

Some Aspects of the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny: A Historical Review

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Abstract: The 1946 Royal Indian Navy Mutiny was an important, but relatively less acknowledged chapter in India's fight for freedom. What started as a demonstration about bad food, low wages and discrimination quickly turned into a coordinated, politically wakeful revolt that involved almost 20,000 soldiers in the navy and affected 78 ships at major coastal bases. This is historical-qualitative research analyzing the background, causes, context, leadership, suppression and political implications of the mutiny. Based on documents such as official correspondence, military records and government reports, it demonstrates that the rebellion was about more than simply working conditions. It was a strong declaration of grass-roots anti-colonial resistance. Though leaders of the stature of Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah were hesitant to endorse it, the Communist Party of India supported it wholeheartedly, organizing students and workers. Although ruthlessly crushed by the British, the mutiny exposed the weaknesses of the colonial state and showed that Indian soldiers were becoming politically conscious and also how multi-ethnic and multi-religious solidarity was also a possibility. In retelling this event, the research emphasizes the heroic action of these largely overlooked figures and argues for their inclusion in the broader history of India's struggle for freedom

Key Words: Navy Mutiny, Indian Independence, Military Resistance, Colonial Rule, Racial Discrimination.

Introduction

It cannot be said that the transition from being a certified merchant group to becoming the ruling class and subsequently managing the system of governance was a smooth path for British colonial rule. For 190 years, the people of this region were bound to the chains of subjugation.¹ Yet, whenever the opportunity arose, engaging in anti-British movements and struggles was a natural course of action. Every anti-British movement emerged from a specific context. Among all the movements and struggles that took place, the most significant rebellion was the Naval Mutiny. It occurred in Bombay, now Mumbai, from February 18 to February 23 in 1946. This mutiny struck a severe blow

to the dying colonial authority of British rule. Although the Naval Mutiny was a courageous episode in the history of the anti-British freedom struggle, it has remained a largely neglected and unstudied subject. The Naval Mutiny began aboard the HMIS Talwar ship stationed in Mumbai. The first spark of the rebellion arose from the provision of substandard food and discriminatory behavior. However, what began as a strike soon evolved into a coordinated uprising. It rapidly spread to key naval bases across the country. Nearly 20,000 navy soldiers took part in the mutiny. Moreover, the impact of the rebellion swiftly escalated to 78 ships stationed in coastal areas.² At one point, the rebellion was no longer just about improving the soldiers' socio-economic conditions. It quickly turned into a politically conscious movement. Through the slogans *Jai Hind* and *Inqilab Zindabad*, a clear political message was delivered to the British government. In defiance of the Union Jack, the symbol of British colonial rule, the tricolor flag of the Indian National Congress, the green flag of the Muslim League and the red flag of the Communist Party of India was hoisted, an act that stood as a symbol of courage. This decision dramatically exemplified an anti-British nationalist sentiment and was explicitly a rival assertion of authority over British rule.³ Not even the leading lights such as Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah backed the Naval Mutiny. Such positions reflect the precise ideological splits within the anti-colonial political landscape. They also expose differences over political calculations.⁴ Meanwhile, the Communist Party of India was a strong proponent of the 1946 Naval Mutiny. In reality, they mobilized students and all the oppressed masses in Mumbai to conduct a huge general strike which paralyzed the city. However, the British government succeeded in crushing the rebellion eventually through harsh repression. Hundreds of naval men were kicked out of service and arrested. The British had a speedy control over the movement because of this sufficient element. The 1946 uprising was no less forceful and wider in scope than previous movements and uprisings. However, many see the revolt merely as a spontaneous process of discontent but not as a real serious revolution.

The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny needs to be reassessed as an important event in the freedom struggle of the Indian people. Scholars have analyzed thoroughly the reasons for the failure of the revolt, its spread, the process of suppression and consequences. This research shows that the mutiny was not simply a protest against working conditions. It came from the grassroots and was a powerful symbol of armed anti-colonial resistance. The paper shows how, within the ruling nationalist discourse, even those who have been neglected, namely the navy soldiers, also played a heroic role in the anti-colonial struggle.

