

Nationalism and Indian Community in Malaya during the Japanese Occupation, 1941-1945

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Received 2025-05-01/Accepted 2025-08-26

ABSTRACT—This study examines the transformation of the Indian community in Malaya during the Japanese occupation (1941–45), with a focus on the rise of nationalist consciousness and collective identity. Through the formation and activities of the Indian Independence League (IIL) and the Indian National Army (INA), the Indian community experienced significant organizational and ideological changes. Under Subhas Chandra Bose’s leadership, civilian participation and support for the INA increased dramatically, fostering a sense of unity and purpose. Comparative analysis highlights the differing wartime experiences of Malaya’s major ethnic groups: while Malays benefited from Japanese policies, the Chinese faced harsh repression, leading to intensified interethnic tensions. The findings suggest that the Indian community’s collective wartime experiences fostered political unity and national identity, contributing to both the anti-colonial movement and the post-war restructuring of Malaya’s multi-ethnic society.

Keywords: Indian Nationalism, Indian Independence League, Indian National Army, Subhas Chandra Bose, Malaya

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1. Introduction

Experiences of Indian community in Malaya during the Japanese occupation include the organization and activities of the Indian Independence League (IIL) and the Indian National Army (INA), and the formation of Azad Hind provisional government. It was one of the non-mainstream national movement, away from the Indian sub-continent. The INA was formulated with the British Indian Army war prisoners in Malaya and Singapore for the first time in December 1941. The first INA was dissolved with the arrest of Mohan Singh, a leader of the INA in December 1942. The INA reorganized with the advent of Subhas Chandra Bose in 1943, was marked with the participation and support of the migrant Indians in many areas of Southeast Asia, especially labouring and merchant classes from South India. The organization and activities of the IIL and the INA, therefore, have exerted a direct effect on the lives and consciousness of the Indian community in Malaya. The part of INA, which had been committed to the Burmese front, was captured by the British Army and tried as war criminals with the defeat of the Japanese empire. The whole process affected the national movement in India to a certain degree. The absorption of the INA tradition by people in mainland India, such as the activities of Defence Committees and the broad mass agitation against the trials, led to mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy. The INA tradition enriched the nationalist tradition of India though it did not fundamentally change the mainstream national movement.

There has been a considerable amount of research on the Indian national movement in Malaya including the INA-related issues. Some studies on modern Indian history give salience to the INA in the sense that it had inherited the revolutionary-terrorist aspects of Indian national movement (Sarkar 1983, 410–411). More studies on the INA put the emphasis on the absorption of INA tradition into mainstream national movement by focusing on the post-war INA trial and mass-upheaval against it (Chandra et al. 1989, 471–486; Chandra 2010, 325–7; Bandyopadhyay 2015, 427–31). There are also many biographical writings which describe Subhas Chandra Bose, a prominent leader of INA, as a national hero (Bose et al. 1973; Mookerjee 1975; Mukherjee 1997; Bose 2011). The INA issue was also dealt with in the bigger scene of

the crash of imperialisms in the World War II, and the Japanese Army along with the INA was estimated as the “hammer-blow” from outside which changed the Indian political outlook overnight (Anderson 2015, 47–48). Indian scholars in Southeast Asia carried out research on the INA and the local Indian national movement as part of their studies on the settlement and localization of migrant Indians. One of the classic studies put the emphasis on the strong national consciousness of the two traditionally separate sections of the Indian community, middle-class merchants and professionals and lower-class labourers who started to share after the IIL and INA organization (Arasaratnam 1970). Another study focused on the characteristics of the Indian population and their economic role, and just briefly mentioned the INA and its meaning to the migrant Indian community (Sandhu 1969). These books did not include the concrete case of the participation or changes of consciousness of local Indian people while they underlined the consolidation of identity and the solidarity of the Indian community. It was in comparatively recent times, after the 1990s, when new research reported the Indian experiences in Southeast Asia including the radical national movement during World War II (Netaji Center 1992; Ramasamy 2000, 90-105).

