

Children at War: Bal Sena of Azad Hind Fauz

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Abstract

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was incredibly a great leader of India. At that time, when the whole world was on the verge of Second World War, he risked his life for the sake of motherland. 'Enemy of the enemy is a friend' was his war tactic and Azad Hind Fauz was his weapon to fight against British Imperialism. As a result, alliance between Japan and Indian independence movement came into existence. The women regiment under this Fauz was probably the world's first women army. **Bal Sena** was another milestone set by him to achieve his goal. This paper aims to explore the Bal Sena, a youth organization formed under the Indian National Army (INA) led by Subhas Chandra Bose during World War II. The Bal Sena's formation, training, and contributions are analysed to understand its role in the Indian independence movement. Additionally, the broader impact of the INA on post-independence policies related to child welfare and empowerment is discussed.

Keywords: World War II, Azad Hind Fauz, Regiment, Bal Sena,

Introduction

Children are often regarded as the architects of a nation's future, and this holds true for India as well. Throughout India's freedom struggle, children and students played a pivotal role, actively participating in various facets of the national movements, including revolutionary activities and Gandhian initiatives. Shyamji Krishna Varma was a trailblazer in initiating student-led revolutionary activities, while nationalist leader Maulana Abul Kalam Azad contributed to the struggle through his revolutionary journal even before turning 16. Similarly, Subhashchandra Bose joined the national movement at the age of 21, resigning from his prestigious ICS position. Later, he reorganized the Indian National Army (INA) and became a key figure in India's fight for independence. One of the INA's most notable contributions was the formation of the Bal Sena, a youth brigade comprising children. This initiative not only involved the younger generation in the freedom movement but also laid the foundation for future efforts in child empowerment in India.

This research paper focuses on the Bal Sena of the Azad Hind Fauz, with a particular emphasis on its activities in Central India. A mixed-methods approach has been adopted, combining an extensive review of relevant literature with interviews of individuals connected to the subject. This study aims to provide deeper insights into the role and impact of the Bal Sena in India's struggle for independence.

Historical Background

Formation of the Indian National Army

The Indian National Army (INA), also known as Azad Hind Fauz, was established by Indian nationalists in 1942 during World War II. Initially, it was formed under the leadership of Mohan Singh with the

objective of supporting Japan in its Southeast Asian military campaigns. The INA consisted of Indian soldiers from the British-Indian Army who were captured by Japan during the Malayan Campaign and the Battle of Singapore. Due to disagreements between the Japanese military and INA leadership, the army was disbanded in December 1942. In 1943, Subhas Chandra Bose revived the INA, aiming to use it to fight for India's independence. He took charge of the Independence League, set up the Provisional Government of Free India, and worked hard to raise money and recruit soldiers. By 1944, he was ready to enter India with an army division of the Indian National Army (INA) alongside the Japanese. However, this division was almost completely destroyed during the Imphal campaign.

Meanwhile, a second division had started arriving in Burma, and a third division, made up of Indian civilians from Malaya, was being trained in Johore. In early 1945, when the British-Indian Fourteenth Army crossed the Irrawaddy River, the second division fell apart, while the third continued Bose's propaganda efforts.

Realizing that his military campaign was failing, Bose began thinking about seeking refuge in Russia, a plan he discussed with some of his ministers. However, before he could act on it, he was fatally injured in a plane crash in Formosa two months later.

This renewed force included former prisoners and civilians of Indian origin from Malaya (now part of Malaysia) and Burma. During that period, Indian prisoners of war were held in various camps across different countries. One such camp was located in Anneberg, Germany, although the number of Indian prisoners there was relatively small. Another camp was established in Italy. Since German forces were actively fighting alongside Italian forces on the African front, most of the Indian troops captured in that region were sent to Italy rather than Germany.

It is documented that an *Azad Hind Sena* (Free India Army) was formed through the efforts of Sardar Ajit Singh, Baba Labh Singh, and Iqbal Shadai. However, this organization remained small and faced significant challenges in management.

A small contingent of Indian prisoners of war was also present in France. However, the largest number of Indian prisoners were held in Libya. This was primarily due to logistical considerations. The German and Italian armies prioritized using their war communication equipment for more critical operations, rather than transporting a large number of Indian prisoners to Germany or Italy. Additionally, the unarmed prisoners captured on the battlefield were seen as a valuable labor force and were often deployed to build roads and dig trenches. For these reasons, Libya housed the largest concentration of Indian prisoners of war.