Literature Review

The Royal Indian Navy (RIN) Mutiny of 1946 has caught the eye of historians for being one of the most significant yet neglected events in India's freedom movement. Academics have analyzed its causes, suppression, and effects through the nationalist, Marxist and subaltern lenses but there are still significant interpretive gaps in between. Bipan Chandra believes that the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny was the last event which led to the end of British rule in India.⁵ He emphasized its nationalistic significance and link with the larger national freedom struggle. According to the Marxist view, the revolt was a protest of the people against colonial exploitation gradually including the issues of poor rations, racism, and wage disparity. Gourgey explains how and why the mutiny started in 1946, showing how British colonization was challenged through the ratings of the Royal Indian Navy. The socio-political background is looked into by him while focusing on caste discrimination, poor conditions, nationalists' impact, and other such things.⁶ Although the Naval Mutiny has traditionally been viewed as part of the broader anti-colonial movement, recent research has more precisely identified its underlying context. Among the key factors that contributed to the rebellion were the unhealthy working conditions in the navy, systemic racial discrimination, and organized criminal networks involving British soldiers.⁷ However, this line of scholarship pays limited attention to the micro-level narratives of the navy soldiers themselves including the background factors, British

suppression, and the broader historical significance of the 1946 mutiny within India's anti-colonial resistance.

Methodology

Using a historical qualitative study, the paper analyses the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) Mutiny of 1946. This paper aims to investigate the causes, context, suppression, leadership, political responses, and historical significance of the mutiny. A number of primary and secondary sources were used to develop the paper thoroughly and systematically. To compile primary data, online resources were utilized from the British National Archives and the National Archives of India. The study examines official correspondence, military documents, and government reports. The origins of the revolt, the discontent of navy soldiers, and the reactions of the colonial government will be studied. The reactions of the conventional political parties in British India will also be studied and analyzed. The recollections and oral narratives of mutineers, military personnel, and common people would provide valuable insights into the leadership and internal structuring of the mutiny and its significance. Seeing how the rebellion shaped real people's lives gives a deeper understanding of it. We have used scholarly journal articles, historical research monographs, and conceptual reviews as secondary sources. The rebellion can be placed in the larger sphere of anti-colonial armed resistance. The critical role of the British suppression strategies, administrative policy, and British government repression will also be analyzed through final analysis of the study for the evaluation of how the mutiny impacted colonial rule.

Background

The Royal Indian Mutiny was an inseparable part of the broader armed resistance movements that were emerging across various corners of colonized India, all driven by the common desire to break free from the chains of subjugation.⁸ The contribution of Indian navy soldiers to the British Empire's major wars, the First World War (1914–1918) and the Second World War (1939–1945), was vast and multifaceted.⁹ During World War I, over 1.3 million Indians (Native Soldiers) served overseas, including on the Western

Front in France and Belgium, in Mesopotamia, Gallipoli, and East Africa.¹⁰ Compared to the First World War, the Second World War was far more devastating and widespread. In this war, over 2.5 million Indians including navy soldiers were recruited. Among all the British colonial territories, India contributed the largest number of volunteer troops to serve under the British.¹¹ Indian troops were deployed in important military operations in North Africa, the Middle East, Italy and Southeast Asia. In particular, the defense of British Burma and the Battle of Imphal-Kohima in 1944, considered a turning point in the Asian theatre were conducted primarily by Indian troops.¹² So, in both wars, British India was one of the empire's major sources of manpower, playing an essential role in military operations. Indian soldiers' participation in these wars resulted in a certain kind of first-hand experience. This experience deeply influenced changes in their political consciousness and psychological state. These inevitable changes within the military posed new kinds of challenges for the British administration after the second world war. The direct observation of racial discrimination, poor treatment toward them, and the process of dismissal from service without proper rehabilitation after the war culminated in the 1946 naval mutiny. As mentioned earlier, the Indian navy soldiers who went to the battlefield during the First and Second World Wars displayed remarkable bravery. They risked their lives fighting on behalf of the British government. Indian navy soldiers were deployed in the most bloody and dangerous operations. In those areas of deployment, there were neither adequate medical facilities nor sufficient logistical support. Even after demonstrating extraordinary courage and sacrifice under such adverse conditions, Indian navy soldiers were kept subordinate to the British command. On the battlefield, they regularly faced racial discrimination, received lower pay than British navy soldiers even in high-risk fronts, and were denied fair opportunities for promotion.¹³ These experiences slowly changed the soldiers' loyalty to the British. On the one hand, the British commanders used Indian navy soldiers to facilitate their own dominance on the world stage. On the other hand, they were still unwilling to install a representative government in British India.

