



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Torn between the nation and the world: D. F. Karaka and Indian journalism in the Second World War

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Abstract

Focusing on wartime journalism and nonfiction, this article analyses how nationalist Indians made sense of the war's political and moral causes and goals, and how such understandings shaped the war's longer historical resonance in India. The article centres on the wartime publications of the writer and journalist Dosabhai Framji Karaka, juxtaposing them with those of his colleagues in the nationalist newspaper, the *Bombay Chronicle*. Tracing the unfolding of the war through Karaka's eyes, the article delineates the acute dilemma that the Second World War posed for nationalist Indians, between the struggle for liberation from colonial rule and the global struggle against fascism. It suggests that contemporaries perceived this dilemma as a choice between nationalism and internationalism. The war dealt a severe blow to the more fluid and capacious political imagination of interwar leftist internationalism, espoused by Jawaharlal Nehru and his followers. While substantial scholarly attention has been paid to the interwar period, this article puts a spotlight on the war, especially the pivotal year of 1942, as a distinct period that should be understood on its own historical terms—terms specific to war, with the urgency that arose from horrendous violence, unpredictable outcomes of battles on multiple fronts, and existential threats to nations and the global order. Such unprecedented pressures and constraints bifurcated the range of possibilities and forced historical actors to make difficult choices. The article shows how, during 1942, Karaka's position parted ways with that of his peers, who more steadfastly represented the Congress stance.

Keywords: Second World War; *Bombay Chronicle*; Dosabhai Framji Karaka; internationalism; Jawaharlal Nehru

Introduction

Men don't often cry, not men like me. But that night in my room in a New York hotel I stood by the window and shed my tears ... The crowds in the streets below were Americans celebrating victory and the end of another war.

My thoughts were far from the Manhattan scene. I was only conscious of one fact: I was born an Indian. India was the country of my people.¹

This is how Dosabhai Framji Karaka (or D. F. Karaka, 1911–1974) opens *I've Shed My Tears: A Candid View of Resurgent India* (1947). A Bombay-based journalist, nonfiction writer, and editor, Karaka documented India's transition from the late colonial period to the first decades after independence in nonfiction works and numerous articles and columns he wrote for Indian English-language newspapers and magazines. Focusing on Karaka's wartime publications, this article addresses 'the question of what people during the war thought the war was about'²—how nationalist Indians made sense of the war, of its political and moral causes and goals, and how such understandings shaped the longer historical resonance of the war.

My analysis foregrounds India's strange relationship to, and later amnesia of, the war. The war, as historian Yasmin Khan notes, has remained on the margins of Indian historiography and of public memory more generally. Such neglect may seem curious, given India's crucial role in this global total war, both as a strategic pivot and as a major provider of labour, money, manufactured goods, and more than two million soldiers. While there has been plenty of historiography on the 1940s, the war itself has served not as an organizing theme but rather as background for the twin events of independence and partition.³ When the war is mentioned, the discussion is centred on Quit India and the Bengal Famine, thereby placing it within a narrative of colonial oppression and anticolonial struggle, rather than a world war. Analysing wartime publications, this article explores how these emphases and omissions evolved over the course of the war.

Tracing the unfolding of the war through Karaka's eyes, the following analysis delineates the acute dilemma that the Second World War posed for Indian nationalists, between the struggle for liberation from colonial rule and the global struggle against fascism. As Khan points out, the war forced leaders and intellectuals to take sides, to clarify their positions and interests.⁴ Building on her argument, I suggest that 1942 in particular proved to be a moment of decision. A critical year in the history of the war, 1942 had an urgency that rendered the contradiction between Britain's liberal and imperial values most conspicuous, as Britain was desperate to enlist Indian leaders'

¹D. F. Karaka, *I've Shed My Tears: A Candid View of Resurgent India* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1947), p. 1.

²Mark Mazower, 'The End of Eurocentrism', *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 4 (2014), p. 301.

³Yasmin Khan, 'Remembering and Forgetting: South Asia and the Second World War', in *The Heritage of War*, (eds) Martin Genger and Bart Ziino (New York: Routledge, 2012). Indivar Kamtekar, 'The Fables of Nationalism', *India International Centre Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (1999). Srinath Raghavan, *India's War: The Making of Modern South Asia 1939–1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), pp. 2–3. For an evocative nonfiction work addressing amnesia of the war, see: Raghunath Karnad, *Farthest Field: An Indian Story of the Second World War* (London: William Collins, 2015). For many years the only monograph on the history of war in South Asia was: Johannes H. Voigt, *India in the Second World War* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1987). The pioneering studies by Kamtekar were followed by two recent monographs. See: Indivar Kamtekar, 'The Shiver of 1942', *Studies in History* 18, no. 1 (2002). Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War* (London: Bodley Head, 2015). Raghavan, *India's War*.

⁴Khan, *The Raj at War*, pp. 10–11, 90–92.

support for the war without giving up control over India. It thus forced Indian nationalists to decide between the struggle against empire and the war on fascism.⁵ I also show that contemporaries perceived this dilemma as a choice between nationalism and internationalism.

A word of caution is necessary. This article does not aspire to encapsulate 'India's' stance on the war, as the war was experienced differently by people of different classes, castes, regions, and ideological convictions. The analysis is confined to the elite circles close to the Congress—a milieu that cannot encompass the array of Indian perceptions, but nevertheless one that was significant in circumscribing the historical memory of the war after India's independence.⁶ Specifically, the article explores the role of wartime journalism and popular nonfiction in circulating and reflecting on the Congress's views, and in shaping national discussions about the war and its moral ramifications.

To further outline the thrust of the argument, let us return to Karaka's quote above. The scene is New York, August 1945, at the end of the war against Japan, but the writer is preoccupied with India's liberation, invoking the uneasy proximity of the war's end to the onset of decolonization. The scene is imbued with alienation—Americans take to the streets to celebrate victory, but the writer is drawn inward. He cannot relate to the celebrations outside. 'I was only conscious of one fact: I was born an Indian.'

But then, in a surprising move, his thoughts take us far from India, to the heart of wartime Europe:

I thought then of two men I had met in this war. One was an Englishman, Field Marshal Sir Harold Alexander. The other was a Jew I met at Belsen the day after its liberation. Both men had known moments of defeat.

Alexander was the British general at Dunkirk. He was the last man to leave the shores of France when the Nazi hordes hurled themselves against the coast. When I met him at Caserta, he was in a very different position. I asked him, 'What were your thoughts that day at Dunkirk, sir?'

'Things looked pretty bad at the time,' he replied. 'I didn't know how we would ever win this war. But I had a faith that we as a people would not be conquered.'

The Jew at Belsen ... was nothing more than a skin-covered skeleton, wearing the dirty and tattered striped suit of the concentration camp. The stench of Belsen was strong on him. I was a war correspondent. He came to speak to me. With

⁵For the tensions between empire and liberalism in Britain, see: Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁶One cannot conflate the experiences of Bengali farmers during the famine with those of businessmen who profited from the war, nor with those of Punjabi families whose sons served in the army. Moreover, there were some political parties and actors who supported the war effort, such as the Punjabi Union Party, princely state rulers, the Dalit leader Bhimrao Ambedkar, the Communist Party of India after Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, and former communist M. N. Roy and his Radical Democratic Party. The Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha lent limited support as well. The Congress leadership itself held a spectrum of opinions. For a succinct presentation of this spectrum of opinions, see: Raghavan, *India's War*, pp. 54–59.

effort I stood my ground, for he was like a scarecrow come to life, a frightening sight. 'Excuse me, sir,' he said. 'Have you a newspaper?' He wanted tidings of the world ...

These were the men I thought of that night, two men whose faith in their people did not waver in the hour of their defeat. My case could bear little comparison to that of the Field Marshal or the Jew. It would be melodramatic if I pretended it did. But for me the sensitiveness of my race was inborn. I felt my hurt deeply. It involved something more than myself. It affected my country and my people. ...⁷

Here, Karaka draws unexpected connections between India's struggle against colonial subjugation and two defining events in the European theatre of the Second World War—the withdrawal of Allied troops from Dunkirk in 1940, when Hitler's blitzkrieg seemed invincible, and the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp of Bergen Belsen at the end of the war in 1945, which brought into sharp relief the horrors of Nazism. Together, the two events convey the magnitude of this war for the survival of humanity. Karaka invokes the notion of human and national resilience, tying it back to India's struggle as he concludes: 'We are once again self-sufficient people. We are a people with self-respect. We are straining to resemble our ancestors who helped to found what is called civilization today. These were my thoughts that lonely night as in my little world I tasted defeat.'⁸

My analysis of Karaka puts forward several claims. First, his wartime writings express an ambivalent coexistence of inward and outward orientations—nationalist and internationalist—that was at the core of the Indian nationalist, specifically Nehruvian, predicament vis-à-vis the war. Anticolonialism and anti-fascism sat together quite comfortably in the internationalist leftist imagination that Jawaharlal Nehru inhabited during the interwar period, along with other leaders, activists, and journalists like Karaka, who echoed his ideas. But the Second World War brought about both a dramatic realignment of global forces and a new kind of military urgency that compelled Nehru and other nationalist Indians to make a painful choice between the nationalist anticolonial struggle and the anti-fascist war.

Second, while substantial scholarly attention has been paid recently to the First World War and the interwar period,⁹ this article spotlights the Second World War, especially the pivotal year of 1942. It suggests that although the war emerged from

⁷Karaka, *I've Shed My Tears*, pp. 1–2.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 3–4. Later in the book, Karaka reveals that the grounds for his humiliation was racial prejudice. A white American woman had broken his heart when she ended their relationship, succumbing to pressure from her parents, who objected to her association with a 'coloured' man.

⁹For works that focus on Indian actors, see: Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). Ali Raza, Franziska Roy and Benjamin Zachariah (eds), *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views 1917–39* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2015). Michele Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Ali Raza, *Revolutionary Past: Communist Internationalism in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). For broad discussions and definitions of different types of interwar internationalism, see: Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,

the rise of fascism and accompanying crises of the 1930s, and was often understood by contemporaries through this lens, historians should not conflate it with the preceding decade. Rather, it was a distinct period that should be understood on its own historical terms—terms specific to war, with the unique urgency emerging from horrendous violence, unpredictable outcomes of battles on multiple fronts, and existential threats to nations and the global order. Thus, the war dealt a severe blow to the more fluid and capacious political imagination of interwar leftist internationalism, bifurcating the range of possibilities and forcing historical actors to make difficult choices.

Karaka ultimately took a universalist view of the war, seeing it as a global struggle for the future of humanity, a struggle that inevitably encapsulated and hence took precedence over the immediate struggle for India's liberation. But this was the exception among intellectuals and journalists aligned with the Congress, as we will see when comparing his voice with those of contemporary journalists, specifically Khwaja Ahmad Abbas (1914–1987) and Narayan Gopal Jog (1905–1987), two eminent writers and journalists who, alongside Karaka, were later described as 'the three angry young men of the *Bombay Chronicle* ... whose pens were sharper and mightier than swords'.¹⁰ As the exception, Karaka reveals that a universalizing reading of the war is fundamentally limited in the context of the colony.¹¹ In exploring and comparing their publications, the article makes a third argument—that wartime journalism and popular nonfiction literature are a significant yet neglected arena that deserves scholarly attention for revealing how the war was experienced, judged, and remembered.¹²

Karaka, Abbas, and Jog wrote for the renowned English-language nationalist newspaper *Bombay Chronicle*, an influential daily catering to the English-educated elite that was closely associated with the nationalist movement and the Congress. While the readership of the English press was not large, it included opinion- and decision-makers in both the nationalist movement and the government, and thus it enabled leaders to reach beyond their regional constituency to an all-India public sphere and to connect regional concerns with national themes. Its contents often found their way to the vernacular press. Furthermore, it connected the Indian press to the world outside and served as a crucial medium, after the First World War, for communicating Mahatma Gandhi's messages and appeal abroad, thereby gathering a sympathetic international audience in Europe and the United States.¹³ The *Bombay Chronicle* was part of this

2013). Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (eds), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁰D. D. Pinglay, 'N. C. Jog, an Unconscious Genius', in *N. C. Jog Commemoration Volume: Crusaders of the Fourth Estate in India*, (ed.) R. Srinivasan (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1989), p. xxvii.

¹¹An important exception among Indian leaders and intellectuals was M. N. Roy. Both Roy and the Indian communists' more zigzagging approach to the war will be addressed below. Another exception is the Hindi writer S. H. Vatsyayan, 'Agyeya': see Gregory Goulding's article in this special issue.

¹²For the challenges of British war propaganda and censorship in wartime India, see: Sanjoy Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939–45: A Necessary Weapon of War* (New York: Routledge, 2009). Devika Sethi, *Wars over Words: Censorship in India, 1930–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 125–172.

¹³Milton Israel, *Communications and Power: Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle, 1920–1947* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For an insider's look at the history of the Indian English-language press in the twentieth century, see: J. N. Sahn, *Truth About the Indian Press* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1974). Gandhi himself established newspapers and magazines—in English and

small and prestigious group of papers, whose opinions carried weight in national and international debates about British rule in India.¹⁴

The article demonstrates that, during the war, Karaka and his peers served as mediators between the all-India Congress leaders, the educated Indian public, and the international community. The *Bombay Chronicle* was closely aligned with the Congress leaders, especially Nehru, who was deeply involved in interwar internationalism and was responsible for the Congress's foreign policy before and after independence. His influence grew during the war, when Gandhi identified him as his preferred heir.¹⁵ The *Bombay Chronicle* writers disseminated, echoed, and negotiated the Congress and Nehru's views on the war in the public sphere. At the same time, these writers were inspired by and responded to works by internationally known writers such as the Chinese Lin Yutang and the Americans Edgar Snow, John Gunther, and Pearl Buck—who, for their part, contributed introductions to their books.¹⁶ Thus, they were firmly situated within a larger field of news articles, editorials, and best-selling travel books that circulated in the Allied world, contributing to an international conversation and debate about the war and its meaning and ramifications.