Creation of the Bal Sena

During his student years, Subhash Chandra Bose experienced an incident that profoundly influenced his belief in the necessity of student-led participation in the freedom struggle. While studying at Presidency College, in Kolkata, he encountered racial discrimination first-hand. An English Professor, Edward, Farely Oaten, reportedly insulted an Indian student in a racially manner. Subhash, standing against this injustice, confronted the professor and resorted to physical action. This bold act led to his expulsion from the college, and despite efforts, nothing could be done to reverse the decision.

Bose later reflected on this event in his book *The Indian Struggle*, noting how it shaped his political perspective and motivated him to advocate for a revolutionary movement supported by students. He developed strong connection with youth leaders, including Ansar Harvani, one of the founders of the All

India Students Federation (AISF) in 1936, the first student organization in India focused on the freedom movement.

As Congress president, Bose was highly popular among the youth, who admired his speeches and followed his ideas. His belief in the potential of young people was evident in his 1938 book *Tarun ke Swapn* ("Dreams of Youth"). Even after leaving India in 1941, he maintained close ties with students, including those in Germany, reflection his enduring commitment to engaging youth in the struggle for independence. Creation of Bal Sena was the outcome of this belief.

Subhashchandra Bose established the **Bal Sena** in 1943, consisting of children aged 6 to 12. This was the first army in which women and children were also included. Netaji had selected 46 experts. After a discussion with the Japanese government, they were given two years of special training at the Military Academy in Tokyo. These children were called *Tokyo Cadets*. Many children of *Bal sena* were trained in campus built in the cities of Burma Malaya. It was published in Japanese military magazine. They lived together like scout guides and NCC.

Here is the list of these Tokyo boys of INA.....

1. **B. Ramesh Rao (Ramesh Sakharam Benegal)**

Father: B. Shankara Rao

Origin: Rangoon, Burma

Author of *Burma to Japan with Azad Hind: A War Memoir*

Passed away in 2003

2. **S. V. Sharma**

name of father - C.V.S. Sharma

Origin: Malaya

Selected by the INA Relief Committee for training at Jadav College of Engineering and Technology, Bengal.

3. **S. Bala Krishna Sharma**

Origin: Malaya

4. **Attar Mohd Khan**

Father: Abdul Rehman Khan

Origin: Village Mehta Nangal, Amritsar, Punjab.

Held the rank of Brigadier and passed away in Pakistan.

5. **Sat Parkash (Satya Prakash Sharma)**

Father: Daulat Ram

Origin: Village Daula Nangal, Amritsar, Punjab.

passed away in 2015.

6. **Harbans Singh and Anup Singh**

Father: Ajit Singh

Origin: Lahore

later, resided in New Delhi, India and passed away in the early 1950s.

7. **Shiv Charan Singh and Harcharan Singh Virick (Malaya)**

Father: Gurcharan Singh Jat

Origin: Ophulweran Dist Shiekhpora, Punjab,

8. **Sukhbir Singh Nindra**

Father: D.S. Nindra

Origin: Penang, Malaya.

Later became PSEB General Manager in Punjab, India.

9. **Guruswamy Gandhi Dass**

Father: M. Guruswamy

Origin: Rangoon, Burma

Died of Malaria in 1946

10. **ST. Rajan**

Father: P.M. Sami Chettiar

Origin: Kuala Lumpur, Malaya

passed away in Africa.

11. **R.M. Annamalai**

Father: Ramaswami

Origin: Singapore, Malaya

Later, resided in Karaikudei, Tamil Nadu

12. **G. Ganapathy**

Father: P. Govindasamy

Origin: Ipoh, Malaya

died in Kuala Lumpur in 1988.

13. **V. Natarajan**

Father: Vellasami

Origin: Singapore

Later, resided in Tamilnadu, India

R. Meyyappan

Father: Ranganathan Chettiar.

later, resided in Bombay, India.

14. **M. Gandhi Nathan (Singapore)**

Father: Mukhayya Pillai

Origin: Singapore.

Later, residing in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

15. **N. Karuppiah**

Father: Narayana

Origin: Singapore.

Died in India in 1988.

16. **D. Ganarajan**

Father: M.d. Rajan

Origin: Rangoon, Burma.

Later, resided in Kerala, India.

17. **K.M.V. Nachiappan**

Father: M. Vallippan

Origin: Singapore.

Later, resided in Madras, Tamil Nadu, India.

18. **M. Meyyappan**

Father: Malayandi

Origin: Singapore.

Later, resided in Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India.

19. **K. Thuraisamy (K. Doraiswamy)**

Passed away in 1992.

20. **K.R.Sekharam**

Father: Dr. Krishna R.

Origin: Malaya

Passed away in Madras in 1992.

21. **Dasan Devasagayam**

Father: Devashayam

Origin: Malaya.

Passed away in Madras in 1992.

