

**ROYAL INDIAN NAVY MUTINY:
A STUDY OF ITS IMPACT IN SOUTH INDIA**

Thesis
Submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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HISTORY

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis entitled **Royal Indian Navy Mutiny: A Study of Its Impact in South India** submitted for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in History**, University of Calicut is a record of bonafide research carried out by **Priya. P**, under my supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any Degree before.

Place : C.U.Campus,
Date : 06-03-2014.

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DECLARATION

I, **Priya. P.**, do hereby declare that this thesis entitled **Royal Indian Navy Mutiny: A Study of Its Impact in South India** is a bonafide record of research work done by me and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any other degrees.

Place: C.U.Campus,
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Abbreviations

AICC	:	All India Congress Committee
BPCC	:	Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee
CDD	:	Civil Defence Department
CER	:	Report of the RIN Mutiny Commission of Enquiry
CO	:	Commanding Officer
CPO	:	Chief Petty Officer
CSD	:	Civil Supplies Department
FOCRIN	:	Flag Officer Commanding Royal Indian Navy
GOI	:	Government of India
HFM	:	History of Freedom Movement
HMIS	:	His Majesty's Indian Ship.
INA	:	Indian National Army
JNU	:	Jawaharlal Nehru University
KSA	:	Kerala State Archives
Lt.	:	Lieutenant
MAR	:	Madras Administration Report
MDG	:	Malabar District Gazette
MSA	:	Maharashtra State Archives
NAI	:	National Archives of India
NCO	:	Non-Commissioned Officer
NCSC	:	Naval Central Strike Committee
NHQ	:	Naval Head Quarter
NL	:	Naval Law
NMML	:	Nehru Memorial Museum & Library
NWF	:	National War Front
PO	:	Petty Officer
RAK	:	Regional Archives, Kozhikode
RAPM	:	Report on the Administration of the Police of the Madras province
RIAF	:	Royal Indian Air Force
RIASC	:	Royal Indian Army Supply Corps
RIN	:	Royal Indian Navy
RN	:	Royal Navy
SR	:	Summary of the Report of the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny Commission of Enquiry
TAR	:	Travancore Administration Report
TNCC	:	Tamil Nadu Congress Committee
TSA	:	Tamil Nadu State Archives
USSF	:	Under Secretary's Safe Files
WRINS	:	Women's Royal Indian Naval Service

INTRODUCTION

Priya P. “Royal Indian Navy Mutiny: a study of its impact in South India” Thesis, Department of history, University of Calicut, 2014.

INTRODUCTION

Social scientists, when they write about the post-Second World War situation in India, generally concentrate on the partition and constitutional developments. That this period witnessed large scale popular protest is often forgotten. **The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny** (RIN Mutiny) constituted an important aspect of this.

The period between the end of the Second World War (1939-45) and the attainment of independence by India was very crucial in history, both in terms of the history of the Indian people and their struggle against imperialism and the history of British colonialism in India. This period was the climatic stage in which the logic of anti-imperialists movements from 1920-42, we can see that these movements intended to move along Constitutional lines. In 1920-22, 1930-32 and 1942 even on such occasions, repression was never immediate and pervasive except in 1942 but delayed and selective. However, Indian and British official sources were apprehending a revolutionary situation in the post-war India. It has been described as ‘sitting on a heap of dynamite’ or ‘on the edge of the volcano.’¹ The official sources admitted that as soon as the war ended, there was a renewal of political agitation and the fomenting of popular discontent and this were followed by mutinies, strikes, outbreaks of disorder and the threat of rebellion and civil war.² General Claude Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of the armed forces in India, in a secret report to the British Cabinet on December 1, 1945, summed up the situation in India in these words:

We must be prepared to deal with well-organised revolution next spring, and the possibility of a serious, but less well-organised rising at any time during the coming winter....when trouble comes; it may

¹ . Regarding the post-war situation of India, Nehru observed that India is on the brink of a mighty revolution, Speech at Lahore, 18 November, 1945 cited in Sarvepalli Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol.XIV, New Delhi, 1981, p.175.