This article investigates the revolutionary national movement during the first half of the 1940s in Malaya and other regions of Southeast Asia. It also aims at probing the changes of lives of the Indian community and the ultimate influence over the Malayan multi-ethnic society by the reconstruction of the facets of the overseas radical national movement. The next section examines the status of the Indian community immediately after the Japanese occupation and during the first INA period in 1942, by reviewing the trial records of ‘enemy agents’ who infiltrated India in 1942. The third section tries to reconstruct the invigoration of nationalism among Indian community in the second INA period, 1943 – 5 through circulars of the IIL and the British intelligence reports. The concise analysis of the experiences of other ethnic groups is undertaken in the fourth section from a comparative perspective with the case of Indian community. The conclusion estimates the overall influence of the radical national activities including INA and IIL over the Indian community and Malaysian multi-ethnic society in general.

2. The First Indian National Army and Indian Community in Malaya, 1942 – 3

The Majority of participants in the first INA were former British Indian Army war prisoners. Some civilians were also recruited from Indian society in Malaya. In his interrogation in 1945, Mohan Singh, a leader of the first INA, stated that on 5 December and 19 December 1942 the INA recruited 1,500 civilians on each date (War Office 2004a), but there remains no records of them. The trial records of ‘enemy agents’, who had infiltrated into India and were captured in 1942, are clear evidence of army recruitment of civilians, as well as the activities of recruits (Government of India 1997). It is notable that the INA established an intelligence school, trained agents, and dispatched them to India. They established the intelligence school as early as the time of the first INA. Statements of the accused in the trial revealed that the Swaraj Institute in Penang was in charge of intelligence training for Indians in 1942. According to the record of Toye, an intelligence officer who interrogated Mohan Singh after the war, a number of teams comprising more than 130 agents infiltrated India in 1942 but no one returned to the INA side (Toye 1984, 376). There is no known evidence of their engaging in espionage in India. Most agents dispatched during the first INA probably returned home or surrendered to the British police.

Agents were dispatched from Malaya to India in five teams in 1942, two teams which comprised five people each arrived at the Malabar coast and Kathiawar coast in rubber boats after moving in a Japanese submarine on 27 September and 29 September, respectively; other three teams which comprised one, three, and six people each, infiltrated inland between the end of October and November, crossing the Indo-Burma border. Individual members of the team were captured, or surrendered between September and November 1942, and tried in April 1943 after interrogations. The trial record shows us the characteristics of the INA agents and the channels of their recruitment in detail. Although the record reflects only a minority, 19 out of 3,000 of the first INA soldiers from the local Indian community, it is one of the rare official documents (Government of Bengal (Home) Def. Branch 1997). The record gives us clues about the relationship between Indian organizations like the IIL and the INA and the members of the Indian community in general.

No.	Name	Age	Caste or race	Occupation	Residence or native place
1	V. M. A. Khadir	23	Mohammedan	Surveyor	Travancore
2	S. A. Anand Alias Thanu Pillay	30	Nanchinat Vellala	Foreman of Works	Trivandrum Town
3	Mohammed Ghani	19	Mohammedan	Student	Trichinopoly
4	K. A. George	27	Christian	School Teacher	Travancore
5	C. P. Eapen	24	Christian	Stenographer	Travancore
6	Lepon D'Cruz	30	Christian	Salesman	Trivandrum Town
7	S. C. Bardhan	26	Kayastha	Telephone Mechanic	Tepparah (East Bengal)
8	Boniface B. Pereira	26	Christian	Draftsman	Travancore
9	K. Mathai Mammen	24	Christian	Chemist	Travancore
10	C. Gopala Krishna Reddy	22	Reddy	Marine Engineer	Chittoor
11	A. Andrew	28	Christian	Radiographer	Bangalore City
12	K. Lochu Govindan	24	Nair	Clerk	Cochin
13	K. M. Cheriyan Alias M. George	27	Christian	Asst. Examiner of Accounts	Travancore
14	M. Gangadharam	24	Nair	Draftsman	Palghat (Kerala)
15	Suprabhat Ranjan Paul	27	Kayastha	Telephone Lineman	Soeniganny, Bengal
16	Phanindranath Roy	28	Kayastha	Clerk	Tipperah, Bengal
17	Jagdish Mittra Kaura	22	Khatri	Landlord	Punjab
18	Fouja Singh	24	Sikh	Farming	Punjab
19	G. Santha Pillai	24	Christian	Student	Tanjore

