

WORKING PAPER: V

TRAVELS BY LEADERS IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY

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1. Introduction

This is a draft paper on the theme ‘Indian Leaders Travelling to Southeast Asia’ which was also one of the themes of the Bibliography compiled for the project ‘Sailing to Suvarnabhumi’. This draft will cover only the travels of Rabindranath Tagore and Subhas Chandra Bose in the early and mid-20th century to various countries in Southeast Asia. In addition to them there were several other leaders and intellectuals who visited Southeast Asia, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, P. J. Mehta, Chittaranjan Das, R. C. Majumdar and Periyar E. V. Ramasamy. These travels led to fostering of linkages and forging of socio-cultural and political ties between Indian and Southeast Asian regions prior to Independence. The paper shall not focus on a chronological account of travels by Tagore and Bose, but shall highlight the impact their travels had on both sides of the Bay of Bengal through the following sub themes:

2. Swadeshi and the Concept of Alternative Nationalist Education

Rabindranath Tagore established a college called Visva Bharati at Shantiniketan in 1921 whose motto was ‘*Yatra visvam bhavatyeka nidam* (Where the world makes its home in a single nest)’. The college was a meeting point of global cultures where both the west and the east would converge on themes of art, culture and education. Tagore believed in

constructive swadeshi characterized with *atma shakti* or self-reliance, in which education was to play a major role. The journeys undertaken by Tagore were an intellectual quest to find India’s past glory and an attempt to forge cultural and educational ties between India and Southeast Asia and pursue artistic and educational dialogues across the Bay of Bengal. His entourage on his voyages to Southeast Asia invariably consisted of intellectuals and artists- Nandlal Bose (painter), Kalidas Nag and Kshitimohan Sen (Sanskrit scholar) in 1924; Suniti Kumar Chatterji (philologist), Surendranath Kar (painter) and Dharendra Krishna Deva Varma (musician) in 1927. He set out on a three and half month Southeast Asian tour on 12 July 1927 on board the French ship Amboise. Rabindranath Tagore ‘embarked on this pilgrimage to see the signs of the history of India’s entry into the universal to collect source materials there for the history of India and to establish a permanent arrangement for research in this field’.¹ Rabindranath Tagore undertook the journey primarily to study the remains of Indian civilization and establish close cultural relations between India and Southeast Asian region. A direct result was the close interaction of scholars from Visva Bharati with the cultures of Southeast Asia and alternatively the study of Indian past in Southeast Asia.

Prafulla Kumar Sen, popularly known as Swami Satyanand Sen, taught at the Visva Bharati, and

went to Thailand in 1932 where he was appointed as a professor at the Chulalongkorn University. This was the result of the 1927 visit of Tagore to Thailand when the Thai Government asked him to suggest a specialist in Indian civilization and literature. Swami Satyanand taught Sanskrit at the University and also mastered the Thai language. He also established a Thai Bharat Lodge which fostered Indo Thai cultural and educational linkages.² The institution imparted physical, spiritual and education among the Indian youth. In his ten years in Thailand he delivered numerous lectures and in addition to many articles also produced ten books in Thai language. He is also credited with the translation of the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and biographies of Gandhi into Thai.³

Rabindranath Tagore's perceptions on education played a leading role in conceptualizing the 'Taman Siswa' (garden of pupils), in Indonesia, by the educator Ke Hadjar Dewantoro (1889 – 1959). "Taman Siswa was an influential and widespread network of schools that encouraged modernization but also promoted Indonesian culture and symbolised syncretism between new (Western) ideas and traditional (mostly Javanese) ways of teaching.⁴ Tagore's ashrama style education at Santiniketan in 1901 could have served as a role model."⁵ Conversely, Tagore also took an interest in Taman Siswa and during his visit to Java he and his team visited the school in Yogyakarta and Suniti Kumar Chatterji observed all the classes at Taman Siswa from close quarters to compare its educational approach with that of Visva Bharati. Close cultural interactions between Visva Bharati and Taman Siswa were fostered through travels of students and teachers to and from these educational institutes. Many dance teachers, such as Mrs Ammu Swaminandan, Shantidev Gose and Nataraj Vashi, were sent to observe and learn the classical Javanese dance forms.⁶ Taman Siswa also established exchange student program with Tagore's schools in Bengal in 1928⁷ and students such as Ki Soebaroto, the painter Rushi Rusli (1916-2005) and Affandi from Indonesia studied in Santiniketan. During his stay at Santi Niketan from 1932 to 1936, Rusli was recommended to consider the art of the Buddhist

temples at Borobodur in his home country as a fountainhead for motifs in his paintings.⁸ He spent six years in India studying painting, fine art of mural and relief, architecture, as well as eastern art philosophy of Santiniketan tradition and thought.⁹ Kartika Affandi also studied at Santiniketan and was advised by the Visva Bharati administration that his two-year grant would be given all at once which would facilitate Affandi's travel around India for studying Indian painting.¹⁰ He also exhibited his paintings in India.¹¹