² . See Penderel Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, New Delhi, 1973, Introduction, p. xiii.

be on a greater scale than in August 1942. The principal danger areas are likely to lie in UP, Bihar and Bengal.³

The Second World War ended not only in the total defeat of Germany and Japan but also the weakening of old imperialist powers like Britain, France and Holland. There was a popular anti-imperialist struggle in India and in other colonized countries of Asia. The time for the final decision about India's freedom and the ending of colonialism and imperialism in Asia had come. The Congress which was banned in 1942 now emerged as more popular than before. It made the Quit India as the central issue in its election campaign. The anxiety for freedom began to gain militant character. Besides, widespread unemployment and the impending food crisis on account of the lurking famine have further aggravated the situation leading to a course of strikes across the country. There was a feeling among nationalists that if people die of another famine, their death will be avenged.⁴ There were widespread protests against the government's decision to send Indian troops to Indonesia and Vietnam to help the Dutch and French respectively in addressing the freedom struggles in these countries. The linkage between India's freedom and freedom of other people was deeply felt. The quest for freedom for all Asian nations was largely recognized and Indian leaders consistently endorsed their commitment to the case of anti imperial struggle in the other colonies. Indonesian day was observed on October 25, 1945 all over the country expressing Indian people's solidarity with the people of Indonesia. The Indian dock workers, like those in many other countries, refused to load the war materials intended for crushing the freedom struggles in other countries.

³ . Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power 1942- 47*, Vol.VI, London, 1976, pp.581-82.

⁴ . In a speech at Bahraich, on 8 February, 1946, Nehru remarked that if there is a famine in the country, people will not tolerate it. He asked the people to revolt against the government, if there is a famine in the provinces. The people must refuse to accept the fate which overtook Bengal two years ago, resulting in 35, 00,000 deaths. Our countrymen must not die like flies - submitting calmly to death. Let the government be prepared to face a rebellion, *The National Herald*, Lucknow, 10 February, 1946, Microfilm, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi (Hereafter NMML) and also see Sarveppalli Gopal (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, Vol. XV, 1982, p.238.

The country witnessed during this time 1945-46 a major mass upsurge comprising students and workers. This was largely due to impending socio-economic political crisis arising out of the exploitative policy of imperialism. The British war effort had drained the Indian exchequer clearly triggering a major inflation. An adverse consequence of the Second World War was extreme inflation, disorganisation and famine in the economic field. The economic sufferings of the people instilled moods of revolt and a strong urge for political and economic liberation. The simmering discontent of the people gained momentum every passing day generating anti-state opinion from all walks of life. Millions of the people were galvanized for mass action through political activities.

In the international sphere there was a world-wide weakening of imperialist forces. Fascism had been routed and the Communist regime more firmly established in Russia. Socialist regimes with Communist leadership or participation were emerging in east European countries. The Chinese revolution was forging ahead. An anti-imperialist wave swept through South East Asia with Indonesia, Vietnam and Burma on the vanguard and in many of these countries, the masses emerged in the forefront of these nationalist upsurges.

India was thus seething with economic and political mass discontent. The country threatened to be a theatre of great mass struggles. Political and economic discontent among the people was consequently aggravated and the class struggles of workers, peasants and middle class employees during the immediate post-war period became a regular feature of the situation. The discontent spread among the armed forces and services creating an explosive revolutionary situation. It was in these circumstances, the Indian National Congress, Muslim League and other political parties evolved their respective plans to secure maximum benefits in whatever new political pattern may emerge as a result of struggle and negotiation.⁵

⁵ . Sumit Sarkar, "Popular Movements and National Leadership 1945-47" in *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, Vol. XVII, Annual No, April 1982, pp.677-689.

The idea of the popular revolt slowly but steadily gained momentum and it got manifested during the Indian National Army⁶ trial. The soldiers who have defected the ranks of the British Indian army when turned to join the INA started by Subhash Chandra Bose to intensify the national movement for attaining freedom. They were largely arrested and brought to India for trial.⁷ This indeed soon became an emotive issue inviting the wrath of people against the functioning of the state. According to the press communiqué of August 27, 1945, three INA personnel were chosen for court martial for waging war against the King, for murder and abetment to murder.⁸

On November 5, 1945 the British started the trial of the three INA officers at Delhi Red Fort.⁹ The defence of the INA prisoners was taken up by the Congress and Bhulabhai Desai, Tej Bahadur Sapru, K.N.Katju, Jawaharlar Nehru and Asaf Ali appeared in court at the Red Fort trials.¹⁰ To the people who had regarded Subhash Bose as a national hero and had worshipped the INA men as a band of patriotic heroes fighting for the liberation of their mother land, this was not acceptable.¹¹ The pro-INA sentiment took the form of demonstrations culminating in violent out breaks and confrontations with the government on two occasions, the first being in November 1945 rising to a countrywide campaign and the second in early February 1946, over the specific cause of the INA personnel Rashid Ali was sentenced of seven years rigorous imprisonment by the C-in-C Auchinleck. Pointing out the Calcutta uprising, Gautam Chattopadhyay wrote, “The Raj could no longer bank on the loyalty of the Indian soldiers and it was impossible to crush the all-India upsurge with the help of white troops alone.”¹² A similar view was expressed by Frank Richards,

⁶ . Hereafter INA.

