

# Dr. Susmit Kumar (PhD)



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## Hitler, NOT Gandhi, Should Be Given Credit for the Independence of India in 1947

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*Dr. Susmit Kumar, Ph.D.*

(Source: "*Modernization of Islam and the Creation of a Multipolar World Order*," Susmit Kumar, Booksurge, USA, pp 17-21, 2008)

World War II had a profound effect on the colonial powers because it completely destroyed their economies. Although Hitler committed crimes against humanity, I give him credit—and not Gandhi—for India's independence immediately after World War II. Hitler destroyed the economies of Britain and France to such an extent that they were no longer able to financially maintain their military forces, and were hence incapable of containing the burgeoning freedom movements in their colonies. It is worth noting that Britain was in such bad shape that it received about one-fourth of the total aid given under the Marshall Plan. Regardless of Gandhi or any other charismatic leader, Britain would have left India in 1947 purely for financial reasons, due to its wholly collapsed economy. After WWII, Britain left not only India but nearly all its other holdings, including Jordan in 1946, Palestine in 1947, Sri Lanka in 1948, Myanmar in 1948, Egypt in 1952 and Malaysia in 1957. For the same reason, France also had to grant independence to Laos in 1949 and Cambodia in 1953, and had to leave Vietnam in 1954; Netherlands also left most of its colonies called Dutch East Indies, mainly Indonesia in 1949. Had there been no Hitler and no World War II, it most probably would have taken another 30 or more years for India and some of the other colonies to achieve independence.

Another major consequence of World War II was that it greatly hastened Indian political independence. The highly publicized Cripps Mission that took place in India in 1942 was essentially a political ploy approved by Churchill to buy time for Britain and to try to assuage anti-colonialist feelings in the U.S.[1]

British historians P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins described the hopeless situation of the British in India as follows:

By the end of war, there was a loss of purpose at the very center of the imperial system. The gentlemanly administrators who managed the Raj no longer had the heart to devise new moves against increasing odds, not least because after 1939 the majority of the Indian Civil Service were themselves Indian. In 1945 the new Viceroy, Wavell, commented on the "weakness and weariness of the importance of the instrument still our disposal in the shape of the British element in the Indian Civil Service. The town had been lost to opponents of the Raj; the countryside had slipped beyond control. Widespread discontent in the army was followed in 1946 by a mutiny in the navy. It was then Wavell, the unfortunate messenger, reported to London that India had become ungovernable [which finally led to the independence of India].[2]

There is a saying that history is written by the victors of war. One of the greatest myths, first propagated by the Indian Congress Party in 1947 upon receiving the transfer of power from the British, and then by court historians, is that India received its independence as a result of Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence movement. This is one of the supreme inaccuracies of Indian history because had there been no Hitler and no World War II, Gandhi's movement would have slowly fizzled out because gaining full independence would have taken several more decades. By that time, Gandhi would have long been dead, and he would have gone down in history as simply one of several great Indian freedom fighters of the times, such as Bal Gangadhar

Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Motilal Nehru, Dada Bhai Naoroji, and C.R. Das. He would never have received the vast publicity that he did for his nonviolence movement. Political independence for India was achieved not by Mahatma Gandhi, but rather by Hitler rendering the British Empire a bankrupt entity.

In fact, Gandhi's popularity among the masses had decreased substantially already in the 1930s, perhaps partially because in reality Gandhi had no idea of how to bring about India's independence. At the Madras Congress session in 1927, when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, two other freedom movement leaders, succeeded in having a resolution passed declaring India's complete independence, Gandhi was annoyed, and hence—only to cater to Gandhi—the Madras resolution was modified to request dominion status under the British the following year at the Calcutta Congress Session in 1928.

Subhas Chandra Bose was a genius with a superlative academic record. After only six months of preparation, he stood fourth in the prestigious Indian Civil Services (ICS) examination, which in those days was held at regular intervals in Britain. In his book *The Indian Struggle*, Bose described his first meeting with Gandhi in 1921:

I began to heap question upon question...The reply to the first question satisfied me...His reply to the second question was disappointing and his reply to the third question was no better...My reason told me clearly...that there was a deplorable lack of clarity in the plan which the Mahatma had formulated and that he himself had no clear idea of the successive stages of the campaign which would bring India to her cherished goal of freedom.[3]