22. **Nani Gopal Chaudhuri**

Father: Dr. D.C.Chaudhuri

Origin: Malaya

Later, resided in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

23. **Ajit Kumar Ghosh**

Father: N.N. Ghosh

Origin: Malaya.

Later, resided in Malaysia.

24. **Bimel Kishore Dev**

Father: Bindhu Bhushan Dev

Origin: Rangoon, Burma.

Passed away while serving in the Burmese Navy

25. **Somerandra Karmakar**

Father: T. Karmakar

Origin: Singapore

Later, Resided in Jamshedpur, Bihar(now Jharkhand), India.

26. **Anil Ranjan Dutta**

27. **Father: A.B. Dutta,**

Origin: Burma.

Later, became President of Lama Shipping in New York, passing away in the 1990s.

28. **Ajit Sen Gupta**

Father: Anil Sen Gupta

Origin: Malaya,

Passed away in Ranchi in the 1950s.

29. **Sushil Chatterjee**

Father: Taran Chatterjee.

Origin: Malaya.

Passed away in Calcutta in 1982.

30. **Ranjit Das**

Father: H.C. Das

Origin: Singapore.

Later, resided in Mumbai, India.

31. **B. Karmakar**

Father: T. Karmakar,

Origin: Singapore. R

Later, residing in New Delhi.

32. **N.C. Mukherjee**

Father: S.K. Mukerjee.

Origin: Malaya.

Later, resided in Malaysia.

33. **P.K. Mitra**

Father: Dr. S.K. Mitra

Origin: Malaya

34. **K. Navaratnam**

Father: Kandavanam

Origin: Malaya.

Passed away in Patna in 1949.

35. **R. Balaraju Naidu (Malaya)**

Father: Ratnaswamy

Origin: Malaya.

36. **Mancadu Kumaran Ramkumar**

Father: M.R.K. Nair

Origin: Malaya

37. **C.P. Krishna (Malaya)**

38. **and C.P. Narayanan**

Father: T.P. Kerunakaran Nair

Origin: Malaya

39. **V. Ganapathy**

Father: Venkitachalam,

Later, resided in Tamil Nadu, India.

40. **N. Damodara Menon**

Father: Dr. N.K. Menon,

Origin: Malaya

Later, became Indian Airlines pilot and Resided in Tamil Nadu, India.

Robert S. Prosper

Father: J. Prosper

Origin: Malaya.

41. **Cecil Lakshman Thevar**

Father: Son of K.K. Thevar

Origin: Malaya

Later, resided in Canada

42. **J. Rabindra Nath, (Malaya)**

Father: Janardhanan Pillai

Origin: Malaya.

Passed away in Malaysia.

43. **Bishan Singh**

Origin: Malaya

Later, passed away on the way to Japan in 1944.

The **Bal Sena's** formation was inspired by a poignant request from an elderly woman during a speech by Bose at Jubilee Hall in Singapore. Moved by her plea to recruit her young son into the army, Bose emphasized the importance of involving every segment of society, including children, in the freedom struggle. These children, who had never visited India, became symbols of patriotism, raising slogans like "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" and "Jai Hind" in the streets of Far East cities.

These small children also worked to instill a sense of nationalism in the Indian soldiers who were in the British Army, the result of which was that they left the British Army and started joining the Azad Hind Fauj. One of such small soldiers was Balachandran who joined the Azad Hind Fauj at the age of just 14. Ishwar Lal Bhatia, whose earlier name was Ishwar Singh, was also among these children, impressed by whose bravery Netaji called him Ishwar ka Lal (son of God) and since then he came to be known as Ishwar Lal.

Bal Sena of Azad Hind Fauj in Central India –

Inspired by Netaji Bose's Azad Hind Fauj, the teenagers here in central India (specially in Holkar State of Indore & Dewas) had also formed "Balsena" which included about 200 teenagers, among whom was Dr. Chandras Palodriya. At this time his age was only 13 years. He never met Netaji but like Eklavya, he continued to follow his ideas.

According to him, everyone wanted to sacrifice for the sake of the nation. For this reason, when the commanders of Azad Hind Fauj were contacted about going to war, Dhillon Saheb secretly came to the village in around 1943-44. They were astonished to see such a large army of children. But being so young, he refused to be taken to war. In 1945, when the Allied countries defeated Germany and Japan, the Azad Hind Fauj also had to retreat. Finally, when the country became independent on 15th August, 1947, all the soldiers of our army kept jumping till midnight. Everyone sang 'Vande Mataram' but regretted not being able to sacrifice for the motherland. After the war ended when British wanted to disband this child army in Rangoon, these little soldiers fearlessly left the camp and refused to return to their parents. Their argument was that Netaji was their father, hence they would not go to anyone other than him. In such a way this Bal Sena came into force. This initiative was unprecedented, marking the first formal inclusion of children in a military organization within the Indian independence movement. Such Bal Sena was formed in Dewas state too. Such branches of Bal Sena were also working at Rau, Tillorkhurd & Pipalda Gram (Indore) under the leadership of Ajay Kumar Sando.