⁷ . K K Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, Meerut, 1969, p.215.

⁸ . Cited in *Ibid.*

⁹ . *Ibid.*

¹⁰ . Defence of the INA men, AICC passed a resolution for appointing a Committee to safeguard the interests of INA men. Letter from J.B.Kripalani to Tej Bahadur Sapru, *All India Congress Committee Papers (AICC Papers)*,1945-46, NMML.

¹¹ . The INA Literature clearly pictured this idea. For details, see K.K. Ghosh, *Op.Cit.*

¹² . Gautam Chattopadhyay, *Bengal Legislature in India's Struggle for Freedom*, New Delhi, 1984, p. 203; For details of his argument on Calcutta uprising on February 11, see his “The Almost Revolution: India in February 1946” in *Indian Left Review*, Vol.III,

Labour MP and leader of the All Party Delegation that toured India early in 1946. After his return to London, he told Attlee, “We must quit India quickly, if we don’t, we shall be kicked out.”¹³

An indication of the popular interest in the INA issue can be measured from the fact that 160 political meetings were held in the Central Provinces and Berar alone in the first fortnight of October 1945 at which the INA issue was discussed.¹⁴ The INA day and week celebrations all over the country were characterised by strikes, large collections of funds, widespread closure of markets and huge processions.¹⁵

An important feature of the INA campaign was its wide geographical reach and the participation of diverse social groups and political parties. This had two aspects. One was generally extensive nature of the agitation; the other was the spread of pro-INA sentiment to social groups hitherto outside the nationalist pale, a fact that had serious implications for the authorities. The unprecedented wide spread, popular interest generated by the INA issue was recognised by the Director of the Intelligence Bureau.¹⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru confirmed the same, “Never before in Indian history had such unified sentiments and feelings been manifested by various divergent sections of the Indian population as it has been done with regard to the question of the Azad Hind Fauj.”¹⁷ The social and political reach of the movement was very extensive ranging from municipal committees to army men and to all political parties. There was no such event that affected the popular sentiment as much as

April 1974, pp.33-46.

¹³ . *The People’s Age*, New Delhi, 23 February, 1946, Ajoy Bhavan, New Delhi.

¹⁴ . Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition : The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*, New Delhi, 2000, p.82; See Under Secretary's Safe Files (Hereafter USS Files), Government of Madras, File No. 3-A, 16/2/1946, Tamilnadu State Archives, Chennai (Hereafter TSA), for Congress meetings at which INA was the main issue. For details, see Chapter 4, Section 1.

¹⁵ . Home-Political, Poll (I), Fortnightly Reports (Hereafter FR) of Madras for the First Half of November 1945, File No. 18/11/1945, National Archives of India, New Delhi (Hereafter NAI).

¹⁶ . Note on the INA situation by Director, Intelligence Bureau, 20 November, 1945, Mansergh (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, 1976, pp.512-13.

¹⁷ . Sarveppalli Gopal (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, Vol.XIV, p.280.

the INA which became the channel for articulating national sympathy across the society. The passion for political identification and the subsequent recognition of the sacrifice made by the INA heroes generated atavistic feelings in the writings of the nationalists.

The RIN mutiny in contrast did not have a wide geographical reach. As it was only confined to urban areas. No political organization came forward to champion the cause of RIN mutineers. The major political organizations such as Congress and Muslim League did not show interest and the leaders remained non-committal in extending their support and the Communist Party alone extending support.

So we have in our study taken Malabar as a case study because it was a leftist stronghold and we felt it that it would be appropriate to study the popular support the RIN mutiny enjoyed across the society. Focusing on this issue the study would attempt to problematize the entire gamut of military mutiny in the last days of the Raj.

The geographical area is broadly termed as South India. By this we mean the administrative boundaries of the erstwhile Madras Presidency. The port cities of Vishakhapatnam, Madras and Cochin places where RIN mutiny took place and the district of Malabar form the 'space' of the study.

This brings us to the structure of the thesis.