The region of Myanmar/Burma had close relations with India since ancient times- economical, religious as well as political. While the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah was exiled in Rangoon, the last Burmese emperor Thinbaw was exiled to India as a prisoner of war. Political connections and sympathies were augmented by the British conquest of Burma which made Burma a part of British India. On the educational front as well there was a flow of students in both directions. Many Burmese students visited Universities and Colleges in Bengal to pursue further studies. "For the Burmese the Hindu College, Calcutta University and the Calcutta Medical College were popular amongst students for higher studies, and the Judson College and Rangoon College were affiliated to the Calcutta University."¹² Their stay in India for educational purposes exposed them to the concepts of swadeshi and satyagraha which were then implemented by them in the Burmese struggle for independence. Many Bengalis from the University of Calcutta were sent to Burma as officers of the lower rungs of the administration.¹³ U Ottama termed as the 'Gandhi of Myanmar' had close relations with India as he studied in Calcutta for three years and travelled around India. He was also elected as the President of the Hindu Mahasabha and had attended the Madras Session of the Indian National Congress in 1927.¹⁴ U Ottama was the leader of the General Council of Buddhist Association (GCBA) and he adopted the method of boycott while protesting against various Acts of the British administration and was instrumental in promoting the idea of Home Rule Burma.¹⁵

The National education movement in Burma was an essential force in the nationalist movement.¹⁶ Tagore made three trips to Burma in 1916, 1924 and 1927¹⁷ The Burmese poets and literary personalities were inspired by Tagore's idea of national education. Artists like Kodaw Hmaing, socialists like U Pakhau Cha rendered support to national education and colleges. Kodaw Hmaing was popularly known as the 'Tagore of Burma' as his writing bore similarities with that of Tagore and he also opposed Imperialism.¹⁸ Burmese artists were influenced by the artistic ideals of Santiniketan as seen in the works of Bagi Aung Soe who is considered the pioneer of modern art in Burma. Soe was sent on a Burmese scholarship to Santiniketan after Min Thu Wun visited Santiniketan and interacted with Rabindranath Tagore. Soe was sent to study and understand the art at Santiniketan and bring about a similar revival of traditional Burmese artistic traditions.¹⁹

3. Revival of Buddhist Linkages

Rabindranath Tagore believed in Universal Brotherhood embracing the whole of humanity and he opposed divisions and discriminations based on religion, territory, geography, caste etc. For him religion was Universal, which is identified with love and compassion and human spirit. "Cherish towards the whole universe immeasurable *maitri* in a spirit devoid of distinctions of hatred, of enmity. While standing, sitting, walking, lying down till you are asleep, remain established in this spirit of *maitri* that is called Brahmvihara."²⁰ Much of these ideals of Tagore seem to have stemmed from his knowledge of Buddhism. He appreciated the way Buddhism was preserved and being practiced in Southeast Asia, even though it had disappeared from India. "I am a disciple of the Buddha. But when I present myself before those holy places where the relics and footprints of the Buddha are found I come in touch with him to a great extent."²¹

In the early 20th century there was a renewed interest shown by scholars in the field of Buddhist studies and its various aspects such as language and philosophy. Pali was accepted as an independent subject for post-graduate studies by the University

of Calcutta in the last quarter of the 19th century and the Department of Pali attracted a number of Asian as well as European scholars. Rabindranath Tagore realized the importance of Tibetan language for a study of Buddhist literature and thus he introduced Tibetan language as a course at Visva Bharati. In 1921 Sylvain Levi joined as a visiting professor at Visva Bharati and through his erudite scholarship scholars became attracted to Tibetan language and Pali, and this along with Sanskrit helped discover the hidden treasures of Buddhism. Through the support and encouragement of Prof. Vidhusekhara Bhattacharya a number of important works in Pali, Tibetan and Buddhist Sanskrit languages were brought out. It is at Visva Bharati that Tibetan studies became an independent subject of study, and thus the institute became a major centre for Tibetan studies in India and the world.

Tagore visited Siam (Thailand) as a pilgrim, "It has been my desire for many years to have the opportunity to visit Siam for two main reasons. The first is that Siam is country in the East, and the second is that his majesty the King of Siam is a devout Buddhist like myself. The hospitality and welcome extended to me have been above my higher expectations."²² "In Bangkok he met prince of Chantabun in Bangkok, who had published multiple volumes of the Pali Tripitaka in Thai script."²³ Tagore carried back with him a set of the published volumes of the Tripitaka gifted by the Prince of Chantaburi²⁴ and a decorated box for the scriptures gifted by the Royal Institute.²⁵

The following poem by Rabindranath Tagore was printed on blue satin and encased in Benares brocade, was one of the poems presented to the King and Queen of Siam.²⁶ This poem reflects his thoughts on the Buddhist linkages between India and Thailand and the preservation of Indian culture in Thailand.