Bose was unanimously elected Congress Party president in 1938. The following year, he decided that the party should launch a nationwide civil disobedience movement, giving the British six months' notice. With this goal in mind, he decided to run for re-election as party president. This was completely within precedent; just before his term, Nehru had also been Congress Party president for two terms. Gandhi, however, was not pleased. He threw his entire support behind Sitaramayya, another senior Congress leader. Despite this, Bose defeated him. Gandhi said publicly that the defeat of Sitaramayya was his own defeat. He then manipulated his followers in ensuing executive committee meetings in such a way that he forced Bose to resign from the party. Commenting on this, Aurobindo Ghosh, the nationally famous freedom fighter turned renunciate, stated:

The Congress at the present stage—what is it but a Fascist organization? Gandhi is the dictator like Stalin, I won't say like Hitler: what Gandhi says they accept and even the Working Committee follows him; then it goes to the All-India Congress Committee which adopts it, and then the Congress. There is no opportunity for any difference of opinion, except for Socialists who are allowed to differ provided they don't seriously differ. Whatever resolutions they pass are obligatory on all the provinces whether the resolutions suit the provinces or not. There is no room for any other independent opinion. Everything is fixed up before and the people are only allowed to talk over it—like Stalin's Parliament.

Ultimately, however, Gandhi and the Congress Party opted for a "Quit India Movement" against the British in 1942 and he spread the slogan "Do or Die," which in fact Subhas had proposed in 1938. The British government arrested all the top Congress Party leaders and thus killed the Quit India Movement before it had a chance to gather steam. It fizzled out entirely within a matter of months. During 1974-75 the Total Revolution Movement, also called JP Movement, led by the veteran Gandhian socialist Jai Prakash Narayan (also called JP), against Indira Gandhi's mis-rule and corruption, was a mass movement. Tens of millions took part in this movement all over north India. But once Indira Gandhi imposed the Emergency Rule in June 1975 and arrested the top leaders of this movement, there was no JP movement anywhere. The 1942 Quit India Movement had the same fate once the British government arrested all the top Congress Party leaders.

Although Bose's Indian National Army (INA), which drew its cadre from Indian POW's in Japanese camps and fought along with Japanese forces on India's eastern front towards the end of the war, failed in its ultimate mission, indirectly it succeeded in causing the British to leave India early. When Japan surrendered, the British charged 20,000 INA men with treason. They decided to hold the trial in public at the Red Fort in Delhi. The first three of Bose's officers to be tried were a Hindu, a Muslim, and a Sikh. This immediately united Indians of all three religions against the British. While the Muslim League was at that time fighting with the Congress Party and demanding a separate state for Muslims, on this issue it joined Congress in the now-national movement against the INA officers' trial. Most of Bose's army cadres were Muslims.

On November 21 and 23, 1945, a mass demonstration took place in Kolkata (Calcutta). Participants included members of the Congress Party, the Communist Party, and Muslim League. The police shot more than 200 people, of whom 33 died. Then the British decided to put on trial only those INA men who were charged with committing murder or brutality against other POW's. However, Kolkata simply exploded when, in February 1946, an Abdul Rashid Khan (a Muslim) of the INA was given seven years' rigorous imprisonment for murder. The protest began peacefully by students of the Muslim League, but later students of the Congress and Communist parties joined them in solidarity. Both the police and the army were called to put down what came to be known as "the almost revolution." This time nearly 400 people were shot down, and nearly 100 killed. Since racial discrimination was rampant in the Royal Indian Navy, Khan's trial gave thousands of Indians the excuse to mutiny. From the initial flashpoint in Bombay, the revolt spread and found support throughout British India, from Karachi to Calcutta and ultimately came to involve 78 ships, 20 shore establishments and 20,000 sailors. Due to the Naval Mutiny, Britain decided to leave India in a hurry because they were afraid that if the mutiny spread to the army and police,

there would be large scale killing of Britishers all over India. Hence Britain decided to transfer power at the earliest.