The present study entitled **The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny: A Study of Its Impact in South India** focuses on the February uprising of 1946, its spread and its repercussions in South India especially in Malabar. The mutiny began on a Monday and ended on Saturday – just for six days only. Though a revolt of such a short duration, its impact was more long lasting. This was because in places, its character was changed by popular expressions of solidarity. It was led by ratings¹⁸ in the communication department of the HMIS¹⁹ Talwar of RIN in Bombay. The revolt quickly spread to naval establishments all over

¹⁸ . Lower level sailors in the navy are referred as 'ratings.' We have used the term in our study.

¹⁹ . His Majesty's Indian Ship.

undivided India. Most of the ratings posted in 74 warships, four flotillas and 20 shores in Bombay²⁰ which was the hub of Indian Navy, took part in the mutiny. For five days they were free from their colonial masters and superior officers. The British however, recovered from their initial shock. The Labour Government in London supported the navy's plan to use violence, if necessary, if the ratings did not surrender 'unconditionally.' For a few days the sailors stood firm. But the revolt was doomed once the Congress joined hands with the British. After a week, the sailors gave up peacefully. However, one ship, the 'Hindustan' of Karachi had to be briefly fired on before the sailors realized that they had to surrender.

Aims and Objectives

- a. In the long history of the Indian National Movement, a violent capture of power or aiding or abetting such a capture were never even contemplated. Did it remain unchanged till independence? Aren't forms of struggle determined by specific situations? Did the RIN mutiny signify any change in the overall strategy of the Indian National Movement? We intend to find answers to these nagging questions in the study. In the process we intend to investigate the contention of Bipan Chandra that the overall strategy of the Indian National Movement which according to him was 'struggle-truce-struggle' did not undergo any change.²¹
- b. Sumit Sarkar has contributed to the debates among historians about why Britain leave India when it did by stating that more than anything else it was the post-war popular upsurge in the form of demonstrations against INA trials, the RIN mutiny and peasant struggles which forced a decision on the part of the British. In the course of study we would try to investigate these possibilities by subjecting the RIN revolt for thorough scrutiny.

²⁰ . We have used the old place names as the changes came much later after the event. So 'Mumbai' would be Bombay, 'Chennai' - Madras etc.

²¹ . Bipan Chandra, *Indian National Movement: Long Term Dynamics*, New Delhi, 1988, p.129.

- c. It has been contended that the RIN mutiny was violent and did not, unlike the INA trials, have the potential for spreading to the rural areas. This would be investigated by focusing on the Malabar region. There by we may be able to identify, whether was there a rural-urban divide with regard to the impact of this mutiny.
- d. The study focuses on South India with a detailed study of the impact of the mutiny in Malabar. This is to analyse the political dimensions of the mutiny.

The present study is an attempt to throw light on the penultimate phase of the freedom movement by probing into the question of native military response to the authority of the Raj. In the existing school of historiography there are two major approaches that tend to offer a much widely accepted explanation to the events of this period. One treats the Quit India Movement and its aftermath as the most important event leading to India's independence. The second perspective, sometimes trivialize the Quit India movement and highlight the labour unrest and peasant movements, the protest against INA trials and RIN mutiny as playing a crucial role in the British decision to withdraw from India. The first perspective is largely advanced by administrative historians who concentrate on the convoluted negotiation which finally culminated in the partition and independence of India. The second perspective generally found favour with leftists and has recently been accorded an academic status by Sumit Sarkar. What however is missing in all these perspectives is an evaluation of the impact that a development like the RIN revolt made in those areas which were away from the center of the revolt. This was the rationale behind the selection of our area namely South India for research.

The study aims to bring out how different sections of the society viewed the revolt and how they either participated in the movement expressing solidarity with revolts or maintained indifference. The response of the different political parties also varied. One of the objectives of the study is an evaluation of how different political parties viewed the revolt, what was their assessment

of the objective situation and how did they formulate a programme of action regarding the revolt. It would also be sensible to enquire how ordinary people viewed the developments; whether they saw the revolt as a struggle against Gandhian non-violence and whether they viewed it as the working of a strategy, however rudimentary in the making which went against nationalist strategy of putting pressure to gain some concessions from the authorities.

Review of Literature

The Naval uprising of February 1946 was an event which galvanized various classes of Indian society against British imperialism. It does not command adequate status in Indian historiography. The social scientists have not turned much attention on to the topic 'RIN Mutiny.' No serious effort has so far been made to unravel the mysteries that shrouded around the mutiny of RIN. Moreover it was not accorded due priority on par with other national struggles such as 1857 revolt as far as collecting and collating information and facts. B.C.Dutt, who had played a leading role in the RIN mutiny stated:

All the relevant records pertaining to the Royal Indian Naval mutiny are in the Archives of the Defence Ministry. A comprehensive account of the mutiny can be written only at the instance of the Government of India. No official history however has as yet been attempted nor has any private initiative been encouraged. Somebody, perhaps, the historian of a future generation, free from the prejudices and pressures of the present, will want to record the full and unbiased story of the freedom movement. It is quite likely that he will be both interested and enlightened enough to appreciate the fact that there were many ways to bring an Indian patriot in those days before independence. When he comes across the story of the RIN mutiny he may not be inclined to dismiss the motive behind the upheaval as just a violent agitation for a better quality rice-and-daal ration as was given out to the people.²²

²². B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny of the Innocents*, Bombay, 1971, p.13.