It was a complete contradiction that Indian soldiers were laying down their lives on foreign soil in the name of freedom while being deprived of this very freedom in their own homeland. Many soldiers of the Indian Navy were influenced by Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army (INA) and Japanese broadcasts. They started to notice the sensibilities of anti-colonialism and grew interested in the socialist ideas of the Soviet Union and India.¹⁴ From 1945 to 1946, the British colonial government held INA soldiers' trials at the Red Fort in Delhi. The trials were condemned and people became unhappy and staged protests. Various political parties, student organizations, and sections of the working class came together and took to the streets to oppose the trials.¹⁵ After the war, the demobilization process was chaotic. Furthermore, appropriate job opportunities were scarce. A lot of the returning soldiers were looked upon with suspicion by the colonial government.¹⁶

Consequently, many ex-servicemen began to feel neglected and developed a strong sense of psychological deprivation. The increasing displeasure and anger were no longer limited to the former soldiers alone but also started to spread in the ranks of the active soldiers. The combined frustration, particularly among naval ratings, created a fertile ground for organized resistance. Naval Mutiny was also caused by foreign factors; it was not local. The bitter experiences of the soldiers in overseas environments and their contact with foreign political consciousness also shaped it profoundly.¹⁷

Political Upheavals in British India

The year 1940 saw a rise in the intensity of the nationalist movement across the country, the organization of the working classes and radicalization of ideologies.



Figure 1: Political Unrest Indicators
Source: Author's compilation

There were three events in particular: the Quit India Movement (1942), the trials of the Indian National Army (INA) (1945–46), and the wave of urban labor discontent that excited the political climate of the period.¹⁸ These events had a deep impact on the psyche of young Indian navy soldiers and helped to foster a spirit of rebellion among them. After the failure of the Cripps Mission, widespread dissatisfaction engulfed British India. A deep sense of despair descended upon Indian politics. When the Cripps Commission outright rejected the demand for forming a war-time national government, the political atmosphere became increasingly tense and complex. On August 8, 1942, the historic session of the Indian National Congress was held in Mumbai. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, a proposal was adopted to launch a massive non-violent civil disobedience movement. In his address, Gandhi famously declared “Do or Die”.¹⁹ However, the British government was neither willing to transfer power to Indians, nor ready to entrust them with the responsibility of national defense. Instead, the colonial authorities resolved to crush the Quit India Movement at its inception. On the night of August 8, 1942, the British police arrested top leaders such as Gandhi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, and Jawaharlal Nehru. News of their arrest triggered widespread outrage across the country. In the absence of leadership and centralized organization, the masses took to the streets in spontaneous and uncoordinated protests. Nationwide strikes erupted in factories, schools, and colleges. People demanded the immediate release of their leaders.²⁰ The

protests turned increasingly militant. Stones were hurled at moving trains, railway stations were set on fire, and tracks were uprooted.

Telephone, Telegraph and lines were cut, and government buildings were set ablaze. Soon, the movement transformed into a vast mass uprising. The popular resistance movement spread vigorously in many areas like Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Midnapore, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. This mass uprising was eventually suppressed by the British government with brute force.²¹ The oppression, the bloodshed, and the memory of the violence remained vivid. The revolt was not just an episode of rebellion but a sign of organized mass opposition to the British imperial power.²²

The Indian National Army (INA), formed by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose grew to be an important factor in India's struggle for freedom against British colonial rule even though it ultimately failed in its mission of securing India's independence from the British empire.²³ Nevertheless, the campaign of the INA left a powerful nationalist and patriotic mark. In November 1945, the British government put three senior INA officers on a treason trial at the Red Fort in Delhi. They were Prem Sahgal, Shah Nawaz Khan and Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon.²⁴ These three officers, hailing from different regions, languages and religions of India, came to symbolize the spirit of united Indian resistance against colonial oppression. The trials of members of the Indian National Army (INA) questioned the moral foundations of colonial rule.