Table 1 List of the Accused in the trial of 'Enemy Agents' in 1943

In 1942 and 1943, 19 INA agents who infiltrated India were accused and tried. They were accused of “entering India as Enemy Agents of the Government of Japan” and “conspiracy to deprive the King of the Sovereignty of British India by aiding and assisting the Government of Japan”. The personal information of the accused shows that the majority of the agents were from South India and were Christians. This reflects the regional proportion of the Indian community in Malaya. The majority were the professionals, with occupations such as stenographer, chemist, marine engineer, radiographer, and others were listed as student, landlord and farmer. (See Table 1.) This did not match the occupational proportion of the Indian population in Malaya, a majority of which were plantation workers. Only 1 out of 19 was from a plantation, and he was

not a normal labourer, but rather a clerk. People with a comparatively high standard of education were selected as intelligence agents because of the nature of the tasks they performed.

From the interrogation of the accused, we can deduce several facts about the period. The accused uniformly talked about the economic distress during the Japanese occupation. Many of them worked for British companies, or persons before the Japanese occupation, which were closed or being evacuated after the advance of the Japanese. In many cases, the accused started to have a relationship with the IIL, which was originally founded in Kuala Lumpur in 1928 and reactivated in the early 1940s. The process by which the accused became agents gives us insight into the atmosphere of the Indian community during the Japanese occupation. The record depicted a status of abject poverty for the majority of the Indian community “being without work, money, or rice.” Many of the accused went through economic hardships when they lost their jobs in the companies or small businesses after the Japanese advance. In their adversities, the accused nos. 9, 11, 12 and 16 started relationships with the IIL, which resulted in getting new jobs in Japanese-run and IIL-related institutions and/or being admitted to the Swaraj Institute for the intelligence training. For example, accused no. 12, was hired as a Hindustani teacher at the IIL and paid 15 dollars a month after losing his original job, a clerk at a publisher’s office due to discontinuance of a magazine; later he worked as an interpreter for a Japanese officer in Burma before being dispatched to India. Some of the Indians in Malaya were employed by the Japanese Army through the introduction of the IIL or directly employed by IIL, and therefore were provided minimum protection.

Some statements in the trial record provide clues regarding the early reaction of the Indian community to the Japanese advance and subsequent development of the IIL. The statement of witness no. 1 shows the Indian community prepared a countermeasure in an organized manner while facing immense political change during the Japanese occupation. It also teaches us that the leaders of existing Indian organizations supported the IIL and that the IIL was established as an inclusive organization within a short period of time. Witness no. 1, who was employed in a rubber plantation in Kedah and temporarily

stayed at Raghavan's house in Penang during the Japanese occupation, described what he had witnessed. The Indian community immediately formed Peace Community Committees to maintain law and order in the community and to relieve the anxiety of its members. According to his information, it took some time for the IIL to be formed because it did not exist in Malaya. However, once the IIL was formulated by Rash Behari Bose from Japan and Pritam Singh from Thailand, it supplanted many existing Indian organizations and grew to be a huge organization. The leaders who led the existing organizations became leaders of the IIL. It spread all over Malaya and absorbed the Relief Committee which was a relief organization for poor Indians. The existing chief of the Relief Committee became a chairman of the local IIL in Kedah. It was the Japanese Army who provided the rice to the committee.