However, there is no major attempt to analyse this uprising in an academic manner by scholars. At best the mutiny formed a chapter of a wider study. Otherwise it amounted to a section within a chapter. For example, Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India* and Bipan Chandra's *India's Struggle for Independence*. Some authors confirmed their observation to a paragraph or two, example, R.C.Majundar's *History of the Freedom Movement in India* Vol.III and V.P.Menon's *Transfer of Power in India*. At the same time, nationalists, politicians and other thinkers have written in some more detail.

Accounts by participants formed an important source material. But these are handicapped by the authors own bias which sometime became very explicit or too much of a subjectivised narration. For example, B.C.Dutt's, *Mutiny of the Innocents* and Biswanath Bose's *RIN Mutiny: 1946*.

Based on the above, a broad classification can be made. This is as follows:

- a. Imperialist and Pro-British accounts.
- b. Nationalist accounts.
- c. Accounts by participants or eye-witness accounts.
- d. Leftist accounts (including different strands).

a) Imperialist and Pro-British Accounts

The imperialist historians in general were interested in concentrating on the significance of British political and administrative activities in India and in neglecting the study of the Indian responses they implied. They believe that the National Movement was not a people's movement based on the basic contradiction between the interests of the Indian people and British colonialism; it was a product of the needs and interest of the elite groups who used it to serve their own narrow interests. The National Movement represented the struggle of one elite group against another for British favours. On the search for the sources, which led to the British withdrawal the historians of the imperialist tradition have arrived at some common conclusions. These

historians have put forward a statement of strategy that India was never a nation and it is the British who have taken up the role of tutors to civilize the Indians. It is in this process the colonial rulers of their own volition has been developing powers as and when Indians became fit to exercise such powers. However, the final withdrawal, they basically argue, with some variations that British imperial interests in India were declining and that no longer fulfilled its role in the maintenance of imperial interests in the fields of either defence or commerce or finance and in fact over the years it had become a liability for the British.

An important weakness of imperialist historiography is that it ignores the major political activity going on in India; focusing instead, in the typical Eurocentric tradition, on the developments at home.²³ They paid little attention to the popular rebellions which hastened India's independence. In short, the British historians on Modern Indian history completely ignore the RIN episode. Even those imperialist historians who are devoted exclusively to the study of Indian Politics, for instance, R.J.Moore²⁴ are of the view that British policies which shaped India's political development were related to metropolitan changes.

Possibly the earliest study on the subject assigned to the imperialist school of thought was *The Transfer of Power* in seven volumes by Nicholas Mansergh.²⁵ It was a collection of correspondences of the British officials. His work is of value only in that; it records the events as they appeared to the public with no access to inside information. There a number of works followed this perspectives. Hugh Toye's *The Springing Tiger: A Study of Subhash Chandra Bose*,²⁶ Penderel Moon's *Divide and Quit*²⁷ and his edited work,

²³ . David Potter, "Manpower Shortage and the end of Colonialism; the Case of ICS" in *MAS*, Vol. XVII, No 1, 1973.

²⁴ . See his *Escape from Empire: The Attlee Government and the Indian problem*, Oxford, New Delhi, 1983 and *Making the Commonwealth*, New Delhi, 1987.

²⁵ . Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, Vols. I-VII, 1970-78.

²⁶ . Hugh Toye, *The Springing Tiger: A Study of Subhash Chandra Bose*, London, 1959.

²⁷ . Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit*, London, 1961.

Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal,²⁸ H.V. Hodson's *The Great Divide*,²⁹ Percival Spear's *India: A modern History*,³⁰ Leonard Mosley's *The Last Days of the British Raj*,³¹ and Michael Edwardes' *The Last Years of British India*.³²

Nicholas Mansergh was an exponent of the imperialist school of thought, a strong defender of British Empire. In his *The Transfer of power* Vol.VI, he stated clearly that naval revolt of 1946 was merely a 'mutiny.' He is essentially an imperialist historian who sustains the imperialist ideology and outlook in his works. He is also conscious of the fact that the greatest service which a historian should do is to state the facts accurately and in a readable style. His work on *The Transfer of Power* started with the failure of Cripps Mission, the outbreak of Quit India Movement, Gandhi's fast, Bengal famine, Simla Conference and the post-war activities by the Labour government. In his analysis, he tried his best to have information from various sources when he relied too much on official records, he was conscious of the danger of its exclusive use which will foreshorten the perspective of history. A staunch champion of imperialist ideology, he tried to give the British imperialism in India a firm moral basis.

Mansergh described the day-to-day events of the RIN mutiny. But he condemned it as a mere mutiny of the ratings. He claimed that the RIN revolt did not make any threat to the British Empire. In a letter to His Majesty King George VI dated on March 22, 1946, Field Marshall Viscount Wavell reported that:

The RIN mutineers came on us with practically no warning how far will be shown by a Commission of Enquiry. The RIN has expanded so rapidly during the war that it is very short of experienced officers and petty officers and it has not the background and traditions of the Indian Army. But that the expression of any grievances there took

²⁸ . Penderel Moon (ed.), *Wavell...Op. Cit.*

²⁹ . H.V.Hodson, *The Great Divide*, London, 1969.

³⁰ . Percival Spear, *India: A Modern History*, USA, 1971.

³¹ . Leonard Mosley, *The Last Days of the British Raj*, London, 1981.

³² . Michael Edwardes, *The Last Years of British India*, London, 1982.

the form it did was undoubtedly due to instigation by political agitators, Communist and left-wing Congress. The riots in Bombay which accompanied the mutiny were simply due to the dangerous mobs which are always ready in any Indian city to seize the opportunity for burning and looting. They have of course been encouraged by the violent speaking during the last six months. A very ugly situation was extremely well-handled by the police and military.³³

The published British documents on *The Transfer of Power* admitted that the INA rebels were popular heroes and the treason charge would only increase their popularity. The result would be that a thoroughly dangerous and explosive situation would be worked up. If government intends to carry on the death sentences they must be prepared to face unparalleled agitation more widespread than in 1919 and 1942 and to use ruthless force to suppress it.³⁴

Penderel Moon was another exponent of imperialist school of thought but liberal in outlook. He is the author of *Strangers in India, Divide and Quit* and *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*. He himself had claimed that his works were neither purely personal nor objective. His edited work *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal* provides an official outlook of the RIN mutiny.

Michael Edwardes, an expert of imperialist school of thought admits Netaji's influence over the armed forces. He states in his work *The Last Years of British India*, "Only one outstanding personality took a different and violent path, and in a sense, India owes more to him than to any other man even though he seemed to be a failure."³⁵ He again observes that:

British had not feared Gandhi the reducer of violence, they no longer feared Nehru, who was rapidly assuming the lineaments of statesmanship..., the British, however, still feared Subhash Bose... the ghost of Subhash Bose like Hamlet's father walked the

³³ . Wavell Papers, Private Correspondence - His Majesty the King, pp.110-114, Cited in Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. VI, p.1234.

³⁴. *Ibid.*, p.536.

³⁵. Michael Edwardes, *Op. Cit.*, p.55.

battlements of Red fort and his suddenly amplified figure overawed the conferences that were to lead to independence.³⁶

Hugh Toye another notable imperialist historian admits that with his remarkable personal magnetism, Netaji inspired in the soldiers he led, a loyalty which... obliterated their sentiments for the remote King Emperor, carefully fostered by the British rulers over long decades of their rule.³⁷ Michael Edwardes and Toye admitted that the final and fatal blow to the British rule in India was indeed inflicted by Bose. By bringing about a complete psychological transformation of the Indian officers and men of the British armed forces - from being pro-British mercenaries to fiercely militant nationalist, who were no longer willing to be instruments of imperialism. Bose enabled India to wrest her freedom from Great Britain.

Percival Spear was another historian of this category. He adopted Ranke's techniques of writing history through a very careful and critical study of the sources and of presenting the information in an objective manner as possible. As an imperialist historian, he also tried to minimize the importance of the naval revolt of February 1946. In his *India: A Modern History*, he writes, "The brief mutiny of the Indian navy in February 1946 along with 'strikes' at Air Force bases, though smothered with the help of alarmed Congress leaders themselves, showed how thin crust of British power was becoming."³⁸

b) Nationalist Accounts

'Nationalist' is a comparative term to be used by way of contrast with the British historians who represent the imperialist school of thought. This should not be taken to mean that the object of such historians was to glorify their country's achievements although such a feeling was not wholly absent in them. In a sense it is rather difficult to draw a line between nationalists and other Indian historians. However the term is more relevant and applicable to

³⁶. *Ibid.*, p.96.