The INA trial sparked strong emotional and political reactions from the Indian Navy when it took place. The British Empire claimed the lives of many navy soldiers on different war fronts during World War Two. However, they noticed that the soldiers of the INA had fought to free India but were now being branded as traitors and punished severely by the same colonial state. The Indian Navy was filled with feelings of injustice and betrayal because of this obvious double standard. They were no longer content to see themselves simply as the servants of the empire. This sense of identity and national consciousness drove the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) to mutiny in February, 1946. The mutineers, in their proclamations, showed a great deal of admiration for the INA

and repeatedly asked for the release of its prisoners. The INA trials had sown a seed for the history books. The harvest of that seed was seen in the armed conscious resistance of RIN. The RIN movement shook British rule in India to its foundations.

Between 1945 and 1946, there was a dramatic increase in labor unrest in urban areas. This combined with the political tension building up. The working class in British India suffered tremendous financial pressure due to wartime inflation. Furthermore, there was food scarcity and fear of unemployment. In Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai, dockworkers, mill men, clerks, and railway men went on widespread strikes for better wages and better circumstances.²⁵ Many of these labor movements were organized or supported by the Communist Party of India. The party had gained ground during the war years and maintained close ties with student unions and working-class networks.²⁶

It is clear from the above discussion that in the period before independence, notably during the 1940s British India was going through a new and never-seen-before phase of mass rebellions. British overseas rule was basically weakened by the intensity and scale of these uprisings. The British government was aware that the methods by which it had governed India for so long could not be continued. The methods of governance and oppression in British India had changed. They were no longer effective. The popular movements in that decade were widespread, deep-rooted and intense. In addition, these mass movements were not targeted exclusively against British imperialism. In many instances, they targeted indigenous exploitative classes, triggering powerful mobilizations against the elite who were beneficiaries of British rule. The Indian National Congress wished to negotiate with the British to secure independence while the Muslim League set its eye on an independent Pakistan. In the backdrop of the adversities created by imperialism, nationalism and communalism, India's socio-political-cultural development moved steadily towards 1947. In this volatile and transforming context, the mass movements added a new political dimension. The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny happened in this broad context. The Indian armed forces' rebellion

proved a clear breakdown of the colonial state's control over them.

Triggering Factors Behind the Mutiny

The figure 2 highlights the causes of the mutiny, where racial discrimination, salary differences, discrimination in promotion, discrimination in food, and unhealthy housing are highlighted. For all these reasons, political awareness and nationalist ideology inspired the army to engage in anti-British movements.

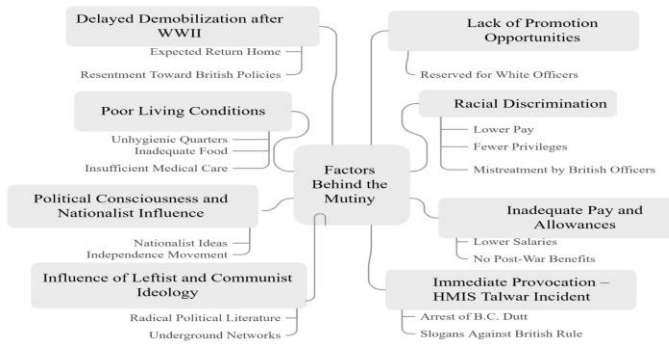


Figure 2: Framework of Grievances Leading to the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny
Source: Author's compilation