The next section will go back to the interwar period, demonstrating how the political and ideological convictions of the *Bombay Chronicle*'s writers followed Nehru's blending of nationalism and internationalism. Subsequent sections will trace the unfolding of the war, and how it challenged interwar internationalism, through Karaka's eyes, as he moved from place to place in his capacity as a war correspondent. Riveted to the war and constantly searching for opportunities to get out of India and see it first-hand, Karaka was rare in witnessing the different theatres of this world war. His visit to Chongqing (April–May 1942) was followed by assignments in Burma (March–April 1944) and in the Middle East and Europe during the last months of the war.¹⁷ We shall see how, during the pivotal year of 1942, Karaka's position parted ways with those of Abbas and Jog. If the latter, who more steadfastly represented the

Gujarati—as central vehicles for communicating his messages: S. N. Bhattacharyya, 'Mahatma Gandhi: The Journalist', *Indian Literature* 9, no. 2 (1966). Nehru's opinions gained wide publicity through his newspaper the *National Herald*: Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 94.

¹⁴The *Bombay Chronicle* was founded by the prominent lawyer and Congressman, the Parsi Sir Pherozezshah Mehta, and first appeared in 1913. For the *Chronicle*'s history during the interwar period and its intimate connection with the history of the Congress, including its vicissitudes and internal conflicts, see: Israel, *Communications and Power*, pp. 216–245.

¹⁵See: Gandhi's speech at the AICC conference in Wardha, 15 January 1942, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 81, pp. 432–433. Gandhi's letter to B. C. Roy, 12 October, 1939, *ibid.*, Vol. 76, p. 403.

¹⁶The British writer Ethel Mannin wrote a preface to K. A. Abbas, *Outside India: The Adventures of a Roving Reporter* (Delhi: Hali Publishing House, 1938). Lin Yutang wrote a foreword to Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, *Did Not Come Back! The Story of the Congress Medical Mission to India* (Bombay: Sound Magazine, 1944). Edgar Snow wrote a foreword to D. F. Karaka, *Chungking Diary* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1942). For Gunther's influence on Abbas, see: Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, *I Am Not an Island: An Experiment in Autobiography* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1977), p. 134.

¹⁷Karaka's wartime travel diaries, published in the *Bombay Chronicle*, were also integrated into the books: D. F. Karaka, *Chungking Diary. With the 14th Army* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1944). D. F. Karaka, *I've Shed My Tears. No Peace at All* (Bombay: Kutub, 1948). Karaka was not the only Indian reporter in Burma. D. R. Mankekar reported for Reuters, and his stay in Burma in 1944 overlapped with and outlasted Karaka's. For Mankekar's reminiscences of this assignment, including anecdotes about his time with Karaka, see: D. R. Mankekar, *Leaves from a War Reporter's Diary* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1977). There were also P. R. S. Mani and T. G. Narayanan, who covered the war in Burma and later events in Malaya and Indonesia

Congress stance, leant to the nationalist (anticolonial) side, Karaka leant towards the internationalist (anti-fascist) one.

Interwar internationalism

Karaka, Abbas, and Jog came from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Born in 1911 to an upper-class Parsi family, the son of an imperial customs official, Karaka grew up in a spacious bungalow in the elite neighbourhood of Malabar Hill in Bombay. His family exemplified the Parsi elite's loyalty to the British, and his childhood was filled with moments such as reciting 'Rule, Britannia!' and excitement at the 1921 visit to India of Edward, Prince of Wales.¹⁸ At the same time, discussions of Gandhian *satyagraha* gradually came to dominate conversations in newspapers and living rooms. Karaka first heard the name Gandhi as a child witnessing a procession of Bombay millworkers. While recollecting the event, he was honest enough to write that hearing the slogan 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai' (Long live Mahatma Gandhi) gave him 'the same feeling of exhilaration as when I had sung "Rule Britannia!"'.¹⁹ This awkward juxtaposition appears to indicate a deep-seated, embodied experience of duality that shaped his ideological and emotional makeup and, eventually, his attitude to the Second World War.

Karaka spent the formative years of his twenties at the University of Oxford, where he was the first Indian to be elected president of the Oxford Union. When he returned to India in 1938 at the age of 27, he decided, to his father's great disappointment, to become a journalist. He joined the *Bombay Chronicle*, a nationalist newspaper, whose editor, Syed Abdulla Brelvi, was a member of the Bombay Congress Committee, had socialist leanings, and was deeply non-communal, striving for Hindu-Muslim unity.²⁰ The *Chronicle's* staff in those days was filled with enthusiastic young men who took to journalism as part of their nationalist calling and 'crusade against imperialism'.²¹ Karaka's first assignments focused on Congress activities, resulting in a feature column about his tours to different towns in India and in an adulatory, nationalist biography of Gandhi.²²

Nevertheless, Karaka's coverage of his travels across India was not devoid of ambivalence. The 1939 Congress session in Tripuri, which he covered, was attended by a crowd of 200,000 people, and the breeze that wafted among them brought with it 'the smell of India also: coconut oil, spinach and stale sweat. All this became nauseating at times.'²³

during 1944–1946: Heather Goodall and Mark Ravinder Frost, 'The Transnational Mission of an Indian War Correspondent: P. R. S. Mani in Southeast Asia, 1944–1946', *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 6 (2017). Subin Paul and David Dowling, 'Gandhi's Newspaperman: T. G. Narayanan and the Quest for an Independent India, 1938–1946', *Modern Asian Studies* 54, no. 2 (2020). The article juxtaposes their writings with Karaka's.

¹⁸Karaka's great-grandfather, Dosabhai Framji (1829–1902), held top positions in Bombay's administration and wrote an authoritative history of the Parsis, entitled *The Parsis: Their History, Manners, Customs, and Religion* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1858).

¹⁹Karaka, *I've Shed My Tears*, p. 15.

²⁰On Brelvi, see: Israel, *Communications and Power*, passim. Abbas, *I Am Not an Island*, passim.

²¹Interview with K. A. Abbas, No. 123, Oral History Collection, Centre of South Asia Studies Archive, University of Cambridge (henceforth CSAS), p. 9.

²²D. F. Karaka, *Out of Dust: He Made us into Men* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1940).

²³Karaka, *I've Shed My Tears*, p. 84.

This response reveals a self that was nationalist yet highly elitist and Anglicized, a combination that may have influenced his support of the British war effort later on.

Abbas and Jog came from humbler, middle-class backgrounds in provincial towns. Among the three, Abbas is the most celebrated figure, prominent in the Progressive Writers Movement, in the Indian People's Theatre Association, and in the Bollywood film industry. Born in the town of Panipat, not far from Delhi, Abbas joined the Gandhian movement at an early age. As a child, he was mesmerized by Gandhi, who visited his town and gave a speech in the courtyard of one of Abbas's relatives. As a teenager, Abbas took part in a large Congress procession in Delhi, was caught by the police, driven several miles out of the city, and left on the jungle outskirts in the harsh winter. This experience, he later claimed, left a mark, and he resolved never to join government service. Abbas pursued his studies at Aligarh Muslim University, the intellectual hub of modern Muslims, modelled after Oxbridge. There he delved into nationalist newspapers and revolutionary literature, and was shaken by news of the execution of the revolutionary Bhagat Singh in 1931. He also made his first forays into journalism and, to the frustration of his father who looked down upon this profession, just as Karaka's father did, he decided to move to Bombay and pursue this underpaid and insecure calling.²⁴

Less is known about Jog, a Maharashtrian Brahman, who was born in the princely state of Ichalkaranji. He was educated at Satara High School, studied for a BA and MA in history at Willington College (Sangli) and Bombay University, and had a keen interest in the Maratha past. He took part in the Maharashtrian Sangamner forest *satyagraha*, as part of Gandhi's famous Salt *Satyagraha*.²⁵ He joined the *Bombay Chronicle* in 1935, shortly after Abbas, and the two became close friends, co-editing the paper's Sunday edition. Apparently, there was no close relationship between them and Karaka. Decades later, Abbas referred to Karaka only once in his autobiography, quite derisively, as 'the Oxford educated elitist'.²⁶ Such mockery may have been determined by post-independence rivalries, as Abbas and Karaka represented two opposing views on the Cold War: while Abbas joined the weekly *Blitz*, which unequivocally supported Nehru's nonalignment, anti-imperialism, and socialism, Karaka, who had become bitterly disillusioned with Nehru, set up his own tabloid, *The Current*, which was pro-American and became *Blitz*'s competitor and ideological arch-rival.²⁷

Their differences and divergent paths notwithstanding, during the 1930s the *Bombay Chronicle* writers shared an enthusiasm for Nehru, echoing the blend of nationalist and internationalist commitments that he represented, embedded as he was in the circles of interwar leftist activism. As it is precisely this interwar internationalism that would be challenged by the Second World War, an explanation of what it entailed is in order.

²⁴Interview with K. A. Abbas, No. 123, Oral History Collection, CSAS. Abbas, *I Am Not an Island*, p. 8.

²⁵Srinivasan (ed.), *N.C. Jog Commemoration Volume*, p. xliii.

²⁶Abbas, *I Am Not an Island*, p. 227.

²⁷Gyan Prakash, *Mumbai Fables* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), pp. 158–171, passim. D. F. Karaka, *Betrayal in India* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1950). D. F. Karaka, *Nehru: The Lotus Eater from Kashmir* (London: D. Verschoyle, 1953).

The future architect of independent India's foreign policy, Nehru was recognized as the Congress's main authority on world affairs and formulated its foreign policy, starting in the late 1920s. His extensive travels, his connections with communists, socialists, pacifists, and anti-imperialists from around the world, and his insatiable reading of world history and politics, gave him a rare ability to view India's situation within the broader international context. This expertise dovetailed with an internationalist orientation, an aspiration to connect India's anticolonial movement to larger networks of socialist and anticolonial struggles in other parts of the world.²⁸

As Michele Louro elaborates, Nehru took a leading role in the League Against Imperialism from 1927 to 1930, imbibing an acute sense of the interconnectedness of the world—both of capitalist and imperialist structures of oppression, and of the struggles against them. He thus expressed an aversion to narrow-minded nationalism, insisting that India's struggle for independence was intimately connected to, and called for solidarity with, colonized people and oppressed groups around the world.²⁹ The living spirit behind the inauguration of the League Against Imperialism were the communists German Willi Münzenberg and Indian exile Virendranath Chattopadhyaya. The movement was intimately connected with the Comintern (Communist International, also known as the Third International, 1919–1943), which coordinated the activities of communist parties around the world.

The dynamic connection that developed between anticolonial activists and communism was grounded in the discourse about the right of peoples to self-determination, which became dominant in the wake of the First World War. Whereas Woodrow Wilson confined the concept to Europe, shattering the hopes of anticolonial movements, Vladimir Lenin applied it to the colonial world and expressed support for national liberation struggles around the globe.³⁰ After the First World War, networks of overseas anti-imperialist activists and revolutionaries, such as the Indian Ghadarites, gravitated towards the Communist International, embracing the Leninist analysis that imperialism and capitalism were inextricably linked, and therefore socialist revolution in Europe was bound up with the overthrow of imperialism and the liberation of Europe's colonies.³¹

Nehru became part of these overlapping and crisscrossing networks of interwar leftist internationalists, which were connected, to varying degrees, to the project of

²⁸Judith M. Brown, 'Jawaharlal Nehru and the British Empire: The Making of an "Outsider" in Indian Politics', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 29, no. 1 (2006), p. 73. A. P. Rana, 'The Intellectual Dimensions of India's Nonalignment', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 28, no. 2 (1969). For Nehru's predominant role in shaping the Congress's foreign relations policy, see: Bimla Prasad, *The Origins of Indian Foreign Policy: The Indian National Congress and World Affairs, 1885–1947* (Calcutta: Bookland Private Limited, 1960). Zachariah, *Nehru*.

²⁹Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*. For the League Against Imperialism, see also: Michele Louro et al. (eds), *The League against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020).

³⁰Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Arno J. Mayer, *Wilson Vs. Lenin: Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917–1918* (New York: Meridian Books, 1964). For a succinct discussion of the connection between the Comintern and activists from the colonial world, including its limitations and the frictions it entailed, see: Sabine Dullin and Brigitte Studer, 'Communism + Transnational: The Rediscovered Equation of Internationalism in the Comintern Years', *Twentieth Century Communism* no. 14 (2018).

³¹Raza, *Revolutionary Pasts*, Chapter 2. For the Ghadar movement, see: Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*.

international communism. Other notable Indian figures whose paths crossed with Nehru's were Comintern members M. N. Roy and Chattopadhyaya.³² As recent studies emphasize, the interwar years were marked by great fervour and urgency. Inspired by the 1917 revolution, leftist internationalism had distinctly utopian qualities, envisioning liberation struggles as parts of a global revolutionary upheaval that would emancipate humanity. Nationalism, in other words, was bound up with internationalism. Activists' political imagination therefore did not succumb to rigid dichotomies and ideological boundaries; rather, it was flexible, amalgamating different political projects. Thus, the League Against Imperialism facilitated the collaboration of communists, socialists, anticolonial nationalists, Pan-Africanists, and pacifists from across the world. Furthermore, international activists constantly moved around the world, traversing state boundaries.³³

Against the background of the rise of Hitler, Italy's invasion of Abyssinia (1935), the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937), and, finally, the Munich Agreement, which forced Czechoslovakia to surrender the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany in 1938, Nehru became a harsh critic of fascism and of Britain and France's appeasement policy. He spoke passionately in support of Abyssinia, Republican Spain, China, and Czechoslovakia.³⁴

Nehru accepted the communist analysis that imperialism and fascism were interconnected outcomes of Western capitalism, and that anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, and socialist projects were thus intertwined as well.³⁵ True, the inclusionary spirit and cross-party cooperation of the League Against Imperialism came under attack during the Comintern's 'Third Period' of rigid sectarianism, and Nehru ended his formal association with the organization in 1930.³⁶ This falling-out notwithstanding, Nehru continued to pin his hopes on the Soviet Union as the harbinger of a new world order.³⁷ When, in 1935, Stalin and the Comintern adopted a policy of broad and inclusive collaboration against fascism, supporting the Republicans at a time when Britain and France maintained neutrality vis-à-vis the Spanish Civil War, Russia was seen as a pillar against fascism.³⁸

³²Kris Manjapra, *M. N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010).