³⁷. Hugh Toye, *Op. Cit.*, p.120.

³⁸. Percival Spear, *Op. Cit.*, p.414.

those Indians who are not purely actuated by a scientific spirit to make a critical study of a historical problem concerning India, but whose primary aim is to include an examination or re-examination of some points of national intend.

The major weakness of nationalist historiography is that they tend to ignore or at least, underplay the inner contradictions of Indian society both in terms of class and caste. There is an abstract cult of people or nation in their writing. They stressed the role of elite group only and thereby never gave any importance to the role of masses belongs to this category. The basic pattern in their writings was of an English educated 'middle class' reared by British rule, engaging in various renaissance activities and eventually turning against their masters and giving birth to modern nationalism out of idols of patriotism and democracy derived from western culture or natural revulsion against foreign rule.³⁹ The nationalist school contributed very little to the study of the RIN revolt. The Indian nationalist historiography on RIN mutiny is only a continuation of the rebuttal of the interpretation of Indian history by imperialist historians. The latter consistently held that India was never a nation in its long history and India as a geographical unit was inhabited by multi nationalism. So there is no question of Congress representing the Indian masses and as such, there is nothing like Indian national movement which wrested power from the British. Early nationalist writings were heavily influenced by imperialist perspectives on the RIN revolt. They completely ignored the political importance of the mutiny. They paid little attention to the popular rebellions which accelerated the process of independence. Perhaps the best representatives of Indian nationalist historians review were done by Tara Chand. In his work he seems to have ignored completely the RIN mutiny in his magnum opus.⁴⁰ This is indeed surprising because he has devoted much space to several other incidents whose connection with the national movement and the politics associated with it were either very vague or none at all.

³⁹ . Bisheshwar Prasad, *Changing modes of Indian National Movement*, New Delhi, 1966.

⁴⁰ . Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vols. I-IV, New Delhi, 1970.

The third volume of R.C.Majumdar's *History of the Freedom Movement in India* left a short paragraph to the mutiny in the long chapter 'Negotiations and Settlement.'⁴¹ He has written that it was no coincidence that the violence of the naval revolt erupted on February 18, whereas on February 19, the British Prime Minister Attlee proclaimed in the House of Commons that a Cabinet Mission would soon be sent to India to finalise the arrangement for India's freedom.⁴²

V.P.Menon, though not a professional historian, has however written about the RIN Mutiny.⁴³ As a high ranking bureaucrat, he must have had access to confidential documents and intelligence reports. But he tends to play down the political importance of the mutiny in his typical bureaucratic attitude. He stated that "The army and the air force not altogether unaffected. There was trouble in several places, though not of a serious character."⁴⁴ Consciously or unconsciously he tried to minimize the importance of the RIN strike.

c) Accounts by Participants or Eye-witness Accounts

The historiographic survey of the available literature on the topic has to begin with the early narratives. The early work related to the theme is *The RIN Strike* by a Group of Victimised Ratings.⁴⁵ The manuscript of this work was submitted in early 1947, just a little more than a year after the RIN strike. For a number of reasons the book could not be published earlier. Later it was published in 1954. Their work forms only a narration of the mutiny. They tried to vindicate each and every event of the naval revolt of February 1946. They claimed that the uprising in the navy was inseparable part of the glorious struggles which every section of the Indian people were then waging in order to force the British rulers to Quit India. The RIN uprising that close resemblance

⁴¹. R.C.Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol.III, Calcutta, 1977.

⁴². *Ibid.*, p.622.

⁴³. V.P.Menon, *Transfer of Power in India*, Chennai, 1957.

⁴⁴. *Ibid.*, p.229.