"I come, a pilgrim, at thy gate, O Siam,
to offer my verse to the endless glory of India
sheltered in thy home, away from her own
deserted shrine,
To bathe in the living stream that flows in thy
heart,

whose water descends from the snowy height
of a sacred time on which arose, from the deep
of
my country's being, the Sun of Love and
Righteousness
I come from a Land where the Master's words
Lie dumb, in desultory ruins, in the desolate
dust
Where oblivious ages of the pillared stones
The records of a triumphant devotion
I come, a pilgrim, at thy gate O Siam
To offer my verse to the endless glory of India
Sheltered in thy home, away from her own
deserted shrine
To bathe in the living stream that flows through
thy heart"²⁷

(Kusalasaya, Karuna-Ruang Urai, 2001: 42)

Rabindranath Tagore hoped that he would receive support from the King of Siam in establishing a Buddhist Chair at Visva Bharati. "We have different Chairs in our University, but we have no chair of Buddhism, and it is essential that one should be established...I therefore have come to Siam to seek your co-operation and your help in the desire to establish a chair in Buddhism, and also, if possible, to bring a message into a wider perspective."²⁸

U Ottama, a leading figure of the Burmese Independence movement had close associations with India, as mentioned above. "He went to Calcutta with the help of wealthy Shan Woman. He studied three years in Calcutta until he passed tenth-standard examination and he passed the entrance examination to Calcutta University."²⁹ On his return to Burma he learnt the Tripitaka under the guidance of Yesagyo Sayadaw Ganthasara and was ordained as a monk at the age of 20 years with the support of U Tun Aung Kyaw, the representative of Bombay Burma Company. On his second visit to India he studied English, Sanskrit and Nagari at the Hindu College and on the request of Director of Indian Archaeological

Department discussed Buddhist scriptures with him for about one year. U Ottama "later became lecturer of Pali at the Bengal National College in Calcutta. U Ottama was the leader behind the formation of the General Council of the Sangha Sametgyi (GCSS) and he asked the sangha not to keep aside the problems faced by people."³⁰ He supported the Young Men's Buddhist Association in Burma whose motto was Nationalism, Buddhism, National Culture and Education. When Rev: U Ottama returned to Burma, he enthusiastically helped and guided that Association. There was Young Men's Buddhists Association in which a majority of its members was laymen. Thus, the GCSS was the parallel association for the monks. In Burma Buddhist philosophy and teachings such as non-violence were integral ideas in the freedom movement. U Ottama: "When Lord Buddha was alive, man had a predilection for Nirvana. There is nothing left now. The reason why it is so is because the government is English... Pongyis pray for Nirvana but slaves can never obtain it, therefore they must pray for release from slavery in this life."³¹ "U Wisara characterized the British as 'wrong-viewed' (in the Buddhist sense), and encouraged monks and laity to attain 'right view' by meditating jointly to 'eliminate the mental defilements so as to attain nibbana'. The GCSS, of which both monks were lead members, exhorted its members to preach 'The Four Noble Truths of Loki Nibbana' in which the path to freedom from samsara coincided with national Independence."³²

Rabindranath Tagore's trips to Southeast Asia were the crucial driving force in the revival of a glorious Indian past amongst scholars. He visited Bali and Java on the invitation of the Dutch Colonial Society or the Dutch East Indies Art Circles. Tagore's word during his farewell that he was going on a pilgrimage of India beyond its political boundaries to find what could be seen of the remains of the ancient culture,³³ and that "he was looking at India when he was walking down the Borobodur galleries³⁴ echo the intellectual undercurrents in India of finding Indian remains in Southeast Asian countries and similarities between their religion, culture, art and architecture. His visits inspired historians, archaeologists and art historians of the Calcutta based Greater India Society

to study and locate India within the wider Southeast Asian context. “Rabindranath Tagore was invited to be and became the ‘*purodha*’ or spiritual guide of the Society. From 1934 to 1958, the Society published 18 volumes of the *Journal of the Greater India Society*, with a gap in the period 1947 to 1954. The topics in its articles through its two-decade existence cover a wide range—political history, literature, religion and philosophy, sculpture and iconography, architecture, etcetera. Their unifying theme was, of course, the historical connect with India.”³⁵ Kalidas Nag who had travelled with Tagore had laid the foundations of the Greater India Society the main focus of which he outlined in the article *Greater India: A Study in Indian Internationalism*, which was republished in the *Journal of the Greater India Society* in 1926, and primarily dealt with the spread of Indian culture and civilization to Southeast Asia in the ancient times. This Society was vital in “reviving India’s past glory against imperialist propaganda that India had no past of its own except the countless invasions from outside. He wanted India to be acknowledged as a modern nation on a par with countries of East and West.”³⁶ The historian R C Majumdar published *Champa: History and Culture of an Indian Colonial Kingdom in the Far East 2nd-16th Century AD* in 1927 and in 1936 published the first volume of *Suvarnavdipa: Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East*, followed by a second volume. In south India the works of Nilakanta Sastri highlighted the ancient connections of the Cholas with Southeast Asia and the relevance of maritime connections. His works include. *The Pāṇḍyan Kingdom from the Earliest Times to the Sixteenth Century* (Luzac, 1929), *The Cholas* (University of Madras, 1935), *South Indian Influences in the Far East* (Hind Kitabs, 1949) and *South India and South-East Asia: studies in their history and culture*. Geetha Book House (Mysore, 1978) to mention a few. In the field of art history the works of Ananda Coomaraswamy projected a pan Indian view of art. He had made several visits to India and befriended Abinandranath Tagore and along with Sister Nivedita co-authored *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists* which featured the illustrations of Nandlal Bose and Abanindranath Tagore.³⁷ His 1927 publication *Indian and Indonesian Art*, covered

*the art of India, East Asia and Southeast Asia and put forth the view that Indian influences spread in these regions by land as well as sea.*³⁸ These monographs and articles were based on the inscriptional, archaeological and literary evidence available to the scholars in both India and Southeast Asia.