Singapore experienced a similar situation in the way that the IIL absorbed existing Indian organizations. The statement of accused no. 8, who was a member of the Indian Passive Defence Force, organized by the president of Indian Association of Singapore under the permission of Governor of British government, provides an insight. He observed the situation of the IIL supplanting the existing organization, the Indian Association of Singapore, because he also worked as an Assistant Food Controller of this organization. After Singapore fell, the IIL subsequently organized, and took over the hospital and the food stores of the Indian Passive Defence Force where he continued to work. This demonstrated that the IIL, which came into existence in Southeast Asia with the Japanese occupation, easily constructed their own organization by taking over existing Indian organizations and material resources.

The IIL spread quickly among Indians. According to witness no. 1, membership of the IIL was secured by payment of a dollar, after which a 'ticket,' countersigned by the Japanese, was given to them. It undoubtedly provided Indians who became members with many forms of preferential treatment. Witness no. 1 tried to prove this by stating his own experience: He was able to enter the Kedah aerodrome and also Penang Harbour merely by showing this ticket. Some of the accused said that Indians who did not join the IIL were unable to secure food, were harassed by sentries, had their houses indiscriminately searched and so on. In general, Indian society was restless after seeing the Chinese

beaten by the Japanese and the Europeans, their previous supervisors and protectors had been removed by the Japanese order. This situation made Indians more dependent upon the IIL, because it now played the role of protector from the violence and material supporters for the Indian community.

Most of the accused contacted the IIL, became members due to their hardships, and finally became agents after getting espionage training. Some of the accused were involved in the agent system through direct contact with the Japanese Army. Some undertook the task of gathering information while working in the government institute (accused nos. 18 and 19); others applied through the wanted-ads and were sent to the Swaraj Institute (accused nos. 15 and 17); and another met a Japanese person casually in a restaurant, who persuaded him to get a job and to go to India (accused no. 14). These people chose to resort to their last option in a distressed situation.

The INA was also organized along with the IIL. The INA not only embraced the Indian war prisoners but also recruited civilians, according to witness no. 1. The trial records lack the further information related to the INA. The INA did not attract the interest of general Indians in this early period without visible activities or prominent leaders.

3. The Indian Community during the second INA period, 1943 – 45

The INA started to exercise influence over Indian society in Malaya with the appearance of Suabhas Chandra Bose in 1943. Bose had considerable supporters groups in India, who were mainly former members of the Forward Bloc, and were prominent figures among the Indian nationalist camp. In addition, the reputation of Bose was almost absolute among the nationalists overseas. In the period of the second INA, the participation of Bose gave significance to the INA and there was large-scale recruitment and training of civilians. The INA connected with the Japanese forces was under the surveillance of the British information agencies. The colonial government was making regular reports on Bose and other INA leaders.

The report of the British Information Agency dated 15 October 1943 stated that the morale of both civil and military Indians was quite high everywhere, and that men and women were coming forward in large numbers to volunteer for the INA. The same report reflected the atmosphere of Indian society in Malaya and estimated the status of Bose as high, stating 'Bose used his appeal and his knowledge of mob psychology to good effect and that the results were fairly gratifying to him' (War Office 2004b). He started to contact the Indian community immediately after he entered Southeast Asia and continued his tour throughout Malaya except for a period of four months when he visited Thailand, Burma, and Indochina. He succeeded in expanding the branches of the IIL to localities and plantations and securing human and material resources. An information report in 1944 stated that recruitment for the INA was widely carried out through the advertisements in newspapers, from posters and by visits of recruitment troops (Government of India 2004).

Reaching Malaya and the taking over of the leadership of the IIL by Bose in July 1943 was followed by renewal of the organization. A circular on this renewal and outline of each department was issued on 13 July by Bose, and another circular, containing more detailed directions on 23 July by the recruitment and training departments (IIL Headquarters (Department of Training) 2007; IIL Headquarters (Department of Recruitment) 2007). Departments of the IIL were reorganized into 12 departments, 5 of which were directly related to the INA. The departments of recruitment and supply were newly established, and the department of training was strengthened by absorbing the existing department of youth. Now recruitment and training became the main tasks of the IIL.