The flare-up of the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny on February 18, 1946, was rooted in years of systemic neglect, institutional racism, and deteriorating living standards for Indian soldiers. The mutiny began at HMIS Talwar, a shore-based signals training station in Mumbai, where discontent among the ratings (enlisted soldiers) had reached a boiling point. Among the basic needs of human beings, food stands as the first and foremost criterion.²⁷ Members of the security forces and affiliated units engage in physically demanding tasks on a daily basis, making nutritious and balanced meals essential for their well-being. The Indian navy soldiers serving in the Royal Indian Navy had long been raising complaints to the British authorities about the substandard quality of food they were being served. Alongside this, they also brought attention to issues such as unequal ration distribution and the unhygienic and unsanitary conditions of the kitchens where

their meals were prepared. Hygiene and health are closely associated. Unsanitary and polluted places spread infectious disease pathogens easily. Nonetheless, British colonial authorities constantly neglected the genuine grievances of Indian navy soldiers. The repeated negligence triggered discontentment to the extent that the soldiers were dissatisfied which became one of the causes of the mutiny outbreak. The food served had poor nutritional value and was often spoiled and unfit for human consumption.²⁸ This mismanagement and neglect served as one of the primary causes of the mutiny.

Indian's naval ratings were unhappy with not just the quality or taste of food but also with the lack of dignity and respect. While Indian navy soldiers were forced to eat stale rotten bread with watery lentils, British officers of the same rank and based at the same base were served good quality meals separately. The difference was a daily reminder of the racism embedded in the colonial system. Besides the food crisis, the daily working environment of Indian Navy soldiers was highly discriminatory and humiliating. British officers often abused Indian ratings, regularly calling them things like "coolie" and other insults. It reflected the racist and demeaning mindset of the colonial establishment.²⁹ Such linguistic and psychological abuse not only damaged the soldier's self-esteem, but also exposed the inequalities and oppressive relationships within the colonial military structure. This constant humiliation and unequal treatment strengthened the foundations of the rebellion and fueled the general resentment towards explosion.³⁰ The British believed they were racially superior to the 'natives'. The social difference they created further institutionalized colonial hierarchies. It was usual to have separate mess rooms, toilets and recreation areas which created a divide between Indian and British soldiers. Indian ratings were fully barred from entering British officers' quarters, even while on official duty. British soldiers seldom faced punishments, while the Indian navy were punished heavily for even minuscule infractions of rules. This institutionalized form of discrimination created a daily encounter with humiliation. The exposure of the racial and exploitative nature of the colonial military system laid the

foundation for the resistance movement. The wages of Indian ratings were many times lower than those of British soldiers. For example, an Indian soldier on the ship *Talwar* received less pay than the British despite working 12 hours a day in mental agony. When Indian navy soldiers complained to their supervisors about the above issues, the supervisors ignored them. They even threatened to punish them. Such repressive policies deepened the resentment among the ratings and eventually paved the way for organized rebellion. The situation became most turbulent when the ratings of the *Talwar* did not take into account the complaints of substandard food. The contemptuous attitude of the British officers towards the ratings caused an eruption like a volcano.

On 18 February 1946, the navy soldiers of the *Talwar* ship went on a hunger strike as part of a symbolic protest. They refused to eat and perform their duties. Initially, it may seem that the soldier's position was about the quality of inadequate food. But the movement added a different dimension to the well-organized resistance against discrimination and humiliation. The symbolic hunger strike action by the ratings soon turned into a well-organized movement. They took control of the relevant naval base and hoisted flags with nationalist slogans.³¹ The ratings on the *Talwar* coordinated with other stations and ships to call for all-out unity against the British. The movement, which initially began around food and job problems, quickly changed its character. Gradually, the scope of their demands increased, which later acquired a political character.³² Although political awareness had been developing for a long time, the proximate causes of the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny were deeply rooted in the daily lives of the rating's substandard food, racist abuse, and degrading service conditions. These factors made daily life unbearable for the Indian Navy. The accumulated anger and deprivation experienced by thousands of navy soldiers eventually erupted into mutiny. The mutiny was not just political symbolism, but an expression of an inner and organized resistance against long-standing physical, social, and psychological oppression. The immediacy and intensity of this anger explain why the mutiny spread so quickly. Starting from a training camp in Mumbai, it spread to 78 ships and shore bases across India

within 48 hours.³³ The combined memories and feelings of these experiences formed the basis of a deep solidarity among the ratings, which helped to organize and expand the rebellion. It was a collective transformation of personal resentments that was able to challenge the very foundations of colonial rule.