4. Revival of Traditional Dance, Textiles and Handicrafts

“Textiles are an important medium in cultural studies because of their universality and mobility. They circulate within specific cultural milieus and also serve as a vehicle for the transmission of ideas between cultures. Textiles lie at the heart of the exchange mechanisms of many societies. These processes are not only economic: many social, political and spiritual contracts are sealed through the giving and receiving of cloths.”³⁹

Batik textiles are thought to have originated in India, travelled via sea as an important trading commodity to Southeast Asia, and after Rabindranath Tagore’s visit to Indonesia in 1927 the craft was revived in Bengal.

‘Batik is a process wherein dye-resistant wax is utilized to create elaborate patterns and designs. The first step in batik making is to stretch a piece of cotton or silk onto a frame and paint (“*cat*”) or stamp (“*cop*”) a design on the fabric using a mixture of beeswax and resin. Painting designs are done using, a pen-like instrument or *canting* which is used to draw the hot wax onto the fabric. The tip of the *canting* is usually made of copper so that the wax flows smoothly onto the cloth. The dye is painted onto the fabric between the intricate wax pattern. After the dye dries, these first two steps can be repeated to produce multiple layers of design and colour.”⁴⁰

As has been rightly stated by Deboshree Banerjee, “.... a vital aspect to be considered while studying a culture through its textiles are the routes that textiles follow when they are exchanged between cultures.”⁴¹ Here a discussion on the traditional art of Batik shall be taken up to highlight the cultural influences between India and Java that lasted for centuries. The

story of batik encompasses both sides of the Bay of Bengal highlighting a continued cultural tradition and exchange of artistic influences crucial to the long term survival of traditional crafts,

Theories and discussions abound on the origins of batik, its spread to Southeast Asia and comparative analysis of Indian and Indonesian batik. Many scholars believe that the roots of this ancient craft can be traced to Indian textiles, which found their way to Southeast Asia along with textiles such as chintz and Patola,⁴² for instance John Guy is of the opinion that technique of batik and many of its designs in Southeast Asia were inspired by imported Indian textiles.⁴³ According to scholars like Maxwell Indian elements were ‘absorbed, adapted and transformed’ wherein some were ‘replicated’, and others were reinterpreted to form a part of Javanese batik textiles.⁴⁴ Kahlenberg, is of the opinion that while in the first millennium Indian influence spread to Java, the next millennium witnessed the adaptation of the religious aesthetics gradually paving the way for an indigenous and distinct style in the region.⁴⁵ The artisans of Southeast Asia gradually mastered the art of batik and were able to produce textiles with indigenous materials that were less expensive and more affordable as compared to the expensive imported Indian textiles. The import of Indian cloth in Southeast Asia began to decline in the mid seventeenth century and the Javanese not only favoured their own textiles, but exported them from the 1680’s to Borneo, Sumatra and the Straits of Melaka.⁴⁶

Even though batik most likely had its origins in India, it travelled across the seas to Southeast Asia where it was adapted and transformed to suit local needs and continued to be practiced over the centuries. Tagore’s visit to Indonesia completed the circle of story of batik textiles, when he decided to revive the craft at Santiniketan. Tagore had received several pieces of batik fabric as gifts, such as sarong, kemben, selandang, which contained traditional motifs and patterns, and these he hoped would help in re-establishing the native art of batik. According to Ashish Basu, Tagore’s experience during his trip to Java was the source of inspiration behind batik

revival.⁴⁷ The key figures in promoting the revival of batik at Santiniketan were Surendra Kar and Tagore’s daughter-in-law Pratima Tagore.⁴⁸ The study of batik was thus introduced at the Viswa Bharati University in Santiniketan and it became one of the main subjects of the curriculum, and “over the years revolutionized the craft scene in the locality of Santiniketan, giving it a distinct identity of Santiniketan art.”⁴⁹

Tagore’s revival of the batik was part of his ‘constructive swadeshi’ ideals that aimed at revival of rural industries and the collection of folk art to be able to halt their decay. Tagore established the ‘Bichitra’ studio, which was primarily concerned with the revival and promotion of folk arts and crafts. This aim was to be achieved by the use of local and inexpensive material and technique, just as in the case of the Javanese batik which helped it survive as a traditional craft for centuries. In 1922 Tagore’s daughter-in-law introduced batik, lac work and calico printing in ‘Bichitra Studio’ at Santiniketan. It was later shifted to Sriniketan and renamed ‘Silpa Bhavan’ where tanning, wood work, basket weaving and cane work were imparted.⁵⁰ “In 1930 Nandalal Bose established the Karu Sangha, a handicraft co-operative, in Kala Bhawan with an aim to improving the economic life of the artisans.”⁵¹ At the Karu Sangha the artists would live together and devote a certain number of days in a month to commercial orders and commissions. Various artistic creations and handicrafts made by artisans of the Karu Sangha were sold in the stalls of the Satui Poush or village style fairs held at Santiniketan⁵². These fairs served as nodal points for cultural exchange and implementation of Tagore’s ideas of revival of folk traditions through performances of *kathakaras*, *jatakas*, folk songs and dances.