³³Raza, Roy and Zachariah, *The Internationalist Moment*. Raza, *Revolutionary Past*. Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*. Manjapra, *M. N. Roy*.

³⁴For Nehru's articles on these issues, his tour in Europe during the Czechoslovakian crisis, and his visits to Spain and China in 1939, see: Jawaharlal Nehru, *China, Spain and the War: Essays and Writings* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1940). Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*, Chapter 6. For an analysis of Congress's statement on Abyssinia, see: Maria Framke, 'International Events, National Policy: The 1930s in India as a Formative Period for Non-Alignment', in *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi—Bandung—Belgrade*, (eds) Nataša Mišković, Harald Fischer-Tiné and Nada Boškovička (New York: Routledge, 2014).

³⁵Allahabad, 17 October 1940. Published as Nehru's epilogue to the American edition of his autobiography, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (hereafter SWJN), Vol. 11, p. 166. The association of fascism with imperialism also guided the Communist Party of India's (CPI) interpretation of the Comintern's 1935 'Popular Front' policy, which called for collaboration with democratic forces against fascism. In India, the united front was against imperialism. Zachariah, *Nehru*, p. 79. Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020 [1959]), pp. 155–170.

³⁶Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*, Chapter 4.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 187.

³⁸It is noteworthy, albeit beyond the scope of this article, that the Popular Front approach, and Stalin's foreign policy in general, was and continues to be the subject of controversy. For a critical analysis that

Simultaneously, with the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Nehru's notions of Pan-Asian solidarity became grounded more firmly in identifying with China against Japanese aggression, and solidarity with China became a central pillar of his vision.³⁹ The Congress sent an Indian medical mission to China in 1938 and Nehru visited China in 1939, establishing a special rapport with Chiang Kai-shek. In Chongqing, China's temporary wartime capital, he experienced five air raids and marvelled at the determination and composure of the Chinese, who resiliently resumed normalcy as soon as a raid was over. The Chinese, he found, combined the imprint of an ancient and proud civilization with energy and adaptability to the modern world.⁴⁰ 'I was no judge of the military position, but I could not imagine that a people with this vitality and determination, and the strength of ages behind them, could ever be crushed.'⁴¹ For Nehru, sending medical supplies and food to China (as well as Spain) had internationalist ramifications; they 'helped to raise our own national struggle to a higher level, and to lessen somewhat the narrowness which is always a feature of nationalism'.⁴²

Nehru's ideas reverberated in the public sphere, significantly in two books published in 1938—Abbas's *Outside India* and Karaka's *I Go West*. Both books belong to the genre of travel writing, gesturing towards the American journalist and writer John Gunther's *Inside* series. Abbas was teasingly called 'the most consistent of all Nehruites—including Nehru!'.⁴³ As an adolescent, he was electrified by Nehru, who represented a young, dynamic leadership with radical views about complete independence and socialism. Abbas became a regular staff member of the *Bombay Chronicle* on the day Italy invaded Abyssinia and thereafter, he claimed, fascism 'haunted' him.⁴⁴ He took pride in Nehru's refusal to meet Mussolini in 1936 on his way back from Europe,

emphasizes the Sovietization of Stalin's foreign policy and its betrayal of anti-imperialism and anti-fascism, see: Bernhard H. Bayerlein, 'Addis Ababa, Rio De Janeiro and Moscow 1935: The Double Failure of Comintern Anti-Fascism and Anti-Colonialism', in *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities, and Radical Internationalism*, (eds) Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copley and David J. Featherstone (New York: Routledge, 2021).

³⁹Nehru's stance on China was grounded in Pan-Asian ideas circulating in the Indian public sphere from the nineteenth century onwards. For the attraction of Indian intellectuals to Japan following the Japanese-Russian War of 1905, and the partial reorientation towards China in response to Japan's aggressive foreign policy, see: Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer-Tiné, 'Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and Internationalism (ca. 1905–1940)', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 1 (2012). For Japan's Pan-Asian diplomacy and its fruition during the wartime occupation of Southeast Asia, see: Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire and the War with Japan* (London: Penguin, 2004).

⁴⁰For the medical mission the Congress sent to China, Nehru's visit in 1939, and his relationship with Chiang Kai-shek, see: Nehru, *China, Spain and the War*, pp. 11–53. Maria Framke, "'We Must Send a Gift Worthy of India and the Congress!'" War and Political Humanitarianism in Late Colonial South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 6 (2017). Yang Tianshi, 'Chiang Kai-Shek and Jawaharlal Nehru', in *Negotiating China's Destiny in World War II*, (eds) Hans Van de Ven, Diana Lary and Stephen Robert MacKinnon (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). Avinash Mohan Saklani, 'Nehru, Chiang Kai-Shek, and the Second World War', in *India and China in the Colonial World*, (ed.) Madhavi Thampi (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁴¹Nehru, *China, Spain and the War*, p. 24.

⁴²Allahabad, 17 October 1940. Published as Nehru's epilogue to the American edition of his autobiography, *SWJN*, Vol. 11, p. 166.

⁴³Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, *I Write as I Feel* (Bombay: Hind Kitab, 1948), p. vi.

⁴⁴Abbas, *I Am Not an Island*, pp. 124–125.

participated in Nehru's Abyssinia Day, and was excited at the 1936 Congress resolution stating solidarity with Spain's Republicans. An invitation from Congress socialist leader Yusuf Meherally to join an anti-fascist youth rally in New York was an opportunity to see the world outside India for the first time. Thus, in 1938, Abbas toured East Asia at war and Europe on the brink of it. He visited Colombo, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Japan, then spent a week in Hollywood and another in New York, concluding with a tour of Europe in the midst of the Czechoslovakian crisis. He published his impressions as articles in various Indian newspapers and collected them soon after his return in *Outside India*, which was marked by two sentiments—anti-fascism and anti-imperialism.

On an Italian steamer heading to East Asia, Abbas met destitute Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria and bemoaned the implications of the racial madness unloosed in Europe. In Hong Kong he met Chinese refugees from nearby Canton and heard their tales of the destruction wrought by constant Japanese air raids. He was astonished, he wrote—echoing Nehru and using a familiar trope in international discourse—by the remarkable endurance and discipline of the Chinese, their unbreakable morale. In Kobe, he found the Indian students to be excessively impressed with everything Japanese, and was alarmed that many of them unashamedly supported Japan's aggression in China. Abbas cautioned that Indian patriots were seduced too easily by the military paraphernalia of uniforms, parades, and flags, warning that 'we [should] guard against our national movement degenerating into Fascism'.⁴⁵

In Geneva, Abbas described his disgust at witnessing sessions of a League of Nations that seemed lethargic, apathetic, and totally incapable of dealing with the crisis. His criticism was undoubtedly influenced by Nehru, whom he met in Geneva, and who 'refused to attend any meeting of this sham "League of Nations"'.⁴⁶ Abbas reported on unemployment and aggressive jingoism in Italy, and on groups of uniformed Brown Shirts in Munich, where huge swastikas hung everywhere. He recorded his doubt that the pro-Nazi Indian students he met knew what Hitler had written in *Mein Kampf* about "'inferior races" like ours'.⁴⁷ In Vienna after the Anschluss, he was alarmed to see anti-Jewish literature in every bookstall, and huge posters above Jewish stores calling on customers to boycott them.

Karaka's *I Go West*, a bestseller portraying his years at Oxford, was published the same year. Like his subsequent writings, the book centres on Karaka himself, and it reveals the writer's extremely privileged background, preoccupied as it is with his personal revolt against Parsi high society ideas of respectability. Yet it bears striking similarities to Abbas's *Outside India*, with plenty of adulatory comments on Nehru as the embodiment of India's future: 'To-day as we look beyond the horizon another figure stalks across the grey skies. Sleek. Smart. Manly. Upright of carriage he walks on the troubled waters, without fear, without compassion, without apology. His name is Jawaharlal Nehru.'⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Abbas, *Outside India*, p. 66.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 172. For a survey of the historiography of the weaknesses besetting the League of Nations and its inability to handle the interwar crises, see: Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007).

⁴⁷ Abbas, *Outside India*, p. 215.

⁴⁸ D. F. Karaka, *I Go West* (London: Michael Joseph, 1938), p. 143.

Both books are anti-fascist and anti-imperialist, echoing Nehru and representing the *Bombay Chronicle* policy of the late 1930s.⁴⁹ Yet a close reading reveals that, compared with their ideologically driven, somewhat rational and distanced condemnation of fascism, Abbas and Karaka's critique of British imperialism took a much more personal, emotional form. Far from an abstraction, the problem of empire was the problem of foreign rule in their home; it was, first and foremost, a national issue. While Abbas's account of East Asia and Europe is that of a distant, if dismayed observer, his reportage on London and the racial bar he encountered there is personal and emotionally involved. Similarly, Karaka's portrayal of his years at Oxford moves between excitement over exposure to intellectual and radical circles and resentment at his first-hand encounters with British racism.⁵⁰

The two young writers were also enraged by American literary and cinematic representations of India, which they deemed imperialist, distorted, and degrading—from Katherine Mayo's best-seller *Mother India* (1927) to the Kipling-based Hollywood production of *Gunga Din* (1939).⁵¹ Karaka often mentions such degrading representations of India alongside humiliating personal encounters with racial arrogance, thus connecting personal with collective dishonour.⁵² In the late 1930s such an intimate critique of colonialism sat comfortably with the internationalist, anti-fascist facets of our Nehruvian writers' mental landscape. But these two facets would come to clash during the war.⁵³

⁴⁹For a discussion of the *Bombay Chronicle*'s and *Bombay Sentinel*'s anti-Nazi and anti-fascist policy, and Abbas's emphatic articles in the paper exposing fascist and Nazi influence in India, see: Benjamin Zachariah, 'Nazi-Hunting and Intelligence Gathering in India on the Eve of the Second World War', in *An Imperial World at War: Aspects of the British Empire's War Experience, 1939-45*, (eds) Ashley Jackson, Khan Yasmin and Gajendra Singh (New York: Routledge, 2017). Karaka's anti-fascist and anti-Nazi articles include: 'Prepare, My Son, For War', *Bombay Chronicle*, May 1938, reproduced in D. F. Karaka, *All My Yesterdays* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1944), pp. 55–60. See also: Karaka's open letter to Dr Hjalmar Schacht, 13 April 1939, reproduced in D. F. Karaka, *This India* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1945), pp. 138–141. 'An Eventful Year', *Bombay Chronicle*, 30 December 1939.

⁵⁰Karaka's book became popular in India and in 1943, British officers expressed concern over its potentially subversive political influence on Indian military officers: F. 37/11/43-Pol(I), Home Department Political Section, National Archives of India (henceforth NAI). Copies of the book were removed from bookshops: F. 37/14/43-Pol(I), Home Department Political Section, NAI.

⁵¹K. A. Abbas, "'Gunga Din': Another Scandalously Anti-Indian Picture!", *FilmIndia* 1939. Available at [https://memsaabstory.com/2010/01/31/the-gunga-din-tamasha/Outside India](https://memsaabstory.com/2010/01/31/the-gunga-din-tamasha/Outside%20India), 109–16, [accessed 17 March 2023]. Atul Bhardwaj, 'Gunga Dins of World War I: Victors or Victims?', *Economic and Political Weekly* 51, no. 4 (2016). Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, *Let India Fight for Freedom* (Bombay: Sound Magazine, 1943), pp. 46–47.

⁵²Karaka, *I've Shed My Tears*, pp. 2–3. Published in 1927, Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* depicts India as a land of poverty and squalor, disease and ignorance, stirring strong reactions from Indian nationalists, notably Gandhi. For the controversy surrounding Mayo's writings, see: Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Sethi, *Wars over Words*, pp. 63–75.

⁵³Indeed, Nehru and Krishna Menon, who were part of the International Peace Campaign in the late 1930s, encountered some resistance from within the institution to their anti-imperialist message, but the tension was not as blatant, and Nehru could still wish it away. See: Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*, pp. 227–235. It did not come to the surface in the larger arena of nonfiction publications, where Nehru's ideas reverberated.

Will war come to India? 1939–1942

Indian nationalists' response to the onset of the Second World War was shaped by their memories of the First World War and its immediate aftermath in India. The First World War created high expectations among the Congress leaders, who unequivocally supported the war effort. Encouraged by the Wilsonian rhetoric of a right to self-determination, they expected significant progress on the path to self-rule. But the war was followed by the Rowlatt Act, which allowed for incarceration without trial even in peacetime, and by the massacre of unarmed demonstrators in Amritsar, which became a metonym for colonial oppression and catalysed the first Gandhian mass movement.⁵⁴

Germany's invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 signalled the ultimate failure of the appeasement policy of the 1930s, and Britain and France finally declared war on Germany. When Viceroy Linlithgow simultaneously declared India's entry into the war without consulting Indian leaders, the Congress demanded immediate independence. The rejection of their demand led to the resignation of the Congress provincial governments, and to tortuous negotiations between the Congress and the British government about India's contribution to the war effort. Above these negotiations hovered the threat of a mass Gandhian civil disobedience campaign in the middle of a war.⁵⁵

The Congress and associated parties were not unified in their position. At one end of the spectrum was Subhas Chandra Bose, the Bengali leader and former Congress president, who had drifted away from Gandhi and the Congress leadership, and established his own Forward Bloc party, yet possessed great influence. Pursuing a long-standing strategy of Indian revolutionaries from the First World War, Bose was convinced that the outbreak of the European war was India's opportunity to overthrow Britain, that independence could be achieved only through armed struggle, and that India should pragmatically align with its enemy's enemy. Bose's Pan-Asianism centred on Japan, which had gained Indians' admiration following Japan's modernization and astounding victory over Russia in 1905. Bose would escape from India in January 1941, stay in Berlin under Nazi patronage for nearly two years, and eventually move to East Asia to take command of the Indian National Army (INA) from 1943 to 1945 with Japanese support.⁵⁶

⁵⁴For a study that places the rise of the Gandhian nationalist movement in the global context of the First World War and the disillusionment in its aftermath, see: Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

⁵⁵It should be noted, though beyond the scope of this article, that the negotiations between the British government and the Congress were complicated by a third player—the Muslim League, whose demand for Pakistan, articulated in March 1940, served the British argument that the Congress and its political demands were not representative of India as a whole. Thus, the negotiations and politics surrounding the war became interlocked with the politics that would eventually lead to partition and the establishment of Pakistan in 1947. For detailed studies of wartime negotiations, see: R. J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994 [1985]). Raghavan, *India's War*.