The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny, which began on February 18, 1946, unfolded rapidly across the Indian subcontinent and represented one of the most widespread and coordinated acts of military defiance against British colonial rule. What started as a localized protest at HMIS *Talwar* in Mumbai quickly expanded into a full-scale revolt involving over 20,000 navy soldiers on 78 ships and shore establishments across Mumbai, Karachi, Kolkata, Chennai, Cochin, and Vizagapatam.³⁴

Table 1: Timeline of the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny (February 18–23, 1946)

Date	Event
Feb 18, 1946	Mutiny begins at HMIS <i>Talwar</i> , Mumbai. Hunger strike and protest initiated.
Feb 19, 1946	Mutiny spreads to Castle Barracks and other ships in Mumbai.
Feb 20, 1946	Revolt reaches Karachi, Kolkata and Chennai. Strike committees formed.
Feb 21, 1946	General strike across Mumbai; civilian unrest and rioting across the city.
Feb 22, 1946	British authorities issue an ultimatum; military suppression of mutiny begins.
Feb 23, 1946	Mutineers surrender; over 500 arrested or dismissed from service.

Source: Ronald Spector, *The Royal Indian Navy Strike of 1946: A Study of Cohesion and Disintegration in Colonial Armed Forces* (Armed Forces & Society, 1981), 271–284.

The main fighting broke out from 21st February. The call of the naval mutineers was well expressed through the Urdu song composed by the poet Josh Malihabadi popularly sung by the rating: “kaam hai mera taghayyur, nam hai mera shahab. Mera nara Inquilab O-Inquilab O-Inquilab” (My job is

to change, my name is youth, and my slogan is Revolution! Revolution! Revolution!).³⁵

Leadership and Coordination

The Royal Indian Navy (RIN) Mutiny of 1946 was an exceptional military uprising, led by the rank and file of the soldiers, without direct direction from any external political party or higher military authority. One of the most important features of the mutiny was its decentralized but well-coordinated leadership structure, which emerged in many places within the colonial navy. At the heart of this process was the Naval Central Strike Committee (NCSC) an interim strike committee formed primarily by politically conscious young soldiers such as Signalmen M.S. Khan and Telegraphist Madan Singh.³⁶ Although the committee had no constitution or formal organization of its own, it played an effective role in communicating with the mutinous soldiers, articulating their demands, and determining the pace and direction of the movement. They tried to evade British censorship by using radio signals, oral messages, and internal networks to exchange information and messages. These leaders were trying to expand the rebellion beyond food and wage grievances to a broader political and moral protest. When the naval mutiny broke out in February 1946, some demands were presented by the ratings. These demands were not only for professionals but there were also political demands hidden in them.

Table 2: Categorized Demands

Category	Specific Demands
Political Demands	<p>Immediate release of Captain Rashid Ali and Captain Borhan Uddin.</p> <p>Release of Azad Hind Fauj (INA) members.</p> <p>Liberation of all political/state prisoners.</p> <p>Withdrawal of Indian troops from Indonesia.</p>
Institutional Reform	<p>Improvement of working conditions in the Royal Indian Navy.</p> <p>Abolition of discriminatory exemption rules for Indian naval personnel.</p>

Racial Justice and Respect	Formal apology from Captain King for his racist and insulting behavior towards Indian soldiers. End to disrespectful and humiliating treatment of Indian naval professionals.
Civil-Military Justice	Immediate cessation of persecution of Indian civilians by British military and police officers.
Material and Welfare Demands	Improvement of food quality provided to naval personnel. Provision of adequate basic facilities and welfare support for Indian soldiers.

Source: Nicholas Mansergh, ed., *Constitutional Relations Between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power, 1942-7, Volume- V: The Simla Conference, Background and Proceedings, 1 September 1944-28 July 1945*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1974).