The nationalist movement in Burma was associated with rejection of foreign textiles and promotion of the *longyi* or traditional dress. The Wunthanu movement in Burma, established by U Ottama in 1921, “focused on the government’s economic policies, which undermined local industries and impoverished the Burmese common folk, and advocated the use of local goods and a

boycott of imported products.”⁵³ Wunthanu derives from Pāli and means “supporting [one’s] own race.”⁵⁴ Joining the nationalist movement meant boycotting foreign products in order to strengthen their own economy.⁵⁵ Ikeya says that the Burmese nationalists or *thakins* chose to wear slippers and *longyi* instead of Western dress out of an interest in reviving traditional Burmese culture as an antidote to the negative effects of colonialism.⁵⁶ The Buddhists and women folk in Burma took to wearing home spun and coarse cloth as a symbol of their protest against colonial rule. According to Mendelson, U Ottama, “wrote and spoke about the wanthanu rekhita taya—the points of law to be observed by nationalists—including the wearing of homemade cloth and boycott the tinned and other foreign foods”⁵⁷ U Ottama in his nationalist struggle propagated the boycott of foreign cloth in Burma and promotion of homespun clothing,⁵⁸ and the *pinni*. Burmese cloth in the eyes of the Burmese national student was a symbol for national identity and support to the national economy,⁵⁹ and the Burmese dress was worn by the radical nationalists.⁶⁰ The *pinni-yaw* became one of the most widely known symbols of anti-colonialism in Burma.⁶¹

On his various tours Rabindranath Tagore made it a point to witness the dance forms of the place, and these he would then incorporate within the artistic heritage of Santiniketan. Tagore is credited with reviving Kathakali, Mohiniattam and Kuchipudi, and these had become a part of the syllabus at the Kala Bhavan. What is today popularly known as the Rabindra Nrtya is the net result of Tagore’s experimentation with various classical dance forms that he saw during his travels. These dance forms were eventually made part of the syllabi at Santiniketan and the main protagonists in the revival and continuity of the ‘classical’ dance forms were the girl students and women at Santiniketan.

“The Tagorean dance tradition, reflecting the modernism of Renaissance Bengal, provided the first watershed in modern dance. Tagore’s foremost contribution was to provide the context for the emergence of “respectable” middle class women in the world of performing arts... With his new dancers

Tagore asked for a new rank of educated audience, consisting of both men and women. Indeed, in his day, he served the valuable purpose of making dance accessible to middle class women.”⁶²

The Kandyan dance of Sri Lanka had its origins in the Kandy region of Sri Lanka, and under the Kandyan dynasty underwent transformations, and during the rule of the south Indian dynasty of the Nayyakars the dance moved outside the confines of the royal household. ⁶³ On his visit to Sri Lanka Tagore witnessed a performance of the Kandyan dance on 3rd June 1934, which was later integrated into his dance dramas, as seen in the character of Kotal in dance drama *Shyama*.⁶⁴ The Mayar Khela had elements of Southeast Asian dance forms.⁶⁵ Tagore sent “Santidev Ghose, a music and dance teacher at Visva Bharati, to Java and Bali to study the traditional dance forms and versions of the *srimpi*, *golek*, *legong* and *kebyar* were studied at Santiniketan.”⁶⁶

The dance performances witnessed by him were to influence his dance dramas as well, “The narrative as well as abstract movement components of Balinese dance made a deep impression on Tagore’s mind and would feature in his own dance drama experiments on his return to Santiniketan.”⁶⁷

On 6th November 1919 Rabindranath Tagore visited the Bishnupuriya Manipuri village of Machimpur where he saw *Ghostha Lila* being performed in Manipuri dance style. The dance performance with its subtle movements and variety impressed him so much that he asked Mr. Tanu Singha to look for a Manipuri teacher who was versed with Bengali. This finally resulted in Guru Nileswhar Mukherjee travelling back to Santiniketan with Tagore to become the teacher for the Manipuri Dance department at Santiniketan which was established soon after their arrival.⁶⁸ The influence of Manipuri dance is evident in the compilation of ‘*Chitragada*’ in which Tagore incorporated various elements of Manipuri dance.