The reasons behind Indian independence are nicely summarized by the esteemed Indian historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar:

There is, however, no basis for the claim that the Civil Disobedience Movement directly led to independence. The campaigns of Gandhi ... came to an ignoble end about fourteen years before India achieved independence ... During the First World War the Indian revolutionaries sought to take advantage of German help in the shape of war materials to free the country by armed revolt. But the attempt did not succeed. During the Second World War Subhas Bose followed the same method and created the INA. In spite of brilliant planning and initial success, the violent campaigns of Subhas Bose failed ... The Battles for India's freedom were also being fought against Britain, though indirectly, by Hitler in Europe and Japan in Asia. None of these scored direct success, but few would deny that it was the cumulative effect of all the three that brought freedom to India. In particular, the revelations made by the INA trial, and the reaction it produced in India, made it quite plain to the British, already exhausted by the war, that they could no longer depend upon the loyalty of the sepoy [low-ranking Indian soldiers under British command] for maintaining their authority in India. This had probably the greatest influence upon their final decision to quit India.”[4]

Without loyal sepoy [low-ranking Indian soldiers], it was quite impossible for British to rule in India because it could not have brought enough English men to India to quell any nationalist movement. It is worth noting that Britain was able to suppress the Indian Rebellion of 1857, also called India's First War of Independence, mainly because of the support of the Sikhs and Pathans. Also the large princely states of Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, and Kashmir, as well as the smaller ones of Rajputana, did not join the rebellion. The Sikh princes backed the British by providing soldiers and support. In 1857, the British Bengal Army had 86,000 men, of which 12,000 were European and 16,000 Sikhs. The Sikhs and Pathans of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province helped the British in the recapture of Delhi. Had they not supported the British at that time, Britain would have had to leave India in 1857.

It was British prime minister Clement Atlee who, when granting independence to India, said that Gandhi's non-violence movement had next to zero effect on the British. In corroboration, Chief Justice P.B. Chakrabarty of the Kolkata High Court, who had earlier served as acting governor of West Bengal, disclosed the following in a letter addressed to the publisher of Ramesh Chandra Majumdar's book *A History of Bengal*:

You have fulfilled a noble task by persuading Dr. Majumdar to write this history of Bengal and publishing it ... In the preface of the book Dr. Majumdar has written that he could not accept the thesis that Indian independence was brought about solely, or predominantly by the non-violent civil disobedience movement of Gandhi. When I was the acting Governor, Lord Atlee, who had given us independence by withdrawing the British rule from India, spent two days in the Governor's palace at Calcutta during his tour of India. At that time I had a prolonged discussion with him regarding the real factors that had led the British to quit India. My direct question to him was that since Gandhi's "Quit India" movement had tapered off quite some time ago and in 1947 no such new compelling situation had arisen that would necessitate a hasty British departure, why did they have to leave? In his reply Atlee cited several reasons, the principal among them being the erosion of loyalty to the British Crown among the Indian army and navy personnel as a result of the military activities of Netaji [Subhash Chandra Bose]. Toward the end of our discussion I asked Atlee what was the extent of Gandhi's influence upon the British decision to quit India. Hearing this question, Atlee's lips became twisted in a sarcastic smile as he slowly chewed out the word, "m-i-n-i-m-a-l!" [5]

1 Cain, P.J. and Hopkins, A.G., *British Imperialism 1688-2000*, 2nd Ed., Pearson Education, Harlow, U.K., 2002, p. 560.

2 Ibid., pp. 560-1.

3 "Netaji and Gandhi, 2 Titans of the Independence Struggle", *India Abroad* (India), January 24, 1997.

4 Majumdar, Ramesh Chandra, *Three Phases of India's Struggle for Freedom*, Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, India, 1967, pp. 58-59.

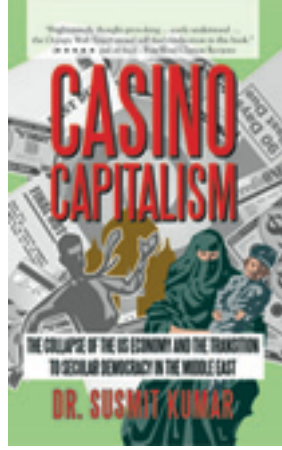
5 Ranjan Borra, "Subhas Chandra Bose, The Indian National Army, and The War of India's Liberation," *Journal of Historical Review*, Vol. 20 (2001), No. 1, reference 46.

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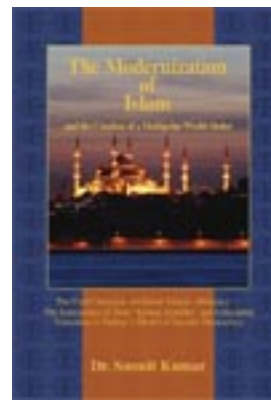


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