Recruitment was carried out by each branch of the IIL with the chairman of that branch as officer-in-charge. The process of the recruitment involved in sequential order each of the following: enrolment of the applicant, a physical check-up, dispatch of the enrollment document and a report of the physical check-up to the head office. This process of recruitment was simplified in order to attract as many applicants as possible. Some regulations were loosened for the smooth recruitment: the age limit of 17 was abolished, the result of a physical check-up was

not an absolute criterion, and any applicant of sound health could be recruited. Bose aimed to recruit 300,000 new personnel including women, according to the circular of the department of recruitment.

The department of training continued the process afterwards. In the first step, trainees took a two hour training session every day while they stayed home and worked. The second step included full day training and admission into a training camp that was divided into general training and special training. General training would admit 5,000 trainees, and out of these first-step trainees, ones with good marks would be selected for the second-step training. In the third and final step, trainees were admitted to the military camp and trained as members of the INA. There were separate special training institutes including the Swaraj Institute and Azad School in Singapore. Special training institutes limited admission to people with a high educational standard, because they aimed at 'turning them into instructors' through further training, according to the British intelligence report (Government of India 2004). All trainees were provided with a uniform, board, and salary.

Bharat Youth's Training Centres were designed for the elementary military training of civilian recruits. They were founded in early 1943 with a 3-month-course (Government of India 2004). At the end of the course, 10% of the recruits were selected and sent for advance training at the Azad Schools, while the remainders were absorbed into the INA. Other training institutes for civilian recruits were established in Burma and Bangkok. The number of INA soldiers who went through these training institutes from 1943 to mid-1944 was 14,000, in two divisions, training camps and Bharat Youth's Training Centres (War Office 2004c). The US government reported the status of Indian minorities in Southeast Asia under the subtitle of 'The Background of the Indian Independence movement' in September 1943 (Office of Strategic Services Research and Analysis Branch 2004). The document reported that the Indian population in Southeast Asia was a potential human resources for the IIL. The report emphasized the important characteristics of the Indian population in Southeast Asia, noting that 'Indian males greatly outnumber the females' and 'a large proportion of them are between the ages of 15 and 35'. This gender ratio was related to the nature of migration of Indians to Malaya, which was largely a labour driven migration.

The INA experienced the rapid growth after 1943. In the first INA period, Mohan Singh continuously had conflicts with the Japanese army regarding the issue of recruitment (Toye 1984, 365-381). When Bose took over the INA, he could freely recruit the civilians initially on the basis of the backing from Japan, and later with the strong material support from the local Indian community. Active recruitment and regular training in localities involved a considerable number of Indians in Malaya, a military style of life and group activities. Experiences of group activities and organizational lives considerably affected the individual Indians and the Indian society in general. The Indian labouring class in Malaya also experienced changes in their mentality and organization. Many labourers volunteered for the INA from 1943 onwards and volunteer troops, Thondar Padai were organized on plantations (Arsaratnam 1970, 108). Two distinct groups in the Indian community, the urban-dwelling middle class and labouring class, mainly located on plantations, started to find a shared Indian identity through these group experiences (Mani and Ramasamy 2006, 5). Organizational experiences through the INA made the establishment of numerous labour unions and political organizations possible in post-war Indian society in Malaya. A few examples include the Indian Congress of Malaya, founded in 1946, The National Union of Plantation Workers in 1954, and DMK(Dravida Munnetra Khazagam) organized in Singapore (Mani and Ramasamy 2006, 8-9).