However, this decentralized leadership also had its limitations. The refusal of the mainstream political leadership, notably, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah to directly support the rebellion weakened the strategic thrust of the movement. In addition, the colonial administration's tactics of repression and isolation successfully undermined the foundation of this decentralized leadership. As a result, although this structure of leadership and coordination is considered a historical example where the ruled organized themselves to resist the ruler, the lack of political patronage and organizational weakness hampered the sustainability of the rebellion. Nevertheless, this leadership became a symbol of the political consciousness and democratic aspirations that had accumulated within the colonial army.

Suppression of the 1946 Royal Indian Navy Mutiny

The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny of 1946 which began on 18 February 1946, is considered a landmark and symbolic event in the anti-colonial movement in the Indian subcontinent. Although the mutiny began as a soldier's protest against the poor living conditions, wage inequality, and racial discrimination of soldiers, it quickly transformed into a politically conscious and well-organized rebellion that

seriously challenged the foundations of British colonial authority. The mutiny involved more than 78 ships and submarines and spread to more than 20 cities in India including Mumbai, Karachi, and Kolkata.³⁷ The scale and organization of the rebellion sent a clear message to the British administration that the loyalty of the Indian armed forces to colonial rule had finally broken down.

The strategy adopted by the British colonial government to suppress the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny of 1946 was essentially a combination of military repression and selective tactical concessions. Immediately after the mutiny began, the administration deployed several army units and launched armed interventions to recapture naval bases. They attempted to recapture bases from the mutinous navy soldiers by deploying warships along the coast and sending troops to strategic towns. Although the mutiny spread rapidly and the organized resistance of the ratings was evident, the British administration was able to re-establish control over most of the bases within a few days. The process of suppressing the mutiny was multifaceted and politically sensitive. The British government did not limit itself to the use of military force, but also attempted to strategically neutralize the movement by creating divisions among the mutinous through threats, intimidation, and promises of limited reforms. This two-pronged strategy of repressive hard force on the one hand, seductive diplomacy on the other represents the last desperate attempt to preserve the existence of the British colonial state. Although promises of improvement were made in some cases, the British government characterized the rebellion as a breach of discipline and disloyalty to the British throne. After the rebellion was brought under control, many navy soldiers were arrested and some of the leaders of the movement were given exemplary punishments.

Table 3: Casualties and Arrests During the Suppression (Report Centre, Date: 22nd Feb 1946)

Category	Causalities	Killed	Wounded	Total
Indian	-	1	12	12
British		200	213	413
Arrested				

Indian (All Civilians)	126	-	-	125
British	70	-	-	70

Source: Biswanath Bose, *RIN Mutiny: 1946*, (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1988), 46.

This rebellion, although suppressed militarily, nevertheless revived the workers and student's movements throughout India and created a new wave of protest strikes. The British government clearly understood that it was no longer possible to continue their rule in India. As a result, the colonial administration was forced to accelerate the process of granting independence. However, this policy of repression failed to suppress Indian nationalist sentiments and the public's hostility towards colonial rule. Despite the suppression of the rebellion, it weakened the foundations of colonial rule and foreshadowed the inevitable fall of British rule.

Historical Significance

The uprising began on a Monday and ended on a Saturday, a period of only six days.³⁸ Although it was short-lived in time, its impact was far-reaching. This is because the uprising was not limited to a military coup, but rather transformed into a larger popular resistance through sincere and active expressions of popular solidarity in various regions. The Royal Indian Navy (RIN) mutiny represented a distinctive and radical form of anti-colonial resistance. It was armed, spontaneous, and without centralized leadership, in contrast to the organized, negotiated, and leader-driven strategy of the traditional Indian nationalist movement. While the mainstream political leadership was pursuing a path of transfer of power through controlled dialogue with the colonial powers, the mutiny was an expression of a different anti-colonial spirit that moved toward direct resistance to state violence. In the complex and long struggle for national liberation and the movement of the subcontinent, the spark of the naval mutiny, although short-lived like a comet, had great significance and importance. For the first and last time, in the last naval mutiny before independence, the blood of the

Indian people and the blood of the navy soldiers were shed together for a common ideal, the desire for freedom.