Another dance form that caught Tagore’s attention was Kathakali, and in 1931 when he sent Shantidev Ghosh to Kerala to find out the

whereabouts of Kerala Kalamandalam that was just opened and learn the dance form so as to be able to teach it at Santiniketan.⁶⁹ Tagore invited a number of Kathakali dancers to Santiniketan, such as Guru Gopinatha and Ragini Devi (1935), Guru Shankaran Namboodiri, and after Poet Vallathol visited to Santiniketan Rabindranath Tagore asked him to send a Kathakali teacher. In 1937 Shanti Dev's visit to Kalamandalam resulted in the Santiniketan having its first Kathakali teacher as Kelu Nair.⁷⁰ "In 1938 with lot of experimentations, the dance drama Shyama was created in a new style. The dance drama included a number of dance forms such as Manipuri, Kathak, Bharatanatyam, Kathakali and Kandyani dance forms."⁷¹

Tagore's daughter-in-law Pratima Debi was encouraged to learn dance and she went on to produce the first dance drama at Santiniketan, Natir Pujo, in 1926 along with Guru Nabakumar Singh. This drama was staged in 1927 in Jorasanko, in Kolkata, and the characters were played primarily by the young women students at Santiniketan.⁷² She was the driving force behind Tagore's compilation of dance dramas and he composed the Mayar Khela in a new format and she herself transformed poems like Samanya Kshati, Dalia and Kshudita Pashaan for performance purposes. Pratima held dance classes in the ashram to train girls in dance performances.⁷³ In the late 1930's Mrinalani Sarabhai taught Bharatanatyam at Santiniketan, and in 1939 travelled to Bali and Java where she studied srimpi dance at Kridha Beksa Wirama, gave a performance in Yogyakarta and also studied dance at Bali for a short period under I Mario.⁷⁴

Saumyendranath Tagore or Sreemati danced to the recitation of Rabindranath's poems- Juhlan and Shishu Tirtha in her own unique dance forms which were influenced by Manipuri, Kathakali and Hungarian, and Hainamati danced with a recitation of Dushamay from Kalpana.⁷⁵ Tagore on his trip to Saurashtra and Gujarat saw some women dancing with cymbals in their hands. A family from the same village was invited to Santiniketan to teach dance and music to the girls.⁷⁶

"As Santiniketan expanded to include women as students and village welfare as objectives, curriculum innovations were required. These often took place through extra-curricular activities such as the 1910 drama Lakshmi puja, which was staged and performed by female students. Tagore brought in dance teacher from Banaras to train the girls and when they left, he personally taught them."⁷⁷ "Tagore took it as a challenge to introduce dance into his dramatic compositions, train women students to participate in them and travel all over India and abroad with them".⁷⁸

5. Role of Women: Rani of Jhansi Regiment

On 9 July 1943, Bose asked both men and women to join as volunteers and stressed the need for women to equally share the burden of the freedom struggle. The women responded by joining the struggle and the creation of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment.⁷⁹ "Rather than drawing on India's rich collective (sub-) conscious with several goddesses known for their use of violence, Bose opted for a real woman of flesh and blood as his role model."⁸⁰ With the arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose the structure of the INA changed, as he invoked the revolutionary spirit and the will to fight amongst women by providing them an equal footing in the rejuvenated Azad Hind Fauj. The Rani Lakshmi Bai Regiment was formed under the guidance and leadership of Dr Lakshmi Swaminathan, who was secretary of the Women's section of the Indian Independence League in Singapore. Her duties entailed touring various parts of Burma, Malaya and Thailand to open more centres, collect funds and provide amenities to soldiers.

Lakshmi Swaminathan as Minister in Charge of Women's Organisation of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind (Free India) convinced twenty young women to join her and on 12 July 1943 and her efforts in recruiting, which included home visits, led to the creation of 1500 strong women regiment from Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Ipoh. The regiment consisted of women from diverse religious, educational and economic

backgrounds. In Ipoh, she was invited by two Christian Indian girls, Ponnammah (b. 1925) and Rasammah Navarednam (b. 1927) to convince their mother to allow them to join the regiment.⁸¹

A women's camp was started on 23 October 1943, in Singapore which was followed by many more in Malaya and Burma. Besides being trained in nursing, social service and general welfare work, Subhas put them on an equal footing as far as military training was concerned. They were trained in various aspects of military exercises such as weapon training, tactics, map reading and general subjects. They were trained to use rifles, bayonets, sub-machine guns, machine guns, revolvers, grenades, swords and daggers. They wore the soldiers' uniforms and had to observe strict military discipline. They were taken out on route marches and had to cover between six and forty miles at times.⁸²

Women joined the INA for various reasons- Lakshmi Nair's father had just died, there was no money for food in the home of her stepmother and her father had hated the English. Rani Muniammah's father lost his job in the rubber estates in Malaya and so she joined the regiment in order to survive. The inspiration for the fifteen-year-old, Rasammah Navarednam was banned book, *Jallianwala Bagh—The Amritsar Massacre* which described the killing of innocent Indians. Janaki Bai, a Rajput, grew up on a large coconut estate in Malaya, where her father, El Fateh Singh, a Rajput, worked as assistant manager and when a young man from the Indian Independence League in Selangor came looking for volunteers to join the Ranis, she and a Christian girl signed to join the army.⁸³ Manavati Arya of Burma, who even prior to the arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose, had shown interest in the freedom movement by working as a civilian with the Indian Independence League.⁸⁴ She sold all her jewellery for the struggle and joined the INA,⁸⁵ where she held the post Lieutenant Captain. "She worked out a detailed proposal for the increased participation of women in the freedom struggle which impressed Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose so much that he appointed her Secretary-In-Charge of Women and Children in the provisional government of the Azad Hind."⁸⁶