⁵⁶Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj: A Biography of Indian Nationalists Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2012 [1990]). Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011). For studies that focus on Bose's wartime stay in Germany, see: Milan Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan, and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981). Jan Kuhlmann, *Netaji in Europe*, (trans.) Christel Das (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2012). Romain Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany: Politics, Intelligence and*

In the war's early stages, between the signing of the German-Soviet nonaggression pact in August 1939 and the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Communist Party of India (CPI) fiercely condemned the war as an imperialist war and, like Bose, saw it as a revolutionary moment to be utilized, calling for an armed insurrection against the British and fomenting massive labour strikes.⁵⁷ At the other end of the spectrum was M. N. Roy, a Marxist thinker who played a key role in the networks of interwar communist internationalism. Roy became ostracized in the political world of wartime India for his unequivocal support of the British war effort. He insisted that solidarity with the global struggle against fascism took precedence over, and preconditioned, India's struggle. The war was nothing short of a 'struggle for the future of the civilised humanity against the greatest menace of our time'.⁵⁸

The Congress leadership had a wide spectrum of opinions, and its official reaction was more equivocal and hesitant. Gandhi, though conciliatory at first, would soon reject any cooperation with the British war effort on grounds of nonviolence. Nehru was ambivalent. The Soviet-German nonaggression pact, he admitted, was a shock, as was the subsequent Soviet march into Poland and Finland. Both shook the image of the Soviet Union as a pillar against fascism and imperialism. Yet initially, the Congress, like the CPI, claimed that Britain and France were fighting an imperialist war with a rival imperialist power while cynically speaking the language of democracy and freedom. Further, Nehru expressed support of the Soviet Union in the event of a Soviet-British conflict, which seemed probable at this stage.⁵⁹

The Congress stance, however, was challenged by developments in the European war. Between April and June 1940, Hitler's army launched an astonishing blitzkrieg in north and west Europe, sweeping through Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg, and France. The French Army collapsed, the Allied soldiers had to evacuate Dunkirk in northern France, and the British Isles were under threat of invasion. In May 1940, Chamberlain's cabinet was replaced by a new war cabinet, headed by Winston Churchill. Against the backdrop of the unfolding crisis and Britain's grave plight, the Congress leadership emphasized it would not take advantage of its rival in its difficult hour and would abstain, for the time being, from launching the *satyagraha* encapsulated in its previous Ramgarh resolution.⁶⁰ In contravention of Gandhi's insistence on nonviolence, the Congress compromised on its initial demand for total independence; instead it agreed to support Britain's war effort in exchange for the establishment of a national government during the war and a promise of independence

Propaganda, 1941-1943 (London: Hurst and Co., 2011). For the INA: Peter Ward Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995). Joyce, C Lebra, *Jungle Alliance: Japan and the Indian National Army* (Singapore: Asia Pacific Press, 1971). For Nehru's and Bose's opposing views on the war: Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Nehru and Bose: Parallel Lives* (Gurgaon, India: Viking Penguin, 2014).

⁵⁷Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, pp. 177-183.

⁵⁸M. N. Roy, *India and War* (Lucknow: Radical Democratic Party, 1942), p. 182. After being expelled from the Comintern in 1928, he joined the Congress in 1936, but was soon marginalized and broke with it formally in August 1940. See: Manjappa, M. N. Roy, Chapter 5.

⁵⁹See Nehru's articles from late September 1939 to mid-January 1940 in Nehru, *China, Spain and the War*, pp. 162-168, 242-257. See also: Allahabad, 17 October 1940. Published as Nehru's epilogue to the American edition of his autobiography, SWJN, Vol. 11, p. 176.

⁶⁰Nehru's interview to the press, 24 May 1940, cited in the *Hindustan Times*, SWJN, Vol. 11, pp. 46-48.

afterwards. Britain's response, in the form of the August Offer (1940), fell far short of this lesser demand and unified the Congress leadership behind Gandhi, who launched a limited campaign of individual civil disobedience in October 1940. Individual members courted arrest by declaring that India would not participate in the war effort, and Nehru, along with over 7,000 Congress members, was imprisoned. Yet it is noteworthy that such individual civil disobedience was intentionally limited in scope, intended to be symbolic rather than to compromise the war effort.⁶¹

On 22 June 1941, while the Congress leadership was still in prison, Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, invading the Soviet Union and opening up the Eastern Front of the war. This brought about another dramatic realignment, as the Soviet Union created an alliance with capitalist and imperialist Britain against the fascist powers, dealing a blow to the convictions of interwar leftist internationalism. That the fate of the Soviet Union was now at stake also brought the war and its dire possibilities much closer to the hearts of Indian leftists, first and foremost the CPI.

'Rarely had the international and domestic environments so plainly pulled the CPI in opposite directions as in the months after June 1941.'⁶² Soviet and British communists now stated that the defence of the Soviet Union took precedence over all other struggles in the colonial world, for its defeat would mean the defeat of the world's proletariat—and of humanity at large. Indian communists were expected to support the British government as long as it was a Soviet ally, fully and unconditionally, with or without independence. But 'Indian nationalism demanded freedom, war or no war; any political party in India that urged temporary surrender in the anti-imperialist struggle would risk ostracism or worse.'⁶³ This was an acutely felt dilemma that produced months of debates and a chasm within the party. Whereas the imprisoned leadership accepted the overriding importance of the Soviet Union's survival—and hence of collaboration with Britain—it took the underground party outside prison almost six months to recategorize the war from an Imperialist War to a People's War.⁶⁴ Eventually, the CPI took the momentous decision to prioritize the fight against fascism over the fight against British imperialism, internationalism over nationalism.⁶⁵

What made this decision so torturous were controversial events such as the Atlantic Charter. On 14 August 1941 American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced the Atlantic Charter—a shared statement of the war's aims, which promised to restore sovereignty and self-government to those who had been forcibly deprived of them. Echoing the anticipation and disappointment surrounding the Wilsonian moment of the First World War, the charter aroused hopes in the colonial world that were brutally crushed when Churchill clarified, three weeks later, that this promise was confined to European countries under Nazi occupation and did not apply to India or other parts of the empire. The charter

⁶¹For the negotiations leading to the August offer and individual satyagraha, see: Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India*, pp. 18–44.

⁶²Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, p. 194. On pp. 191–22 they analyse the communist stance on the war after the invasion of the Soviet Union. See also: Raza, *Revolutionary Pasts*, Chapter 7.

⁶³Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, p. 194.

⁶⁴P. C. Joshi, *The Indian Communist Party: Its Policy and Work in the War of Liberation* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1942).

⁶⁵Raza, *Revolutionary Pasts*, pp. 218–220. Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, pp. 198–199.

and Churchill's subsequent qualification of it encapsulated the tension between the universalist rhetoric of the Allied fight for democracy and Britain's imperialist agenda. The reaction in India was fierce.⁶⁶

Jog followed the European war closely, covering and analysing its progress in a weekly column in the *Bombay Chronicle*.⁶⁷ Significantly, as 1941 drew to a close, Jog anticipated an imminent change, suggesting that even as the Indian public felt detached from the war, the latter was getting closer to home. In the column from 3 September 1941, in response to the German advance towards the Caucasus and Japan's strategic position in Southeast Asia, he wrote,

For a moment the war had almost come to India. ... Whether we like it or not, the inexorable facts of geography put India right in the centre of the present strategic stage. ... We are situated between those two theatres of hostilities, the first big with fate, the second grim with threat. *The war came to India two years ago. Will war come to India?*⁶⁸

The two concluding sentences cleverly capture this moment of suspense and India's odd relation to the war: while India became a belligerent in September 1939, contributing soldiers and resources, the war had not been fought on its soil, the Congress had not lent its support, and the public had remained apathetic or ambivalent. Karaka, for instance, described a scene he saw in a Bombay bus: the conductor was punching tickets, and when one blew away, an Indian man mockingly said, 'Like a Dunkirk hero your ticket has run away.'⁶⁹ The evacuation of Allied troops from Dunkirk, which in the Anglo-American discourse signified the British people's courage, solidarity, and heroism, weakened the empire's prestige and carried a subversive meaning in the colonial context.⁷⁰ India's strange relationship to the war would become a leitmotif in subsequent wartime publications by Karaka. At this early stage of the war, Jog's position was not far from Karaka's: both saw the wars raging outside India as wars that would determine the future of humanity, and both were committed to sparking the interest of the Indian public.⁷¹

⁶⁶Raghavan, *India's War*, pp. 216–218.

⁶⁷Jog's weekly columns on the war were collected and published in late 1941 in N. G. Jog, *Will War Come to India? A Week-by-Week Record of the First Two Years of World War II* (Bombay: New Book Company, 1941). On Jog's weekly column 'A Week of the War', see: Abbas, *I Am Not an Island*, p. 218.

⁶⁸Jog, *Will War Come to India?*, p. 293. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁹Karaka, *I've Shed My Tears*, p. 117.

⁷⁰For the construction of the memory of Dunkirk, see: Penny Summerfield, 'Dunkirk and the Popular Memory of Britain at War, 1940–58', *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (2010). Karaka fully embraced this view, as evident in the opening quotation of this article as in his decision to include J. B. Priestley's famous broadcast and a *New York Times* editorial on Dunkirk in his collection of wartime speeches and texts: D. F. Karaka and G. N. Acharya (eds), *War Prose* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1944), pp. 12–14. See also: Karaka, *I've Shed My Tears*, pp. 125–126.

⁷¹Tellingly, the book's foreword is by M. R. Jayakar, a judge who belonged to the small group of moderates seeking to bridge the British and Congress positions during the war. Jayakar saw Jog's publication as an important step in bringing the war and its stakes closer to an apathetic Indian public. On the moderates, see: D. A. Low, *Britain and Indian Nationalism: The Imprint of Ambiguity, 1929–1942* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Chapter 8. For Jayakar's politics and his role on the board of the *Bombay Chronicle*, see: Israel, *Communications and Power*, passim.

In early December 1941, Congress members, including Nehru, were released from prison. Four days later Japan attacked the American base at Pearl Harbor and launched its invasion of the Philippines, Malaya, Thailand, and Hong Kong. The European war and the Second Sino-Japanese War now merged into a single world war, and the question—Will war come to India?—became all the more urgent.

Chongqing, 1942: 'To have seen it once is more than hearing about it a hundred times'⁷²

Churchill called 1942 the 'Hinge of Fate', because 'in it we turn from almost uninterrupted disaster to almost unbroken success'.⁷³ In the first six months of 1942, Rommel's forces in North Africa approached Egypt, the German Army advanced in the Caucasus, and Japan occupied Malaya, Singapore, Burma, the Philippines, and the Dutch East Indies. This year was also India's most dangerous hour, because the war 'caught the colonial state looking the wrong way'.⁷⁴ For decades Britain had focused on preventing a Russian attack on India from the northwest, and it was unprepared for an attack from the east. Japan's rapid advance in southeast Asia caught it by surprise.

When Singapore, the British 'fortress' in the Indian Ocean, fell to the Japanese in February 1942, it was a shocking and humiliating capitulation. 'For the British, it was the end of a world that was never to be recreated, despite a second occupation after 1945 of nearly twenty years.'⁷⁵ A garrison of over 85,000 men surrendered to a Japanese force of roughly 30,000 troops. About 45,000 Indian troops were turned over to the Japanese as prisoners of war, and many Indian soldiers, feeling betrayed, joined the new Indian National Army (INA, Azad Hind Fauj), which would later fight the British Indian Army under Subhas Chandra Bose and the Japanese flag, becoming a symbol of Indian nationalism.

In February, General Chiang Kai-shek, who had already established a personal connection with Nehru when the latter visited Chongqing in 1939, came to India to reconcile Congress and British positions at a time when Japan was nearly at India's eastern border and India's collaboration with the war effort had become vital for China's survival. While Chiang came to India as a British ally, his mission had Pan-Asian and anti-imperialist resonance. Inspired by a *New York Times* article, Karaka interpreted the historical gravity of the event in terms of impending decolonization: 'a man, who by the old standards, was just a "native", but, by the new was one of the half-dozen most important men in the world ... had flown to India to tell the British to fight harder, and to ask the Indians to. In the difference between the telling and asking lay, if not a world, at least an Empire.'⁷⁶ In spite of British protestations, Chiang devoted much

⁷² Author's note in Karaka, *Chungking Diary*.

⁷³ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War. Volume 4: The Hinge of Fate* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985 [1950]), p. xiii.

⁷⁴ Kamtekar, 'The Shiver of 1942', p. 82. Voigt, *India in the Second World War*, Chapters 3–4.

⁷⁵ Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, p. 154

⁷⁶ Reproduced in Karaka and Acharya, *War Prose*, p. 102. In reality, of course, Chiang's relationship with the Allies was fraught with tensions and frustrations: Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), Part IV.

of his visit to meeting Congress leaders and publicly expressed his support for India's independence.