The INA experiences also enhanced their national consciousness of the Indian community, providing psychological confidence and pride. The training program in the Officers' Training School emphasized morale training and general knowledge, according to the information report (Government of India 2004). Such topics as the Russian revolution, the Irish revolution and the 1857 revolt of India were taught in the Swaraj Institute. Hoisting the tri-colour flag of India and singing Vande Mataram may have been an important ritual to enhance the Indian national consciousness (Government of India 1997). As a result, Indians in Malaya became fighters for Indian independence, not colonial subjects or oppressed labourers. Enhanced national spirit during World War II encouraged the Indian community to construct organizations and to strengthen solidarity.

According to the new constitution of the IIL, that Malaya Branch

required all branches to make substantial contributions towards organization expenses. Apart from this it was also decided to reduce the contribution from the branches from 25% to 5% of membership fees each month from May 1943 onwards (IIL 2004). However, at the same time, the document emphasized that all branches should be financially independent and that the Relief Fund in particular should be funded and used by each branch. Unlike the first INA period when the Japanese Army provided rice to the Relief Fund of the Indian community, economic relief in this circumstance should be carried out by the Indian community themselves. It also demanded that each branch have constant contact with plantation labourers in order to maintain the sound finance through the membership fee. With the settlement of Japanese occupation, plantations reopened and the labourers started to work and received their salary. Labourers were assisted to join the League as many estates resumed work. The IIL branches depended on the regular membership fee of their members and had worked to guarantee the rights and interests of the Indian community through the negotiations with plantations and factories as earlier. The IIL started to restructure its financial frame from 1943 onwards, when the Japanese regime began in the Malaya region.

The British intelligence Report of late 1943 described the treatment of trainees in Bharat Youth's Training Centre and Azad Schools in detail. Rations were good and were supplied by wealthy local members of the IIL. Recruits were issued khaki shirts and shorts, boots, woolen cloth, socks, hose tops, and wore INA caps and breast badges. They were paid at a rate of \$8 per month, while instructors received \$27, \$16 and \$14 per month according to their respective ranks (Government of India 2004). This report mentioned the direct financial support from the Indian community. It is also possible that the salary was, at least, partly covered by fund raising. The circular of the IIL indicated that the costs for local recruitment and first step training should be met by the local committee (IIL Headquarters 2007). The Indian community, with its enhanced national consciousness, financially contributed to the activities of the INA.

These circumstances suggest that the Indian community was not only a source of human resources but also the provider of the INA's

material base. This does not change the fact that the INA was established with the support of Japan, and mainly depended upon the Japanese army. However, it is clear that Indians in Malaya also sacrificed and supported under the system of total mobilization, which affected their entire lives. Unlike the first INA period, when the Indian community economically depended on the IIL, it functioned as the primary source of human and material resources to the INA in the second phase.

4. Comparison with other communities

The Malays who constitute a majority of the Malaya population, did not receive satisfactory treatment during the British colonial period. The British concept of ethnic groups in Malaya categorized Malay people as unsuitable for organized labour therefore did not employ them in the modern industrial units. Usually the Indians and Chinese were considered to be more suitable as industrial workers and were therefore employed in the tin mines and various plantations which gave jobs in quantity. The Malays stayed mainly in rural areas engaged in traditional agriculture, and consequently lagged behind the other communities economically. On the other hand, the Malays who belonged to the ruling class had access to the British administrative structure (Hashim 1983, 18-19).

The British colonial rule inevitably brought about certain transformations in politics and governments in Malaya. The British regime overpowered existing local sultans, but maintained them with the residents in order to ensure law and order, especially in tin mining and other areas of economic importance. The traditional ruling class in Malaya was generally cooperative with the British. However, anti-British movements were not absent. There had been protests against the British colonialism from the late nineteenth century onwards. Anti-colonial movements, including the uprising of the Perak and Nanning War in 1875, the Pahang Rebellion in 1891, the Kelantan uprising in 1915 etc. emerged from various parts of Malaya. Several groups started to organize against British colonialism from the early twentieth century onwards. For example, there was a group of Arabic educated students with politically advanced ideas in the 1920s and an organization that was vaguely Marxist-oriented, anti-feudal and anti-colonial in nature

formed in 1938 (Hashim 1983, 10-12). However, these organizations were few in number, loosely organized, and remained in an embryonic status, failing to develop into full-fledged nationalist organizations.