'Our strike is a historic event in the life of the nation. For the first time, the blood of the military and the common people flowed together on the streets for the same cause. We, the members of the armed forces, will never forget this. And we know that our brothers and sisters will never forget either. Long live our great people!'³⁹

One of the features of the turbulent politics of the 1940s was communal frenzy, behind which the National Congress, Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League had more or less contributed. In such a situation, the naval mutineers set an example of unique communal harmony. During the strike, their demands included socio-economic and political demands. As a symbol of unity, the National Congress, Communist and Muslim League flags were hoisted together.⁴⁰ Where the upper-class leaders could not rise above the communal divide, it goes without saying that these ordinary naval soldiers demonstrated a high-minded political consciousness.

The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny is a significant historical event because it transcended religious and regional divisions to demonstrate a rare unity among Indian navy soldiers and the general public. The combined participation of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh soldiers gave the mutiny a form of universal resistance, where not individual or communal identities, but a collective protest against colonial exploitation became the main focus. This multi-ethnic and multi-religious solidarity carried an immediate political message. It also helped lay the foundation for the larger non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements in India later. The mutiny had a significant impact on shaping public opinion and the movement towards a larger and more aggressive struggle against colonial rule on the eve of India's independence in 1947.⁴¹ After this mutiny, the British government realized that it was no longer possible to maintain military and administrative control over India. The widespread discontent within the military and the naval forces' expressions of solidarity with the general public seriously damaged the credibility and authority of British rule. As a result, the

British administration was forced to take a series of political and diplomatic initiatives, which ultimately paved the way for India's independence in 1947. The mutiny is therefore marked as a turning point, which set the pace for the final phase of colonial rule and is considered one of the main reasons for the final breakdown of British imperialism. Clement Attlee, the former Prime Minister of England, was an influential orator and a renowned parliamentarian of his time. In a discussion with the then Provisional Governor of West Bengal, Phani Bhushan Chakraborty, Attlee said that while there were various reasons behind India's full independence such as mass movements, political unrest, food shortages, etc., the most important reason in his opinion was the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) Mutiny of 1946. He frankly admitted that this mutiny shook the foundations of the British Empire and ultimately precipitated the decision to grant India independence.⁴² The naval mutiny of 1946 was an event that brought back the painful memories of 1857. And the significance of the naval mutiny in the making of nationalist history is important because it posed a formidable challenge to the British Raj. The awakening of political consciousness in the army was the source of this mutiny. During the mutiny, a brotherly relationship was established between the mutinous soldiers and the common people of various cities of India, and in that relationship lay hidden great revolutionary potential. This unprecedented awakening of the navy soldiers appeared as a final blow against colonial rule.⁴³

Conclusion

The Royal Indian mutiny was a landmark in the progression of anti-British movements. For the British, that had already been on the cards, but this was also the last nail in removing British colonial administration. It was not just a statement of grievances over food, pay or racial discrimination. It was as well an extremely organized and politically aware resistance of common navy soldiers against the colonial military structure. The mutiny spread with surprising swiftness to a number of naval bases, including Mumbai, Kolkata and Karachi, increasing pressure on British authority. The British government used the military to stop the mutiny and gave some concessions to the rebels. This helped them in stopping

the rebellion but ultimately, the mutiny weakened the foundation of British colonial rule in India. It was soon realized that the desire for freedom and the spirit of revolt was also present in the navy. This rebellion made the British realize that they could no longer have control over British India and its people. The colonial grip had loosened, and this was one of the greatest assault signals of the last stage of colonization. The revolt emerged as a major and deep political statement of Hindu-Muslim unity which was an anomaly of the times, colonial rule notwithstanding. The socio-political reality at the time was deeply communal, with deliberate support from colonial policy. The unified stand of the soldiers, regardless of their religion, signifies the psychological and organizational outline of the resistance besides a larger national solidarity. The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny should be considered an emblem of a significant resistance where not just top political leaders military but also regular navy soldiers played a strong role in the history of struggle for independence.

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