Yet Chiang left India frustrated. His long discussions with Nehru proved futile, because the latter clarified that, as long as a national government was not established, all the Congress could offer China was its sympathy. Gandhi, Chiang wrote, 'knows and loves only India, and doesn't care about other places and people...'.⁷⁷

In his farewell broadcast to the Indian people, Chiang said, 'The present international situation divides the world into two camps, the aggression camp and the anti-aggression camp. There is no middle course...'.⁷⁸ Alluding to the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese forces, he warned that an Allied defeat would be hazardous for India and humanity. Chiang's intimation that Gandhian nationalism was inward-looking became a dominant trope in the Allied world. Karaka echoed it, criticizing Gandhi's insular position in the midst of total war. Chiang's visit inspired him to seek an assignment in Chongqing, in order to bring the war closer to the Indian public.

Significantly, British officials were initially reluctant to allow Karaka's visit. 'Why should the Government of India even visualize the possibility of Chungking having any objection to an Indian correspondent when they welcomed correspondents from all over the "Allied" world?' he asked in frustration.⁷⁹ The question—and its answer—touches on the core of the colonies' peculiar position during the war: India was not an independent, equal partner in the Allied camp, and the colonial government's need to mobilize and unify public opinion behind the war effort did not sit easily with its concern for law and order and its desire to curb Indian journalists. Propaganda was an arena where the wide gap between government and society in the colony was nakedly evident, so that Allied propaganda—quite effective at home—floundered in the colonial world.⁸⁰

Eventually, Karaka received approval for his trip, to report for the *Bombay Chronicle* and to broadcast for the government-run All India Radio, which served as a war propaganda organization and as competition to the Axis radio in India.⁸¹ In Chongqing Karaka became acquainted with 'the press gang'—the war correspondents from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, taking part in their daily routine of press conferences, shared meals, and political conversations.⁸² His first war assignment in Chongqing made a huge impact on him, as he wrote explicitly—and

⁷⁷Quoted in Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, p. 248. For Chiang's visit and disappointment, see also: Tianshi, 'Chiang Kai-Shek and Jawaharlal Nehru'. Raghavan, *India's War*, pp. 224–227. His disappointment notwithstanding, Chiang continued to support the Congress's struggle.

⁷⁸Quoted in Karaka and Acharya, *War Prose*, p. 103.

⁷⁹Karaka, *Chungking Diary*, p. 6. For resistance to Karaka's mission in Chongqing among officials, see: F.143-X (P) 1942(S), External Department, NAI.

⁸⁰For Karaka's subsequent analyses of the failure of war propaganda in India, see: Karaka, *With the 14th Army*, pp. 64–66. For Abbas: Abbas, *Let India Fight for Freedom*, pp. 65–68. For a detailed analysis of the mechanism of war propaganda and censorship in India, see: Sethi, *Wars over Words*, pp. 125–172.

⁸¹Isabel Alonso Huacuja, *Radio for the Millions: Hindi-Urdu Broadcasting Across Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023).

⁸²He also befriended the representative of the Soviet News Agency, TASS. For information on the foreign war correspondents in Chongqing, see: Vincent K. L. Chang and Yong Zhou, 'Redefining Wartime Chongqing: International Capital of a Global Power in the Making, 1938–46', *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 3 (2017).

divulged implicitly by the large amount of space allocated to Chongqing in subsequent, even much later, books. His visit coincided with the Japanese occupation of Burma, which cut off the Burma Road, but also with the first Allied air raid on Tokyo (18 April) and the American victory in the Coral Sea Battle (8 May). Such news was devoured by the international community in Chongqing with dejection and elation. It was an acute sense of the global nature of the war and its stakes that Karaka absorbed.

Karaka felt that Chongqing taught him the difference between reading about a place at war and seeing it. Indeed, from now on, his role as an eyewitness became a leitmotif in his writings about the different war theatres—allegedly granting a special authority to his understanding of the war. It was in Chongqing that he witnessed death for the first time—not the death of individuals given a proper funeral, but rather dead bodies lying in the street as a feature of everyday life. Chongqing was the first in a series of encounters with death—in Bengal in 1943, Bergen Belsen in 1945, and Punjab in 1947—that would invest Karaka's understanding of the Second World War with a universal meaning.

The spirit of Chongqing—the resilience of a society at war—took his breath away. Bombed and often flattened in parts, China's wartime capital exemplified the Chinese will to fight. Japan would never break Chinese morale, because 'A country that can take such blows for so long without complaining cannot lose.'⁸³ Of course, 'the spirit of Chongqing' was a common expression disseminated throughout the world, as we have already seen in Abbas's 1938 travel book and in Nehru's impressions from his 1939 visit, and hence Karaka's experience of the place was mediated by romanticized notions. These were further deepened during his stay through his close interaction with foreign war correspondents, diplomats, and military officials.

Karaka's account bears the evident imprint of Nehru's voice, resounding as it does Nehru's focus on the bond between China and India against European racism and imperialism. Karaka felt that, as an Indian, he was especially welcome in Chongqing:

India counts for so much in China. And as one who had smarted earlier in life at having the doors of London hotels slammed into my face ... it was a strange feeling to find in this other land that every door, be it rich or poor, opened to welcome the Indian. What a difference there was between the East and the West.⁸⁴

A telegram Nehru wrote on Karaka's behalf ensured a warm reception. Karaka was pleased that the only foreign flag in sight at the Kuomintang's Central Political Institute was that of the Congress, which Nehru had given to the vice chancellor when he had accompanied Chiang to India. He observed that, in the communist circles surrounding Zhou Enlai, interest in India was even greater.⁸⁵

⁸³Karaka, *Chungking Diary*, p. 24. 'Chungking... As I See It' (two parts), *Bombay Chronicle*, 4 and 7 May 1942. 'Romance of AVG', *Bombay Chronicle*, 16 May 1942.

⁸⁴Karaka, *Chungking Diary*, p. 114.

⁸⁵It is interesting, in light of Karaka's hostility to communist influence during the Cold War, that his portrayal of Zhou Enlai and the Chinese communists in 1942 is extremely positive, echoing the influence of Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*. Snow also wrote the foreword to Karaka's book on Chongqing. Karaka's favourable depiction of the communists buttresses the argument that foreign correspondents

The book is thus shot through with the theme of Asian civilization's moral and spiritual superiority, bonding China and India together.⁸⁶ Karaka's dedicates a lot of space to quoting and analysing an article by Song Meiling (Madam Chiang Kai-shek), which surveyed the history of China's relations with its current allies, telling of decades marked by plunder and humiliation, followed by detachment and condescension when China was attacked by Japan in 1937. Song Meiling gloatingly contrasted China's heroic resistance with France's defeat in 1940 and the British fiascos in Hong Kong and Singapore. Karaka related emotionally to her hurt at the West's 'superiority complex' and was especially touched by her suggestion that the Indians had the spirit to win the war if they were convinced that they were fighting for their own freedom.⁸⁷

Yet, the emphasis on Indian-Chinese solidarity notwithstanding, the text marks a departure from Karaka's and Abbas's late-1930s publications. Pan-Asianism's connection with anti-imperialism had become more complicated and discordant against the background of the war's changing alliances. Alongside the East–West division operated the division between Allies and fascists. China was now part of the Allied world, and witnessing China struggle gave Karaka a deeper understanding of India's responsibility and a growing commitment to the Allied war effort. 'War is a very real thing in this part of the world. ... People think and live and eat and move about in terms of war.... Of course I knew that China had been at war for over four years, but then India had also been at war for nearly three—so I was told.'⁸⁸ Echoing Jog's 1941 book title, Karaka concludes, 'The war had not come to India.'⁸⁹

India's detachment from the war would become a recurrent, almost obsessive theme in Karaka's writings. He identified two culprits: the colonial government's rigid, unbending, and anachronistic attitude, reminiscent of nineteenth-century imperialism, and Gandhian nationalism, which he increasingly deemed narrow-minded and insular, naive in its clinging to nonviolence in the face of total war. Both forces meant that India remained 'stuck' in the 1930s and failed to adapt to the totally altered world circumstances. Karaka's sense of a temporal and experiential gap between India and the world at war became all the more acute when news of the final collapse of the Cripps Mission reached Chongqing.

Quit India, 1942: A moment of decision

With Japan advancing in Burma, hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing to India, and air bombing of Ceylon and India's eastern coast, 'the Shiver of 1942' was deeply

in wartime China contributed immensely to the communists' public relations triumph: Chang and Zhou, 'Redefining Wartime Chongqing', pp. 617–618. The Chinese government took issue with Karaka's account and complained to the Government of India: F.143-X (P) 1942(S), External Department, NAI.

⁸⁶For the inversion of Orientalist hierarchical notions of civilization, and emphasis on Asian spiritual and moral superiority in Asian political thought, see: Stolte and Fischer-Tiné, 'Imagining Asia in India'. Itty Abraham, 'From Bandung to Nam: Non-Alignment and Indian Foreign Policy, 1947–65', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 46, no. 2 (2008).

⁸⁷Madam Chiang Kai-shek's article was: 'First Lady of the East Speaks to the West: Madame Chiang Kai-Shek', *New York Times*, 19 April 1942.

⁸⁸Karaka, *Chungking Diary*, p. 169.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 201.

felt in both England and India.⁹⁰ The prospect of a Japanese invasion into India loomed large and the identification of the Indian public with the war effort became crucial. Under mounting American pressure, Churchill was forced to send Sir Stafford Cripps, a Labour Party member of his War Cabinet, to negotiate for India's participation in the war in exchange for dominionhood (or even complete independence) afterwards.⁹¹

Gandhi was opposed from the outset on grounds of nonviolence, while others felt that the Congress should not align itself clearly with the Allies in case Japan invaded. Bose, living under Nazi patronage in Berlin, made radio appeals to the Congress to refuse the Cripps offer.⁹² Nehru was more open, as he still hoped to turn the war into a truly popular cause. Cripps shared Nehru's commitment to socialism and was emphatically sympathetic to Congress demands, yet negotiations collapsed over the Congress's insistence that an Indian-run Executive Council direct India's wartime policy, and England's equal insistence that power remain in the hands of the British commander-in-chief. Churchill apparently felt that the mission had served its public relations purpose, especially with respect to the Americans, and he later hinted that postwar independence had never really been acceptable to him.⁹³ The high expectations, tense negotiations, and ultimate failure of the mission reflected the fundamental contradictions inherent in India's position in the Allied war camp.

In response to the failure of negotiations, in its Allahabad resolution of May 1942, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) condemned the Cripps offer as imperialistic. Gandhi originally wished to demand a withdrawal of Allied troops from Indian soil, but Nehru, greatly upset, argued that such a withdrawal would allow Japan to invade India and expand westward towards the Middle East, rendering India a passive collaborator with the Axis powers.⁹⁴ Accordingly, the Allahabad resolution excluded the demand for Allied troop withdrawal, called for a nonviolent but resolute resistance to a Japanese invasion, and asserted a categorical antipathy to fascism and Nazism. Yet Nehru admitted that, despite its internationalist language, the resolution reflected the prevalent 'swing back to intense nationalism', even isolationism.⁹⁵

This was vindicated in subsequent months, as Gandhi prepared the ground for a mass civil disobedience movement. Nehru, though reluctant at first, gradually became convinced that this was the only way. The Cripps Mission's impact, together with

⁹⁰Panic spread in Calcutta and Madras, businesses closed, and people of all classes evacuated to the countryside. See: Kamtekar, 'The Shiver of 1942'. Khan, *The Raj at War*, pp. 93–121.

⁹¹The Cripps offer entailed the option of complete independence by allowing secession from the empire after ten years. R. J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁹²Nehru's correspondence and speeches in those days indicate that some people thought in terms of Japanese appeasement. Nehru stated that Bose's choice was perhaps well-intentioned yet utterly wrong, and those who thought that Japan would liberate India were deluded. See: Nehru to Anath Gopal Sen, 6 March 1942, SWJN, Vol. 12, p. 152. Interview to the Press, New Delhi, 12 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 225–226. Speech at Queen's Garden, Delhi, 7 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 248–249. Interview to the press, 24 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 262–263.

⁹³Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India*, pp. 138–143.

⁹⁴Minutes of the Congress Working Committee discussion of the resolution are in SWJN, Vol. 12, pp. 286–294. Gandhi's initial draft included the assertion that 'Japan's quarrel is not with India. [...] India's participation in the War has not been with the consent of the representatives of the Indian people.' The four different drafts of the resolution, including Gandhi's initial version and the final version drafted by Nehru, are in *ibid.*, pp. 276–279.

⁹⁵Nehru's confidential note to Louis Johnson, 11 May 1942, in *ibid.*, p. 305.

oppressive wartime measures, the shameful flight of the British from Southeast Asia, the differential racial treatment of Indian and European evacuees from Burma, and rumours of food shipments to Persia despite the mounting food crisis at home, shattered any confidence the public had in the Raj. Gandhi, Nehru felt, was voicing deep currents within the Indian public, and events were leading inevitably to a mass movement.⁹⁶ In cables to Krishna Menon, a close associate in interwar communist circles who now expressed his distress at the grave situation on the Chinese and Russian fronts, Nehru stressed that Congress sympathized with Russia and China, but that the demand for independence overrode all other considerations, and the Congress could not go against an almost unanimous public opinion.⁹⁷

The Quit India resolution of 8 August 1942 demanded the withdrawal of British power from India and its replacement by a provisional national government that would cooperate in the war with the United Nations (as the Allies were called from January 1942), and it sanctioned the start of 'a mass struggle on nonviolent lines on the widest possible scale'.⁹⁸ The arrest of the Congress leaders the morning following the resolution unleashed massive protests, beginning in the cities and spreading to the countryside. With Gandhi and the Congress leadership in prison, the movement was guided by more radical, often socialist leaders, and took a more intense and violent turn than previous mass movements.⁹⁹ Later historiography validates Nehru's sense that Gandhi had unleashed subterranean forces over which he could have very little command. The British reaction, for its part, was 'brutal, effective and quick'.¹⁰⁰

China was very much on Nehru's mind in the months before and after the Quit India resolution. He 'had long been troubled and distressed at the thought that we might do something which might mean breaking faith with China'.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, the resolution recognized China's and Russia's heroic struggles and stressed that the Congress was anxious not to compromise their defence. It justified its decision by stating that 'India, the classic land of modern imperialism, became the crux of the question',¹⁰² and that a colonized India would continue to taint the United Nations' war effort. When Congress passed the resolution, Nehru simultaneously released a public statement in support of China.¹⁰³

Yet, idealistic wording notwithstanding, we should not lose sight of the practical implications at stake: the resolution was taken *before* the tide turned against the

⁹⁶Cripps' Report on his Interview with Nehru, 30 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 186. Nehru to Sampurnanand, 28 July 1942, *ibid.*, p. 422. Nehru's prison diary, 10 September 1942, SWJN, Vol. 13, p. 2. For an account of the demoralized public mood at this time, see: Khan, *The Raj at War*, pp. 93–121.