The Japanese occupation of three and a half years altered the social situations of Malaya. In the nationalist tradition, although meager, the Malays developed antagonism towards the Japanese rule after occupation. The Japanese government stimulated Malay nationalism by ceding the northern states of Kedah, Kelantan, to Thailand (Kratoska 1998, 85-93). Enforced worship of the Japanese Emperor and use of Japanese language resulted in a sense of cultural estrangement, which also led to the naissance of national consciousness among the masses. The Japanese military government in Malaya gave favourable treatment to the Malays and Indians over the Chinese. Japanese policy regarding Malays was conciliatory and they enjoyed a certain status during the Japanese period. It was the Malay people who substituted for Chinese labourers when the latter refused to provide their labour force to the mines and industrial units taken over by the Japanese (Thompson 2001, 97-8). This certainly rewarded the Malays with considerable benefits, as, up to that point, they had been isolated from the benefit of economic modernization. This somehow broke the existing image formulated by the British, of Malays as suitable for agriculture but not industrial works including manufacturing. These changes possibly soothed the antagonism of the Malay people towards the Japanese military government. The Malay people earned economic gains due to the strong nationalist sentiment of the Chinese, but these gains also deteriorated Malay-Chinese relations.

The relationship between the Malays and Indians was not fundamentally changed by the Japanese occupation. Negative aspects remained latent in their relationships, which in many cases corresponded to the moneylenders-debtors relationship. The indebtedness of farmers, rampant in the Southeast Asia, was one of the social problems that occurred to a lesser degree in Malaya. The authority employed the system of Malay Reservation to protect farmers, who were mainly Malays, and restricted land holdings of non-Malays. There had still been cases of illegal transfer of land ownership and the deprivation of land from the Malay people who were its real cultivators (Thompson 2001, 95). These problems

could not easily be corrected because the Japanese took a supportive approach to the Indians as well.

The Chinese have had a long history of immigration to Malaya, and considerable numbers of Chinese migrants settled there since the fifteenth century. Their movement was increased during the British colonial period due to the modernization of the Malay economy and the active inflow of capital. The British colonial government encouraged immigration of the Chinese, who were considered suitable workers for industrial units and providers of cheap labour. They, along with the Indians, were concentrated mainly in the western coastal area of Peninsular Malaya, where the tin mines and rubber plantations were established. The Chinese dominated retail business and trade in addition to a substantial portion of the tin and rubber industry. Migration of the Chinese actively continued until the 1930s, although most of these immigrants were a 'floating population' who temporarily stayed in Malaya and ultimately returned to their home country (Sandhu 1962, 35).

The Chinese accelerated their anti-Japanese struggle since 1937 when the Sino-Japanese War broke out. The Kuomintang-Communist cooperation which began even before that conflict created an atmosphere among the Chinese that temporarily resolved their inner conflicts and encouraged fighting against the foreign enemy. The Chinese had experienced a very strong national consciousness and unity in the 1940s and the Chinese in Malaya were no exception. Hard line policies of the Japanese military against the Chinese also drove the Chinese to be more nationalistic (Akashi 1970, 61-89). Even before the landing of Japanese forces, local Chinese undertook anti-Japanese activities such as fundraising to support China and strikes and boycotts of Japanese goods in protest of Japan's invasion of China in 1937 (Cheah 2002, 97). Accordingly, the Japanese government in Malaya marked them as a dangerous element and employed repressive policies against them.

On the eve of fall of Singapore, British troops, joined by Chinese volunteers, known as Dalforce, after the name of their commander, Lt. Col. John D. Dalley, fought against the Japanese forces. It was an action that manifested the anti-Japanese sentiments of Chinese people, even though they failed to defend Singapore. The Japanese policy towards Chinese people was very repressive in nature and epitomized in the 'Sook

ching' (meaning clean-up) operation and coercive fund raising name the 'gift of atonement' (Cheah 2002, 97). Japan changed the direction of policy to conciliation by allowing Chinese schools and launching bureaus to improve Japanese-Chinese relationship from 1943. However these changes resulted in only limited success.