Saraswathi Rajamani belonged to a family that owned gold and tungsten mines in Rangoon. She as a teenager emptied all her jewellery in the INA donations box and when Bose came to return her jewellery to her father, she did not allow him to take it back. It was then that Netaji told Rajamani he needed something even more valuable than jewels. "If I really wanted freedom, he told me, I would have to spill my blood," recounted Rajamani, "I stepped forward without batting an eyelid. There and then, I joined the Azad Hind Fauj."⁸⁷

In Malaya was Janaky Devar was responsible for the uneducated women recruited from the rubber plantations. She first heard Bose at the Selangor Club maidan in Kuala Lumpur and was so overwhelmed that she took off her jewellery to demonstrate her support for the Indian National Army. Her desire to join Netaji's armed force was met with resistance by her family members, yet she did not succumb and finally managed to join the Rani of Jhansi Regiment and eventually became second in command. A list of women who joined the cause for freedom under Bose included, Chinnammal, Subaranjitham, Rukmani, Vellayammal alias Malai Ammal of Vyasarpady, Radhambal of Red Hills, Pattammal of Rayapuram and Jeyalakshmi Ammal of Korukkupet from Madras were sepoy in Regimental No.8240 of Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Thanapackiam from Thanjavur District, was served in Indian National Army as a Nursing sepoy in Rani of Jhansi Regiment with Regiment No. 84370, Lakshmi Devi Lieutenant in Rani of Jhansi Regiment, Meenakshi served as a sepoy in fifth Guerilla Regiment. The prominent women sepoy in the Ramanathapuram District were Chinnammal and Kamakshi Ammal who served in Indian National Army as a Chairman for the women section, Indian Independence League Hanthawaddy East, Burma and Indian Independence League. Others include Mangammal, Vijayam, Maragatham, Muthammal, Dhanuskodi Ammal, Kalimuthammal Nagammal, Puranam, Muthulakshmi Ammal.⁸⁸

"The regiment was trained as vakayda soldiers. Each chose her line of work according to her aptitude, her preference- if she liked nursing, she'd take that up. Some chose to be part of the military

police. Others were soldiers doing administrative work. There were three lady doctors in the Jhansi Regiment - Dr Narula, Dr Gyan Kaur - who became Gyan Puri later - and Dr Lakshmi herself.”⁸⁹As Rasammah expressed it, “They became soldiers for India’s freedom and their own liberty.”

6. National Identity

“Of the nearly 30 million people who left the Indian shores between 1840 and 1940, all but two million of them travelled back and forth between eastern India and just three destinations- Ceylon, Burma and Malaya.”⁹⁰ In Burmese nationalist leader Ba Maw’s opinion Subhas Chandra Bose, “personified the spirit of long and passionate Indian revolution and the wider Asian revolution that could change the face of Asia.”⁹¹

A brief account of the history of the Indian National Army (INA) reveals the changes it underwent under the able leadership of Bose which led to a feeling of unity and brotherhood amongst the vast number of Indians residing in Southeast Asia. During the war Japan had occupied Malaya and many Indians were taken prisoners of war. These were recruited by Captain Mohan Singh,⁹² Pritam Singh and Fujihara to form the first Indian National Army. An estimated 40,000 Indians⁹³ were placed under the charge of Captain Mohan Singh. Thus the first phase of INA constituted primarily of Indian prisoners of war, and members of the Indian Independence League set up under Rash Behari Bose. Mohan Singh had expressed that it was Subhas Chandra Bose who should be the right leader of the INA. After the arrest of Captain Mohan Singh the responsibility of the INA fell on the shoulders of Rash Behari Bose. In the Bangkok Conference of June 1942⁹⁴ the Imperial Government of Japan was asked to bring Subhas Chandra Bose to Southeast Asia. Bose thus travelled from Germany to Tokyo aboard a Japan submarine. He arrived in Singapore along with Rash Behari Bose, on 2 July with an aim to reorganise and lead the IIL and INA and was given a prodigious welcome by the Indians. On 8 July 1943 he took formal charge of the INA and renamed it as the Azad Hind Fauj.⁹⁵

Bose believed in ‘total mobilization’ and envisaged the INA as constituting not only Indian soldiers but civilians as well. His movement stressed on ideals of equality and unity among his followers who belonged to different castes, religions and regions of India. “The psyche of labouring Indians as well as those in the British army regiments and those in white collar colonial occupations and traders was altered so that they too felt that they could bring down a mighty empire and be free.”⁹⁶

The civilians in the new INA were mostly Tamilians from Madras. The famines in the Madras Presidency had forced numerous Hindus, Muslims into labour migration and some of them were recruited by Kannagi in Melaka.⁹⁷ There were an estimated 21,000 Indian employed in the plantations of Sumatra. “The INA included a significant number of Tamil plantation workers in Malaya, instilling in them an unprecedented level of political mobilization and commitment...Tamil plantation workers who joined or supported the INA during the war felt a sense of citizenship for perhaps the first time, as citizens of the Provincial Government of Free India: Subhas Chandra Bose’s government in exile.”⁹⁸ As shown by Rajesh Rai - Nearly 30,000 Indians died while building and maintaining the Thailand-Burma “Death” Railway, 78,000 civilians from Malaya and Singapore were deployed on the rail project.⁹⁹ Other Indian communities comprised former Hindu and Muslim sepoys from Bengal and Sikhs.