⁹⁷Nehru's cables to V. K. Krishna Menon, 5 June, 21 July and 23 July 1942, SWJN, Vol. 12, pp. 339–340, 414–415.

⁹⁸For the resolution's drafts, see: *ibid.*, pp. 436–453. C. Rajagopalachari was a lone voice in the Congress high command who opposed Quit India. See: Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885–1947* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983).

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 394–404. Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *The Indian Nation in 1942* (Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1988). Francis G. Hutchins, *India's Revolution: Gandhi and the Quit India Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).

¹⁰⁰Pandey, *The Indian Nation in 1942*, p. 4.

¹⁰¹Nehru's prison diary, 10 September 1942, in SWJN, Vol. 13, p. 2.

¹⁰²SWJN, Vol. 12, p. 439.

¹⁰³'Nehru's Message to the People of China, Bombay, 8 August 1942', *ibid.*, p. 482. Nehru also requested that Gandhi send a letter to Chiang Kai-shek, which he drafted.

Axis. Although the defeat of the Japanese in the Battle of Midway (June 1942) dispelled the danger of a Japanese landing on India's eastern shores, an invasion through Burma could not be ruled out—and would indeed take place in 1944. In the Middle East and Soviet Union, the turning points of El Alamein and Stalingrad had not yet taken place.¹⁰⁴ This was a moment of decision when, as the Quit India resolution's drafter put it, nationalism took precedence over internationalism.¹⁰⁵

As the Congress perspective became ever more entrenched in a nationalist, anti-colonial rather than anti-fascist position, Karaka drifted further away from it. News of the Cripps Mission's failure and of the Allahabad resolution was received as a staggering blow in Chongqing. Nehru's previous statements about the need to organize guerrilla resistance against a Japanese invasion had aroused enthusiasm in Chongqing:¹⁰⁶ 'They ask me here... Will India fight as China has done—from the housetops, from the windows of little houses, on the beach and in the streets?'¹⁰⁷ The phrasing, presumably Karaka's, unmistakably echoes Churchill's 'We shall fight on the beaches' speech, delivered after the withdrawal from Dunkirk, thereby insisting on a common Allied struggle.¹⁰⁸ But now the Allahabad resolution, stating that all the Congress intended to do in the event of a Japanese invasion was to offer nonviolent non-cooperation, baffled those surrounding Karaka in Chongqing, who dwelled at length on the horrendous massacre in Nanjing.¹⁰⁹

Having to explain the Congress position to the international community in Chongqing left Karaka confused about his conflicting loyalties. There was a decisive moment, he later claimed, as he took a walk and stood on hilltop, from which he could see little boats and 'little dots' moving on the river below—Chinese boatmen and labourers who 'were once the flesh and blood of China, but which in five long years had become skin and bone, knowing only blood, sweat, toil and tears'. Again, one cannot miss the Churchillian ring of the statement.¹¹⁰ 'Somehow I cannot take my vengeance

¹⁰⁴Voigt, *India in the Second World War*, pp. 168–169.

¹⁰⁵Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2004 [1946]), pp. 461–462. I depart from Manu Bhagavan's interpretation, which focuses on the paragraph calling for a future world federation and thus highlights the resolution's anti-fascist and internationalist character. See: Manu Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World: The Peacemakers* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 12–13, 37.

¹⁰⁶For Nehru's speeches on the need to organize guerrilla warfare, see: Address at Jorhat, 23 April 1942, and Interview to the Press, 24 April 1942, in SWJN, Vol. 12, pp. 262–263. It was received coldly by Nehru's colleagues in the Gandhian camp, led by Patel and Kripalani, who threatened to resign in response: Nehru's prison diary, 19 March 1944, including editor's note no. 13, in Neerja Singh (ed.), *Nehru-Patel, Agreement within Differences: Select Documents and Correspondences 1933–1950* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2010), pp. 350–357.

¹⁰⁷'Chungking... As I See It', Part II, *Bombay Chronicle*, 7 May 1942. See also: Karaka, *Chungking Diary*, p. 145.

¹⁰⁸After the Dunkirk evacuation, Churchill delivered a speech on 4 June 1940, concluding: '...we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender...'. Available at <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/yourcountry/collections/churchill/exhibition/churchill-the-orator/fight-on-the-beaches/>, [accessed 17 March 2023].

¹⁰⁹'AICC Resolution: Reaction in Chungking', *Bombay Chronicle*, 15 May 1942.

¹¹⁰In his inaugural speech before the House of Commons on 13 May 1940, Churchill declared: 'I would say to the House, as I said to those who have joined this Government: "I have nothing to offer

on humanity, because I bear a grudge to a handful of Englishmen.’¹¹¹ Together, the Chinese ‘little dots’, the American soldiers, and the Englishmen at Dunkirk embodied humanity struggling to survive. He resolved that this global war was more urgent than the anticolonial struggle at home.¹¹² Karaka recast pan-Asianism in support of the Allies’ war effort.

Back in India, faced with the inertly conservative attitude of the British government and an impending Congress movement, Karaka experienced a dislocation. Compared with the urgent reality of war that he had briefly witnessed, India felt unreal, out of touch with the times.¹¹³ The war had come, yet had not come to India.

A war of words

All the tensions and frustrations surrounding colonial rule in India surfaced under the pressures of 1942. The events of that year forced Indian socialists (who led Quit India) to break from both Indian communists (who supported the Allied war effort following the German invasion of the Soviet Union) and British socialists (who supported Cripps and blamed Gandhi for the mission’s failure).¹¹⁴

Following Quit India, the Government of India published a report vilifying the Congress leadership, especially Gandhi, as defeatist.¹¹⁵ Now that the Congress leaders were confined in prison, it was up to nationalist writers and journalists to disseminate its version of events against British propaganda.¹¹⁶ A war of words ensued, and Abbas and Jog played a central role in it. As Quit India and the war on fascism pulled in opposing directions, Abbas was keen to prove that Congressmen, first and foremost Nehru, were anti-fascist and internationalist to the core, and to disprove the prevalent allegation that Gandhian nationalism was narrow or, worse still, pro-fascist. In *Let India*

but blood, toil, tears and sweat’”. Available at <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/yourcountry/collections/churchill/exhibition/churchill-the-orator/blood-toil-sweat-and-tears/>, [accessed 17 March 2023].

¹¹¹Karaka, *Chungking Diary*, p. 53.

¹¹²Karaka, *I’ve Shed My Tears*, pp. 124–125.

¹¹³Karaka, *Chungking Diary*, p. 217.

¹¹⁴For the rift between Indian socialist and progressive writers Ram Manohar Lohia and Mulk Raj Anand, on the one side, and the British writers George Orwell and Leonard Woolf, on the other, see: Raghavan, *India’s War*, pp. 236–239. Ram Manohar Lohia, *The Mystery of Sir Stafford Cripps* (Bombay: Padma Publications, 1942). M Subrahmanyam, *Why Cripps Failed* (New Delhi: Hindustan Times Press, 1942). Mulk Raj Anand, *Letters on India* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1942). For a dramatic fictional representation of the schism between socialists and communists in India, see: Yashpal, *Deshdrohi* (Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan, 1984 [1943]).

¹¹⁵*Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances 1942–43* (Delhi: Government of India Press, 1943). The report quoted extensively from minutes of meetings that the government had seized in a police raid, and which revealed Nehru’s concerns about Gandhi’s appeasement. For his part, Cripps understood the role played by Churchill and Linlithgow in subverting the proposal, but laid the blame on Gandhi. Reginald Coupland was instrumental in disseminating Cripps’s version. R. Coupland, *The Cripps Mission* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942). Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India*, pp. 126–131.

¹¹⁶The *Bombay Chronicle’s* editor, who was afraid the paper would cease to function with all its staff engaged in the movement, approached Gandhi, who assured the young reporters before the August AICC meeting that running a nationalist newspaper and publicizing the Congress perspective was no less important to the nationalist cause. Abbas was given the assignment of befriending foreign correspondents and communicating to them the Congress viewpoint: Abbas, *I Write as I Feel*, pp. 239–242.

Fight for Freedom (1943), he reminded his readers that, when Britain and France sacrificed Abyssinia, 'our Jawaharlal was refusing to meet or shake hands with Mussolini. ... When Chamberlain was flying to Munich to placate Hitler, our Jawaharlal was flying to Madrid to support the anti-Fascist heroes of Spain.'¹¹⁷ Abbas took special pride in the medical mission that the Congress sent to China, and in the Indian doctor who married a Chinese woman and died in China—a 'symbol of Indo-Chinese unity' and a testimony to Nehru's internationalism and Gandhi's deep-seated humanitarianism.¹¹⁸ Yet I would like to suggest that these endeavours, like Abbas's participation in the 1938 World Youth Congress, belonged to the time, spirit, and logic of interwar internationalism, not to the global conflict that ensued after Barbarossa and Pearl Harbor, when the Second Sino-Japanese war and the European war coalesced.¹¹⁹

Jog, for his part, replaced his early endorsement of the Allied position with a strictly Indian anticolonial position. Jog's monograph *Churchill Blind-spot: India* (1944) began where his previous book ended—the Atlantic Charter—this time judging it bitterly as the epitome of the contradictions in Britain's war aims. Jog took part in international conversations about the war, referring throughout the text to Lin Yutang, to Wendell Willkie's *One World* (1943), and to Louis Fischer, Pearl Buck, Edward Thompson, and Harold Laski, who all supported the Congress position. The book offers an intriguing study of Churchill's political career, placing his India policy at the centre. If there was one creed that remained consistent throughout Churchill's fickle political career, claimed Jog, it was his unassailable belief in the British empire and his understanding that, without India, there would be no empire. Churchill had been charmed with Mussolini and Hitler, and he stopped his flirtation with fascism only when he realized it posed a danger to the British empire. Churchill was not 'a great democrat, or a great internationalist';¹²⁰ rather, his war was driven by the need to preserve the empire.

A year later, Jog published *Judge or Judas?* (1945), a scathing reply to the English writer Beverley Nichols' *Verdict on India* (1944), which had expressed outright indignation at Hindu society and Gandhi. Jog's book was a huge success, and the first edition of 3,000 copies was sold out within two weeks.¹²¹ The polemical exchange explicitly resounded and built upon earlier controversies over Mayo's *Mother India* and similar degrading representations of India by Westerners. Indian nationalists, as stated earlier, were hurt and outraged by such literature, which encapsulated arrogant Western imperialism. The Nichols–Jog exchange thereby alluded to the personal and emotional experience of empire, the touchy sentiments of humiliation and honour.

¹¹⁷ Abbas, *Let India Fight for Freedom*, p. 55.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 51–55. Abbas went on to publish a book about the mission's chief doctor, who died in China: K. A. Abbas, *And One Did Not Come Back* (Bombay: Sound Magazine, 1944). The book was made into the successful movie, *Dr. Kotnis ki amar kahani* (1946). See: Framke, "'We Must Send a Gift Worthy of India and the Congress!'"

¹¹⁹ It is noteworthy that while some of the Indian doctors stayed in China into the 1940s, the story of the medical mission culminates in Nehru's visit in 1939, which was interrupted by the outbreak of the European war. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Towards Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York: John Day Company, 1941), p. 367.

¹²⁰ N. G. Jog, *Churchill's Blind-Spot: India* (Bombay: New Book Company, 1944), p. 215.

¹²¹ Beverley Nichols, *Verdict on India* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1944). N. G. Jog, *Judge or Judas?* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1945). Srinivasan (ed.), *N. C. Jog Commemoration Volume*, p. xxxix.

And it rested on, and reaffirmed, a division of the world into west and east, colonizers and colonized—a division that ran against the wartime division of Allies versus Axis.

Abbas and Jog reconciled their anticolonial and anti-fascist leanings by reiterating Nehru's claim that India was the crux of the war, that the entire moral basis of the war against the Axis hinged on the Indian question.¹²² With the Quit India resolution, '[T]he Congress had boldly stepped into the centre of the world stage and challenged the conscience of humanity.'¹²³ Referring to Gandhi's 21-day fast in 1943, Abbas wrote, '[T]he whole world watched with anxious interest... a battle for truth and justice carried on within the frail body of an old man!'¹²⁴

It is instructive to contrast this judgement with that of Karaka, who noted mockingly that in the nationalist press 'the diagnosis of hookworm in Mahatma Gandhi claimed pride of place over the news of the opening of the Second Front'.¹²⁵ He felt that Gandhian nationalism and nonviolence missed the magnitude of world events, the true meaning of the Nazi idea and Japanese barbarity.¹²⁶ 'To me, nonviolence, great as it was as an ideal, seemed futile in terms of Stalingrad, Dunkirk and the Blitz over London. In contrast to that grim battle which those people were fighting with their backs to the wall, the unfurling of a flag in Bombay and the shouting of a slogan in Calcutta appeared a little childish.'¹²⁷

As the AICC meeting in Bombay ratifying the Quit India resolution approached, Karaka expressed increasing distress. While acknowledging the utterly imperialist and unsatisfying attitude of Churchill's cabinet—even Cripps had shattered Indians' hopes—it was one thing 'to be a passive observer in the shape of a benevolent neutral ... and quite another to be ... offering resistance ... to those who are already fighting a war for their existence'.¹²⁸ Civil disobedience at this time, he felt, could only mean a 'stab in the back'.¹²⁹ When the momentous Congress meeting eventually took place on 8 August, he could not, as an Indian, but feel deeply moved, and his report on the Congress leaders' speeches was suffused with exhilaration. While his head was going one way, his heart was with the speakers, and, like Abbas and other Indian journalists, he did his best to communicate the Congress message to the international correspondents around him.¹³⁰ Indeed, in later books he expressed admiration for the mental and physical resistance of Quit India, especially as it took a radical and violent turn, disproving British arguments that Indians were too illiterate to understand anything other than the language of two square meals a day.¹³¹ Yet, unlike Abbas, Karaka did not

¹²² Abbas, *Let India Fight for Freedom*.

