamental questions about Bose's political ideology, his strategic calculations in collaborating with Axis powers, and the ultimate impact of the INA campaigns on India's path to independence. These ongoing debates reflect not merely evidentiary gaps but deeper theoretical divisions regarding how scholars conceptualize anti-colonial resistance, revolutionary nationalism, and the relationship between military action and political liberation [1]–[5], [16], [24]. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes the necessity of situating Bose's activities within broader transnational contexts, acknowledging that the Azad Hind movement cannot be adequately understood through a purely national or bilateral (Indo-British) framework. Recent research has demonstrated the importance of examining Bose's extensive networks across Europe, Southeast Asia, and East Asia, his engagement with diverse anti-colonial movements, and the complex geopolitical calculations that shaped his wartime strategy. This transnational turn in Bose scholarship aligns with broader historiographical trends emphasizing connected histories and global perspectives on decolonization.

VI. CONCLUSION

This comprehensive meta-analysis of scholarship on Subhas Chandra Bose and the Azad Hind movement demonstrates the rich complexity of historical interpretation surrounding one of India's most controversial revolutionary leaders. The review has identified significant evolution in scholarly approaches, from early nationalist hagiographies to contemporary analyses employing sophisticated theoretical frameworks and newly

accessible archival sources. Key findings include the persistent influence of geographical and temporal contexts on historical interpretation, the gradual shift from Eurocentric to more transnational analytical frameworks, and the continued relevance of debates regarding the relationship between armed resistance and non-violent struggle in anti-colonial movements. The analysis reveals substantial gaps in existing scholarship, particularly concerning Southeast Asian perspectives, the social history of INA participants, and comparative analyses with other revolutionary movements [1]–[30]. Future research should prioritize several critical directions: deeper investigation into Bose's transnational networks and their role in sustaining revolutionary activities; systematic oral history projects documenting the experiences of surviving INA veterans and their families; comparative studies examining the Azad Hind movement alongside contemporaneous anti-colonial struggles in Asia and Africa; and critical analysis of how Bose's legacy has been appropriated for diverse political purposes in contemporary India. By addressing these research gaps through rigorous methodological approaches and theoretically informed frameworks, future scholarship can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of this pivotal chapter in India's struggle for independence.

VII. REFERENCES

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