Training and Activities

The Bal Sena received extensive training that encompassed physical exercises, parade drills, and firearms training. The children were also educated about the British Empire, the Indian independence movement, and the objectives of the INA. This training aimed to instil discipline, patriotism, and a sense of duty toward the nation.

The activities of the Bal Sena extended beyond training. They participated in various INA operations, serving as messengers and scouts. These children were so brave that they would spy on the enemy's camp

and give all the information to Netaji. These child soldiers were extremely brave. Mansukh Lal, an officer in Netaji's army, told him about one such brave child Vishwanath and how that child helped people. These brave soldiers of Bal Sena used to go to every village of Burma and working for the Burmese people and generating goodwill among them towards Azad Hind Fauj. They were giving momentum to the war efforts despite facing many difficulties. Besides, some brave children have also been martyred in this campaign. Netaji's reaction to this was so emotional. He said, - "I had not even imagined that these children would go to this extent. I had definitely a children's army, but thinking that these people would live near the cities like scouts and will continue to do small services. But I had not thought that they would exert themselves so much. I will not be able to repay this loan. "Their involvement provided a morale boost to the INA and symbolized the collective effort of all Indians, regardless of age, in the fight for independence.

Impact on Post-Independence Policies

Inspiration and Role Models

The leaders and soldiers of the INA, including the young members of the Bal Sena, became national heroes. Their bravery and dedication inspired future generations, shaping the educational and civic values imparted to children in independent India. The way, the young soldiers of Royal Indian Navy (they used to be called 'Ratings') fought against British discrimination, is an example of this. Later, during the Quit India Movement, when movement became leaderless, many youths like Jayprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohiya, Biju Patnaik, Chhotu Bhai Puranik, Sucheta Kriplani, Usha Mehta, Aruna Asaf Ali etc. played a pivotal role in leading the movement and they all were motivated with a strong feeling of nationalism which was instilled by the youths of Bal Sena. In post-independent era the role of youngsters in many areas like governance, elections, economic planning etc. is also commendable.

Educational Reform

The ideals of leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose influenced educational reforms aimed at fostering a knowledgeable and empowered citizenry. Stories of the INA and the Bal Sena became part of school curricula, instilling a sense of national pride and motivation among students. As a student leader during his school years, he inspired many young minds to think outside the box and cultivate self-awareness, which later became evident in his Bal Sena.

Civic Awareness

The legacy of the INA contributed to fostering a sense of civic duty and national consciousness among young people. This encouraged active and positive participation in society, which was essential for nation-building in newly independent India. When Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose proclaimed the slogans **"Give me blood, and I will give you freedom"** and **"Chalo Delhi,"** he sought to ignite civic awareness among Indians, inspiring them to unite and actively resist British imperialism.

Child Welfare Policies

While the INA did not directly focus on child welfare, its contribution to India's independence created an environment where child welfare and development could become a priority. Independent India established numerous policies and programs dedicated to child welfare, benefiting indirectly from the freedom struggle in which the INA played a crucial role.

Cultural and Symbolic Significance

The Bal Sena had its own anthem, composed by Captain Ram Singh Thakur in Nepali. The song embodied the spirit of bravery, patriotism, and the commitment to the nation's freedom. The lyrics encouraged children to rise above their fears and contribute to the nation's liberation.

Conclusion

Subhash Chandra Bose envisioned for the national army of Independent India by reorganizing the Azad Hind Fauz. The most valuable thing he gave to the INA was the spirit of sacrifice for the country. The whole world was amazed to see how much more patriotic and full of life the people of the British-Indian-Army, who had joined Azad Hind Fauz, had become than before. For this, Netaji first cut the web of false English propaganda that was covering their eyes and then made them see the glorious traditions of the country and thus transformed them into true soldiers of the country. The Bal Sena of Azad Hind Fauz is a living example of this. The Bal Sena of the Azad Hind Fauj represents a unique chapter in India's independence movement. By mobilizing children and providing them with military training, Subhas Chandra Bose not only contributed to the immediate struggle against British rule but also laid the groundwork for future child empowerment initiatives. The legacy of the Bal Sena continues to inspire and shape the values of young Indians, highlighting the enduring impact of the INA on the nation's development.

This research paper provides a detailed overview of the Bal Sena's role within the INA and its broader impact on Indian society and policies. Further studies are needed to explore individual stories of Bal Sena members to shed more light on their personal experiences and contributions.

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