¹²³ K. A. Abbas and N. G. Jog, *A Report to Gandhiji: A Survey of Indian and World Events During the 21 Months of Gandhiji's Incarceration* (Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1944), p. 5.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹²⁵ Karaka, *This India*, p. 30.

¹²⁶ Karaka, *I've Shed My Tears*, p. 136.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

¹²⁸ 'Someone must step in', *Bombay Chronicle*, 20 July 1942.

¹²⁹ 'A letter to Mahatma Gandhi', *Bombay Chronicle*, 25 July 1942.

¹³⁰ 'The Congress case', *Bombay Chronicle*, 8 August 1942.

¹³¹ Karaka, *I've Shed My Tears*, Chapter 8.

join the movement,¹³² and his overall judgement of the resolution was that it indirectly aided fascism.¹³³

The Bengal Famine and the forgotten war of Burma, 1943–1944

In 1943 the Bengal countryside faced a horrifying famine along with a cholera epidemic, which together eventually claimed three million lives. Those most affected belonged to the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of the rural Bengali population. Deep structural inequality, poverty, and indebtedness in rural Bengal were aggravated by the war: the fall of Burma both cut off an important supplier of rice to Bengal and resulted in a panicked, scorched-earth policy on the part of the British Army, which destroyed all forms of transport in the delta, from boats to elephants, lest they fall into the hands of an invading Japanese Army. When, in October 1942, a cyclone devastated the rice-producing areas of eastern Bengal and Orissa, rice prices shot up and hoarding became rampant. The Bengal provincial government was corrupt, incompetent, and divided along communal lines, and the central government in New Delhi, which had failed to develop a food policy and to control prices in the first place, simply denied mounting evidence of famine. When it finally woke up to the situation, the British War Cabinet in London ignored its appeals to revoke dispatches of food from India to the United Kingdom and the Middle Eastern front. Moreover, as Bayly and Harper write, ‘Quite apart from the demands of war, it is difficult to escape the impression that the War Cabinet was simply hostile towards India. The prime minister believed the Indians were the next worst people in the world after the Germans.’¹³⁴

Destitute, famished villagers dragged themselves to Calcutta, desperate for some relief. As many collapsed on arrival, the city was lined with skeletal, dead bodies. Karaka and Abbas were among the many journalists, academics, artists, students, and relief volunteers who went to the province, producing poems, drawings, photos, and chilling eyewitness accounts of the ‘hunger marches’ of panting and exhausted people, dying villagers emaciated to the bone, a child struggling to drink milk from the breast of his dead mother, and the wailing and groaning of children that pierced the night.¹³⁵

¹³²Abbas, on the other hand, took part in producing clandestine propaganda and radio broadcasting for the Congress during Quit India. Interview with K. A. Abbas, No. 123, Oral History Collection, CSAS, pp. 11–12.

¹³³Karaka, *No Peace at All*, pp. 8–9.

¹³⁴Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, p. 286. Amartya Sen’s seminal study claims that the famine was caused not by an overall food shortage but by deep structures of socioeconomic and political inequality—it was sharp inflation that crushed poor people’s ability to purchase food: Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). See also: Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943–44* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). For a recent, incisive exploration of the complex axes of power and disempowerment—imperial and local—that produced the famine, and for its long-lasting ramifications, see: Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of Empire* (London: Hurst and Co., 2015). For a comparison of wartime food policy in the British metropole and the colony, see: Indivar Kamtekar, ‘A Different War Dance: State and Class in India, 1939–1945’, *Past and Present* 176 (2002).

¹³⁵See: Karaka’s writings: “‘Fan Deo Ma’ is Bengal’s Hunger Cry”, *Bombay Chronicle*, 2 October 1943. ‘What Causes Bengal Food Crisis—Part Played by Governor’s “Denial” Policy’, *Bombay Chronicle*, 5 October 1943. ‘Bengal Death Rate Bound to Mount Up’, *Bombay Chronicle*, 11 October 1943. ‘Wailing Village of Madaripur’, *Bombay Chronicle*, 15 October 1943. Karaka, *This India*, pp. 45–54. Karaka, *I’ve Shed My Tears*, pp. 163–164.

Interestingly, whereas Karaka's dispatches from Bengal in 1943 chronicled the petty squabbling and internal blame game of Indian politicians, his accounts immediately after the war were markedly angry and bitter, accusing the British and colonial governments of covering up the true causes and dimensions of the disaster, and of total neglect and indifference; he noted that Viceroy Linlithgow did not even bother to visit Bengal. Karaka's postwar analysis lay all the blame on Britain's scorched-earth policy and distorted priorities, dismissing insinuations about the complicity of local actors and hoarding.¹³⁶ In this sense, Karaka's writings took part in, and reflected, a wider discursive development in India. Local Bengali discourse on the famine, consisting of mutual accusations by rival political parties, communal Hindu-Muslim tensions, and complaints about hoarders and profiteering, was transformed, as it travelled outside the province, into a nationalist critique, which lay the blame squarely on Britain's racialized economic priorities. This was the ultimate indictment of the utter failure and moral bankruptcy of British rule in India and the hypocrisy of its declared war goals, and it further catalysed the demand for a responsible national government.¹³⁷ The latest in a series of disastrous famines under colonial rule, the Bengal Famine was seen as the culmination of Britain's drain of Indian wealth and became, in a sense, the iconic tragedy of wartime India, encapsulating two centuries of colonial racial arrogance, exploitation, and violence. This is clearly evident in Jog's indictment of Churchill's responsibility for the famine in his aforementioned book. Such representations would be reiterated in popular Indian nationalist accounts after independence.¹³⁸

Abbas was especially central in shaping the representation of the famine in Indian art. The progressive Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), which Abbas had co-founded in 1942, staged plays on the famine in working-class districts and in the countryside. He also wrote and directed the most memorable film on the famine—*Dharti Ke Lal* ('Children of the Earth'), which was released in 1946 and featured in film festivals abroad. It centres on a starving peasant family that is forced to leave for Calcutta, where it encounters death and prostitution. Eventually the survivors return to the village to undertake cooperative farming.¹³⁹

Both Abbas and Karaka commented on the helplessness, degradation, and dehumanization caused by the famine.¹⁴⁰ Karaka compared his visits to Chongqing and Bengal: in both places he had experienced horrid encounters with death, but Chongqing filled him with exaltation, because death had meaning and purpose, and

¹³⁶This is apparent when comparing 'Why this distrust against Ispahanis?', *Bombay Chronicle*, 7 October 1943 with his postwar writings.

¹³⁷Benjamin Siegel, *Hungry Nation: Food, Famine, and the Making of Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 21–49. Siegel traces this transformation across numerous wartime pamphlets.

¹³⁸Jog, *Churchill's Blind-Spot: India*, pp. 192–196. For recent reiterations in popular Indian nationalist accounts, see: Madhuree Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India During World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (London: Hurst, 2017), Chapter 5. Tharoor's book, along with his interviews and public statements, gained wide circulation.

¹³⁹Abbas, *I Am Not an Island*, pp. 264–275. Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 126–127. For the impact of IPTA plays on famine relief, see: Bhisham Sahni, *Aaj Ke Atit* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2003), pp. 100–102.

¹⁴⁰Abbas, *I Am Not an Island*, p. 266.

the human spirit of resistance was on full display, whereas in Bengal there was only defeat, people 'battered, bent and broken ... for no purpose at all', stripped of morale and the ability to resist.¹⁴¹ Yet the two writers ultimately chose different ways to cope with what they had witnessed. Abbas engaged with the famine artistically, feeling that its representation by socially conscious artists meant 'the reaffirmation of human values on behalf of the people of Bengal, the people of India'.¹⁴² For him, art carried a message of hope and a new dignity for the people. While Abbas remained preoccupied with the famine throughout the war years, Karaka was captivated by the war and opted to cover combat zones outside India, in search of the human spirit he had witnessed in Chongqing.

Accordingly, Karaka left for Burma in March 1944.¹⁴³ Earlier attempts to reoccupy Burma had failed. It was located at the end of a very long supply line, with a severe climate and difficult terrain, and thus required ground forces that the Allies lacked, given their Germany First grand strategy. In October 1943 the Allies launched a more focused effort. At its heart was General William Slim's 14th Army, drawn from British, Indian, Burmese, and African units. Karaka accompanied various units of the 14th Army, getting a close look at some confrontations. Soon after, the Japanese, accompanied by Bose's INA regiment, crossed into India's northeastern province of Assam and lay siege to Indian Army forces in Imphal. The situation turned around when the besieged received supplies through airdrops, and the starving attackers began a long retreat into Burma, pursued by the 14th Army, in a drawn-out, arduous chase, involving savage fighting in harsh terrain.¹⁴⁴

A central theme in Karaka's coverage from Burma and Assam is the reversal of the situation and power relations of the war. His dispatches were infused with optimism: it was clear that the 14th Army was a well-trained and well-equipped force, and that the Allies had come a long way from the days when they had allowed Chongqing to be bombarded without response. They had the upper hand now in the most critical field of the war—the air. The South East Asia Command signified a mental awakening.

The second theme is a nationalist pride in the Indian soldiers, which Karaka shared with the few other Indian correspondents who covered the Burma campaign, notably P. R. S. Mani and T. G. Narayanan.¹⁴⁵ They all put the limelight on the valour and

¹⁴¹Karaka, *This India*, pp. 46–47. For an analysis that goes against this prevalent narrative that the poor died silently, without a murmur, see: Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*.

¹⁴²Abbas, *I Am Not an Island*, p. 266.

¹⁴³His dispatches to the *Bombay Chronicle* appeared in March–April 1944. He collected and rearranged them into a narrative soon after his return in Karaka, *With the 14th Army*.

¹⁴⁴Tarak Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire: Rethinking Army, Society and Battle with the British Indian Army in the Asia-Pacific Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁴⁵P. R. Subrahmanyam, known subsequently as P. R. S. Mani, worked for All India Radio. His fear of fascism led him to accept a commission in 1944 with military public relations, to cover the exploits of the Indian Army in Southeast Asia. Mani continued to accompany the Indian troops in Southeast Asia until after the end of the war. He resigned in early 1946 and continued to cover the Indonesian independence struggle as a war correspondent for the *Free Press Journal of Bombay*. After independence he became a top-level diplomat. Goodall and Frost, 'The Transnational Mission of an Indian War Correspondent'. T. G. Narayanan, a celebrated journalist for *The Hindu*, known for his reports on the Bengal Famine, covered the Burma campaign, and later the Indonesian struggle, for *The Hindu*. Paul and Dowling, 'Gandhi's Newspaperman'.

bravery of Indian soldiers, and on how the battlefield forged national unity among this diverse army, allowing it to transcend communal tensions. Their reporting served as a corrective to the marginalization of Indian troops in British accounts,¹⁴⁶ and to the long-standing British argument that India was a mere collection of discrete and fighting groups that could never forge a nation. For Karaka, the emphasis on unity simultaneously addressed domestic reservations about the war effort and embarrassment about the Indian Army fighting in the service of empire. Karaka asserted that this was no longer an army of mercenaries, but of patriotic, courageous, confident Indians, conscious of their country and on equal footing with their British counterparts. Above all, they had discipline—discipline that would lift the Indian nation to new heights and that could not be achieved in a hundred years of Gandhian nonviolence. War had transformative capacities, he insisted, thereby recasting fighting alongside the British as a step towards nation-building.

Yet Karaka soon left the Indo-Burmese theatre, in a revealing departure from Mani and Narayanan, who both lingered in Southeast Asia throughout 1946 and followed this drawn-out campaign closely. They were the first to gather in-depth information and to report on Bose and the INA. Even after Japan's surrender, they remained in the region, reporting on the plight of the Indian and Burmese civilian populations, on INA prisoners, and on the predicament of Indian troops who found themselves deployed in bloody colonial wars, as France, Holland, and Britain rushed to reassert control over their former colonies.¹⁴⁷

The West, in contrast to these Indian correspondents, never paid much attention to Burma. Britain suppressed news of the siege in Assam, and the Allied invasion of Normandy soon eclipsed it.¹⁴⁸ According to General Slim, the men of the 14th Army 'were calling themselves a "Forgotten Army" long before some newspaper correspondent seized on that phrase'.¹⁴⁹ Karaka succumbed eventually to the Eurocentric neglect of the Burma campaign. He too left Southeast Asia after merely two months. 'Unlike the Battle for Stalingrad or the Blitz over London, where every moment was exciting, there is not enough sustained dramatic action to report. In Arakan the war is slow-moving, long-drawn. It is the story of the taking of one hill-feature and the bombing of another.'¹⁵⁰ He 'was focused on the bigger war being fought in the west'.¹⁵¹

In Europe, 1944–1945

Towards the end of 1944 Karaka left for the Middle East and Europe on a roving assignment for the *Bombay Chronicle* to report on the end of the war in Europe. From Palestine and Cairo he continued to Italy, where he interviewed Field Marshal Alexander

¹⁴⁶Goodall and Frost, 'The Transnational Mission of an Indian War Correspondent'.

¹⁴⁷As the end of the war blurred into controversial counterinsurgency wars in the service of European empires, underscoring the clash between the Allies' rhetoric of global justice and European colonialism, Mani, whose strong support for the Allied war effort had led him to enlist in the army, resigned. Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Karnad, *Farthest Field*, p. 210.