Bose’s army was based on egalitarian principles and the higher ranks were open to all irrespective of gender, religion, region, caste or economic background. Bose also asked the trustees of the Chettiar temple of Singapore to contribute towards the INA.¹⁰⁰ They agreed on the condition that he would visit the temple, provided that his officers accompany him to the temple¹⁰¹ and are allowed to enter the temple premises irrespective of their caste or religion. The temple authorities agreed, and Bose entered the temple with Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and Christian officers who were treated with respect, applied tilak by the temple priest and also given Prasad. This act of Subhas Chandra Bose clearly

brought the unity of Indians living on foreign soil for a common cause.

Those who could not physically be a part of the INA in the fight for freedom contributed in monetary terms by donating all their material possessions. These donations made by innumerable Indians across Southeast Asia were essential to the survival of the INA as it funded the food, uniforms and weaponry and other activities of the army. “While voluntary donations were often generous, Bose never hesitated to persuade, cajole or even threaten Indians for a greater flow of capital for the cause. Much of the fund raising was undertaken at public meetings, where Bose’s oratory would often inspire all those present to contribute in whatever way possible for an Azad Hindustan.”

Habib belonged to Dhoraji in Saurashtra, migrated to Rangoon and became a rich businessman. On 9th July 1944 he handed over all his cash, jewellery and landed estate estimated to be worth one crore and three lakhs for the cause of freedom to the INA.¹⁰² Subhas Chandra Bose granted him the title of *Sevak e Hind*.¹⁰³ The other person to have received this title was Srimati Betai who also gave up all her worldly material possessions to Bose.¹⁰⁴ On 29th January on Bose’s 48th Birthday celebration, Netaji was weighed in gold and a total of 2 crores and 80 Kgs of gold was collected.¹⁰⁵ In all his charismatic personality and fiery speeches, he encouraged Indians in Burma and Malaya to donate all their wealth, which amounted to an estimated 5 crores from Malaya and another 5 crores from Burma.

“The war years also brought about a sense of Indian identity which was lacking before the declaration of the IIL and INA. Indians in both organisations were involved for a single purpose-liberating India... This sense of unity of purpose cut across linguistic, regional, caste and religious divides amongst Indians”.¹⁰⁶

This feeling of unity had spread across the Bay of Bengal and its repercussions were felt by the British Empire on the Indian soil. The Red Fort trials, which began on 5 November 1945, were the

inspiration behind mutiny on board the HMIS Talwar by Balai Chand Dutt who had served in the RIN for 5 years and resented the discrimination and racism faced by Indians. The psychological impact of the INA trials triggered military mutinies across Indian shores in February 1946. On February 17 when the naval ratings demanded better and decent food, the British sneered at them and on the following day on February 18, “1500 ratings walked out of the mess hall in protest”.¹⁰⁷ The next day 60 RIN harboured at Bombay, 11 shore establishments and the barracks “pulled down the Union Jack and hoisted flags of the Congress, Muslim League and the Communist Party.”¹⁰⁸ By the morning of 20th February the strike had spread to other ports across India- Calcutta, Karachi, Madras, Vizag and Cochin. “In all, around eighty ships, four flotillas, twenty shore establishments and more than 20,000 ratings joined the mutiny.”¹⁰⁹ Thus within a span of merely 48 hours the British had lost its control over the navy. The striking naval rankings were also supported by about 1000 RAF Indian men, the Gurkhas, who refused to open fire on Indian soldiers, and the Signals Training Centre at Jabalpur who mutinied as well. Even though the British authorities were able to put down the mutiny, yet this mutiny made the British realise that they could no longer blindly trust the loyalty of Indian soldiers employed in the British armed forces, which was the mainstay of colonial rule in India. Justice P.B. Chakravarty of Calcutta High Court disclosed that when Lord Attlee had visited the Governor’s Palace in Calcutta, Chakrabarty had a discussion with him regarding the factors that led the British to leave India. Amongst the various reasons given by Attlee, “the erosion of loyalty of the Indian army towards the British crown and the navy personnel due to the military activities of Netaji was the principal cause for the departure of the British from Indian soil.”¹¹⁰ Thus, it is evident that travels by Indian leaders in Southeast Asia not only contributed to the demise of colonial rule in India, but also helped forge strong ties between several Southeast Asia and Indian leaders. An appreciation of this phase of India and Southeast Asia relations needs to be researched further.

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