There was a big contrast between the treatment of the Chinese and that of the Malays and Indians: The former were dangerous enemies to be restrained and whose economic resources were to be utilized, while the latter were the objects of soothing due to their spontaneous cooperation. These distinctly different treatments led to deterioration in the Malay-Chinese relationship. One of the most visible examples was the ethnic clash in Johor in 1945. The Japanese Army carried out anti-guerrilla operation, which means suppression of a Chinese-led resistance movement. Malay village chiefs, police, and local volunteer corps were involved in the operation as directed by Japanese policy. The Chinese labelled it collaboration, seeing Malays as willing instruments of the Japanese. Ethnic strife began in April and spread to many parts of Johor. Armed members of the 'Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army' attacked Malay people who supported and cooperated with the Japanese operation. The Malays declared a jihad organizing 'Red Bands of Sabilillah Army' under religious leaders (Cheah 2002, 82-83). The strife continued until the end of the war in August, leaving numerous victims and refugees. It was one of the seeds of ethnic conflicts to come in post-independence Malaysia.

5. Conclusion

This research focused on the Indian community and their experiences in Malaya, an ethnic minority in a multi-ethnic society. Collective experiences and strengthening of national consciousness among the Indian community affected its characteristics in general during the Japanese occupation and later. The Indian community established a new organization, the IIL, which was based on existing organizations, and had the backing of the Japanese military government. The IIL rapidly grew and stood as a central organization of the Indian community, providing political

and economic protection to the community during the first INA period until the end of 1942. The INA was also established, mainly with former British Indian Army war prisoners. There had been new recruits from civilians, but their numbers were limited. The first INA, headed by Mohan Singh who was a former officer of British Indian Army, had to depend upon the Japanese Army. The influences of the INA were comparatively limited among civilians.

The situation developed markedly when Subhas Chandra Bose took over the INA in 1943. In the second INA period, Bose strengthened the unity of whole Indian community, which was followed by the active participation and donation of Indian civilian society to the INA. The main function of the IIL turned to the recruiting for the INA from civilians, and the raising of funds. Indian community became providers of human and material resources for the freedom struggle of their homeland. Many civilians experienced the organizational life and were inspired by the revolutionary nationalistic ideas through education and propaganda. The organizational experiences and spread of nationalism influenced the various strata of Indian society, which made active organizational attempts possible among the community after World War II.

The experience of the Indian community during World War II profoundly influenced its members, although the INA failed to achieve its goal to free India by the hands of Indian people. Indian people in Malaya underwent a period of nationalism, using their own means to advance the struggle for Indian independence, and feeling a strong sense of solidarity as a whole community. The establishment of organizations and participation in them were also meaningful experiences for members of the Indian community. It seemed to enhance nationalist sentiments and honed the organisational minds and skills of Indian people, which influenced post-war development of the community.

The collective experiences of the other ethnic communities during the Japanese occupation affected the Malaya multi-ethnic society in post-war period. Three major ethnic groups, the Malays, Chinese, and Indians in Malaya experienced strong nationalist

tendencies in the early 1940s, although the extent of these tendencies differed. Their respective experiences were different in nature, especially their relationships with the Japanese military government. It should also be noted that the different experiences of each ethnic group affected not only their respective relationships with the Japanese but also their relationships with the other groups. This resulted in inter-ethnic conflicts in some areas, which aggravated conflict in ethnic group relationships, even in the post-war period. Although one of the predominant characteristics of Malaya society has been its multi-ethnicity, it has suffered protracted conflicts and tensions among different ethnic and/or religious groups. The different experiences of each ethnic group in the recent past, including the period of the Japanese occupation, has provided important clues to understanding this situation.

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