¹⁴⁹William Slim, *Defeat into Victory* (Bombay: Macmillan and Co., 1956), p. 181. The theme of forgetting dominates secondary literature on the Southeast and East Asian fronts: Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*. Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*. Fay, *The Forgotten Army*.

¹⁵⁰Karaka, *With the 14th Army*, p. 35.

¹⁵¹D. F. Karaka, *Then Came Hazrat Ali: An Autobiography* (Bombay, n.p.: 1972), p. 186.

(then supreme commander of the Allied forces in the Mediterranean), heard about the great deeds of the 4th, 8th, and 10th Indian Infantry Divisions in the war, and met the partisans operating in the terrain between Massa and Bologna.¹⁵² He also passed through London, where he interviewed Lord Leo Amery,¹⁵³ then based himself at the Scribe Hotel, the war correspondents' headquarters in Paris, and finally entered Germany. Germany, he wrote on 17 April, was a scene of complete devastation, 'horrid, deathly, ghostly. There was a terrifying silence about the place and the only sign of animation was that of people digging among the ruins.'¹⁵⁴ Karaka was at Reims in France with the other war correspondents when Germany surrendered.

Two episodes in this extended tour highlight Karaka's sense of an epistemological gap between India and the world at war. At an airport in Italy, Karaka noticed an important personage's plane which, he concluded, belonged to American Chief of Staff General George Marshall on his way back from the historic Yalta Conference, where Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin planned for a postwar order. Karaka was ahead of the British and American press by 24 hours, and the British censor who passed the item was glad that Karaka had scooped the Americans on their own story. Yet Karaka later found out that the *Bombay Chronicle* had tucked the story in a small paragraph in one of the back pages. He experienced it as a widening gap between himself, situated as he was in the heart of Europe, and the Indian nationalist press.

This feeling was further accentuated in a second, far more momentous occasion inside Germany. News came that the British Second Army had entered the concentration camp at Bergen Belsen. Karaka hurried with several other correspondents to see it first-hand.

While scenes witnessed at the time of the Bengal famine were pitiful, nothing I have seen in all my life has shocked me with such horror, disgust and dazed stupor as this concentration camp tucked away behind woods 'en route' to Soltau. ... What I have seen to-day I have seen with my own eyes and I would like to tell it to all my countrymen who like me have often wondered whether or not it was part of propaganda against the Germans. This is a horror such as I have never visualised. This is the absolute last word in inhumanity...¹⁵⁵

The despatch expresses Karaka's utter shock and his feeling it was impossible to communicate what he saw. It was 'human degradation in the lowest form such as I will never forget'. The writing is rushed, almost breathless, without attention to syntax. 'If my dispatch to-day is not coherent it is only because what I have seen has left me...dazed and short of speech.' All around the camp were piles of naked bodies,

¹⁵²His long tour of Europe is the subject of Karaka, *No Peace at All*.

¹⁵³For Karaka's interview with Amery, see: the official correspondence of the India Office Information Department in F. IOR/L/1/1/1423, British Library.

¹⁵⁴Karaka, *No Peace at All*, pp. 140–141.

¹⁵⁵'Does Germany Deserve Mercy?', *Bombay Chronicle*, 21 April 1945. All quotes in this paragraph are from this source. His article was later reproduced with slight editing in Karaka, *No Peace at All*, pp. 147–151. On the liberation of Belsen, its extensive reportage in British newspapers, and how it shaped British perceptions of their important role in the war, see: Joanne Reilly, *Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

emaciated bodies of men and women lying on top of each other. It is some seven hours now since I saw this scene but sickens still persists. Horrible as was the Bengal famine, it was still due to the negligence of man, wherever blame may have lain. The camp at Belsen was deliberate, coldblooded and sadist in conception. ... It was in every sense of the word of the most ghastly and horrible nature.

Two motifs that recur in this text are connected with senses, with Karaka's experience of the place—the unbearable stench and the fact that he saw things with his own eyes. He stressed it perhaps to express his own disbelief at what he saw, perhaps to counter disbelief in India. Interestingly, in his autobiography, written three decades later, he states that the *Bombay Chronicle* was not interested in his story, and when he telegraphed to ask why it was not published, the newspaper's proprietor cabled back that 'Nazi horrors description though good feel overdone. Change topic unless something special'.¹⁵⁶ The account was published on 21 April. Maybe it was published only after Karaka pressed; maybe it was published in too abbreviated a form to his liking; or maybe his memory misled him. What clearly remained was his strong feeling that impenetrable barriers separated Indian readers from the reality of the war in Europe.

Having witnessed Belsen and Germany's surrender, Karaka felt part of a larger-than-life history. But back home, he realized, the Indian public mood was in an altogether different place. The curtain was falling on empire, and when the 4th Indian Division returned after its glorious conduct in the war, Karaka noted that the people were not there to welcome it. Elsewhere in India, at the same time, the people were cheering Bose's INA. When the colonial government decided to try the three top officers of the INA, Nehru took part in their defence, despite his reservations about Bose's actions. Mass protests and demonstrations broke out throughout the country, forcing Commander-in-Chief Claude Auchinleck to commute their sentences.¹⁵⁷ When the soldiers of the Indian Army marched through the streets of Delhi in a Victory Week celebration in March 1946, the public booed and jeered, and disturbances broke out.¹⁵⁸ Viceroy Wavell lamented that the Indian soldiers who had fought so gallantly during the war and defended India were insulted, while a bunch of INA soldiers who were traitors and cowards were exalted.¹⁵⁹ The INA frenzy left a trail in the archive of popular publications in the immediate aftermath of the war: 1945 saw an avalanche of booklets, pamphlets, and books in English and vernacular languages with

¹⁵⁶Karaka, *Then Came Hazrat Ali*, p. 213.

¹⁵⁷Karaka, *I've Shed My Tears*, p. 269. Indivar Kamtekar, 'The End of the Colonial State in India, 1942–1947', PhD thesis, Churchill College, University of Cambridge, 1988. For selected secondary literature on the INA trials, the mass protests, and the Royal Indian Navy mutiny, see: Sumit Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945–47', *Economic and Political Weekly* 17, no. 14/16, Annual Number (1982). Harikant Singh, *The INA Trial and the Raj* (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2003). Anirudh Deshpande, 'Sailors and the Crowd: Popular Protest in Karachi, 1946', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 26, no. 1 (1989).

¹⁵⁸F. CC 47/1946 Confidential, Delhi State Archives (DSA). F. CC 110/1946 Confidential, DSA.

¹⁵⁹Daniel Marston, *The Indian Army and the End of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 146.

admiring accounts of the INA and semi-hagiographic biographies of Bose.¹⁶⁰ Karaka's perspective was exceptional in this publishing landscape, and it sank into oblivion.

Conclusion

The stench which came from the refugee camp across the road was overpowering. It was the stench of decay, disease and death. I held my nose.

The people in these camps were our own people, the Indians of our free dominion. Herded like cattle, they had come many long miles on foot from the other side of the border, which divided India from Pakistan. They had fled to us in search of safety.

At the edge of the road, they undid their pyjamas and shat. 40,000 people could hardly be expected to wait for adequate sanitary arrangements. Nature does not stop for governments to function.

The smell of urine permeated the air. Soon there was a surplus of filth with which no one could cope.

The Colonel, a strapping Sikh, who drove our jeep shook his head in despair. 'The stench of freedom', he said mournfully. It had come to Amritsar, his holy city.

I knew this stench. I had smelt it first at Belsen, when the Allied forces liberated that Nazi concentration camp.¹⁶¹

This is an excerpt from the poignant booklet Karaka published in 1947 about his painful tour of the violence-ridden Punjab in the aftermath of India's partition. Here, and in other texts that Karaka wrote, smells evoke memories, linking faraway places and experiences—Chongqing, Bengal, Bergen Belsen, Punjab. Karaka, on the whole, did not explore such connections analytically or historically, but pointed to them more rudimentarily, associating them through the stench of death. Undeveloped and limited as it may have been, Karaka's mere act of drawing connections was extraordinary. Witnessing different parts of the war—the bombed Chongqing, military action in Burma, Italian partisans, Bergen Belsen, and Germany's unconditional surrender—reinforced in him an Allied perception of the war as a struggle for the future of humanity. These travels distinguished him from the bulk of Indian journalists and writers, including Abbas and Jog, who spent the war years within India's borders. These writers subscribed to the anticolonial Indian perspective, pointing out, with a great deal of justification, that the Allies' universalist rhetoric was hollow.

¹⁶⁰A famous example is Moti Ram, *Two Historic Trials in Red Fort: An Authentic Account of the Trial by a General Court Martial of Captain Shah Nawaz Khan, Captain P.K. Sahgal and Lt. G.S. Dhillon; and the Trial by a European Military Commission of Emperor Bahadur Shah* (New Delhi: Roxy Printing Press, 1946). For lists of dozens of INA-related publications, see: the Delhi Administration censorship files: F. CC 130/1945, F. DC 643/1946, DC 651/1946, DC 656/1946, DC 658/1946, DSA.

¹⁶¹D. F. Karaka, *Freedom Must Not Stink* (Bombay: Kutub, 1947), p. 3.

The war laid bare the contradictions underlying British rule in India, as Britain sought to gain Indian leaders' support for the war without sacrificing its control over India, thereby forcing Indian nationalists to choose between the struggle against empire and the war on fascism. The war, in other words, brought about unprecedented pressures and constraints that overburdened the flexible political imagination of interwar leftist internationalism—anti-fascism could no longer be amalgamated with anti-imperialism. As the article showed, this became all the more marked in 1942, when the advances of the German forces in North Africa and the Caucasus, along with Japanese ascendancy in Southeast Asia, made an Axis victory, or at least an invasion into India, seem likely. The tension inherent in an ostensibly democratic power fighting for freedom from fascism while holding on to empire surfaced blatantly with the failure of the Cripps Mission, compelling Indian nationalists to choose between the Allied struggle and the anticolonial struggle.

The majority, in effect, chose the latter by launching and supporting the Quit India movement at a time when the fate of the Allies, including China and the Soviet Union, was extremely precarious. Nehru and his followers in the nationalist press understood this wartime dilemma as a 'contest between nationalism and internationalism', and nationalism, Nehru reluctantly submitted, 'was bound to win'.¹⁶² As a historical moment that constrained and dichotomized political possibilities, the war should be historically distinguished from the interwar period, which made room for more open-ended and flexible political visions.

This article explored the gravity of 1942 as a historical moment by comparing the wartime publications of Karaka with those Abbas and Jog. Before 1942, all three were similarly anti-fascist and similarly anti-imperialist, yet from mid-1942 onwards, we can discern a widening gap in their orientations, as Abbas and Jog echoed the choice made by Nehru and the Congress leadership, while Karaka took a more universalist view. Comparing the selection and ordering of materials in two books published in 1944 further illustrates this drift. In Abbas and Jog's *Report to Gandhiji*, narration of the war years revolves around India, opening with Quit India and closing with Gandhi's release. Karaka's *War Prose*, on the other hand, compiles statements about the war by eminent personalities, both Indian and foreign—Gandhi, Nehru, Tagore, Churchill, Amery, Cripps, Roosevelt, Stalin, Chiang, and Beneš. While emphasizing the Indian nationalist predicament vis-à-vis the war, the book provides a broader picture, with accounts of Dunkirk, the Blitz, the sinking of the Ark Royal battleship in 1941, the Battle of Stalingrad, and General Stillwell's retreat from Burma.

The difference in their perspectives carried into Karaka's and Abbas's autobiographical accounts, published 30 years later, suggesting how wartime experiences inflected long-term memories of the war. Karaka's book dwells at length on the war, dedicating entire chapters to Chiang's visit to India and his own visit to Chongqing, to the Burma campaign, and to Europe in 1945. While it describes the Bengal Famine, it mentions Quit India only briefly. In Abbas's autobiography, the chapters on the war period deal strictly with Quit India and the Bengal Famine, detailing his contribution to the movement and to the theatre and cinema of the famine. The war as a global event is absent. Jog's later publications concentrate on nationalist themes, most tellingly

¹⁶²Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p. 462.

an admiring biography of Bose that endorses his actions during the war.¹⁶³ Karaka, predictably, deemed Bose's wartime choice wrong.¹⁶⁴

In juxtaposing Karaka's writings with those of Abbas and Jog, this article also illustrated the value of Indian wartime journalism and nonfiction as historical sources for tracing the war's narrativization and remembrance. Indian writers played an important role in debating and communicating core questions about the war's moral and political ramifications. The editorial pieces and nonfiction works discussed here clearly demonstrate how Allied propaganda intended to galvanize popular support for the war collided with the limits of a colony's loyalty, especially in 1942.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that Karaka and his peers in the Indian English-language public sphere played an important role as intermediaries between national and international discussions about the war. This became especially manifest in 1942. The Indian public sphere became a central arena for commenting on and interpreting this moment of decision and its implications, especially after the Congress leadership was imprisoned and could not engage in public discussions of the war, at home or abroad, until it ended. It was left to Indian writers and journalists to do so.

Jog's question—Will war come to India?—grasped India's peculiar relation to the war: the deeper India became enmeshed in, and affected by, the war effort, the more uninterested, even hostile, Indian nationalist circles became towards the Allied war effort. For Jog, Abbas, and other Indian nationalists, the British war clashed with India's liberation, was deemed responsible for the horrendous famine, and was then marginalized in memory by independence and partition.

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¹⁶³N. G. Jog, *In Freedom's Quest: A Biography of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1969). Unlike Abbas and Karaka, whose publications interlaced personal and autobiographical materials, Jog's publications did not reveal much about his personal background and how it may have shaped his ideological and political leanings. It is noteworthy, however, that he originated from Satara, a district that would become a focal point of the Quit India movement, where rebels formed a parallel government.

¹⁶⁴Karaka, *I've Shed My Tears*, p. 82.

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