⁴⁵. A Group of Victimised Ratings, *The RIN Strike* (1954), Reprint, New Delhi, 1981.

to the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 as well as 1946 uprising were indications that the proud Indian people were determined to throw the foreign rulers out of the country and to build up their own future in the way they liked. They believed that RIN ratings opened new avenues of struggle and created the opportunity for the final assault on the tottering structure of imperialism.⁴⁶ According to them, “By the RIN mutiny the entire foundation of the feudal-imperialistic structure in India had been loosened.”⁴⁷

B.C.Dutt’s *Mutiny of the Innocents*⁴⁸ forms another work of this category. As a participant of the mutiny, he narrated the events in his own style. He claims that it was probably the greatest single factor in hastening our independence. Another participant, Subrata Banerjee who claims that RIN mutiny shook the mighty British Empire. To quote him:

If the year 1857 marked the beginning of the organized participation of the Indian soldiers in the fight for independence, the year 1946 saw its culmination. A situation has arisen in India in 1946 when all that was required was the disorganization of the armed forces to give the final push for the victory of the national struggle for freedom.⁴⁹

In an article in Hindu daily, he writes, “It is the lesson of history that revolutions achieve victory when the armed forces refused to defend the state and the people become organized to form a new state.”⁵⁰ As a participant of the mutiny, his evaluation of the mutiny is not objective. He provided a colourful picture of the uprising. In spite of this, his accounts amount to a valuable estimation of the naval revolt of 1946.

⁴⁶ . *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁴⁷ . *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ . B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny...Op. Cit*; B.C.Dutt, ‘Revolt of the Ratings of the Royal Indian Navy’ in Nishith Ranjan Ray, et.al. (ed.), *Challenge: A Saga of India’s Struggle for Freedom*, New Delhi, 1984, pp.591-603.

⁴⁹ . Subrata Banerjee, *The RIN strike*, New Delhi, 1991, p.20.

⁵⁰ . Subrata Banerjee, “Mutiny that shook the Empire” in *The Hindu*, Madras, 18 February, 1986, Indian Council of World Affairs Library, Sapru House, New Delhi.

Biswanath Bose, another participant and observer, has published some personal accounts. It is not a proper academic study on the revolt. He has incorporated several eye-witness accounts as reminiscences of the revolt.⁵¹ He claims that the RIN revolt has revealed at least two things: Firstly it demonstrated willingness and ability of the armed forces in conducting a struggle against imperialism and secondly, it helped in breaking the barrier between the armed forces and the other exploited sections of the masses. It was a struggle in which the workers, students and lower-middle class people joined together and fought against imperialism.⁵²

Anil Roy who participated in the RIN mutiny at Karachi narrated the day-to-day events of the Mutiny.⁵³ He argued that it was a part of national movement and the ratings fought against imperialism completely due to the spirit of nationalism and patriotism.

To this may be added Percy S.Gourgey's eye witness accounts of the revolt.⁵⁴ He was a British junior naval officer at the time of the mutiny and was caught by chance at the center of the revolt. Though not a participant, his account is very sympathetic and cannot be regarded as part of the British government's or imperialists assessments. He recounts how the immediate provocation for the uprising was the inhuman treatment of the ratings and the slow pace of demobilisation. The Indian Navy had grown during the Second World War but though the war was over, the British were dragging their feet in letting the sailors go back to civilian life. Added to that was the colonial attitude of the British naval officers. Indeed the spark that lit the fuse on February 19, 1946 was insult hurled by Commander F .W .King at the ratings on the Talwar. Gourgey cites King's words, 'Hurry, you sons of coolies and bitches!'⁵⁵ Word went round the establishment like wild-fire and work ceased as if by magic. Ratings thronged to the Regulating Office yelling 'Quit India.'

⁵¹ . Biswanath Bose, *RIN Mutiny: 1946*, New Delhi, 1988.

⁵² . *Ibid.*, p.179.

⁵³ . Anil Roy, 'Royal Indian Navy and the Navy Mutiny (1946)' in Nishith Ranjan Ray, et.al. (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 591-616.

⁵⁴ . Percy.S.Gourgey, *The Indian Naval Revolt of 1946*, Chennai, 1996.

⁵⁵ . *Ibid.*, p.6.

The most remarkable feature of the revolt was that while its origins lay in personal concerns of the sailors, the uprising quickly fused with the struggle for independence.⁵⁶

An important limitation of these works is that, the leaders often exaggerated the importance of specific actions they participated in - a tendency that is shared by the historians of these movements.

d) Leftist Accounts (including different strands)

The Marxist school better known as left tradition in India contributed three types of writings: The official Communist party of India documents and reviews, the writings of the Communist leaders and lastly the works of Leftist historians like R.P.Dutt (*India Today*), Sumit Sarkar (*Popular Movements and National Leadership 1945-47* and *Modern India*) and Mohit Sen (*Revolution in India: Path and Problems*).⁵⁷

Communist Party literature offer information about the mutiny. It stressed that the upheavals which took place in India after the Second World War represent one of the clearest indications of the post-war sharpening of the crisis of the colonial system of imperialism.⁵⁸ When the mutiny started, G.Adhikari, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party edited and published a booklet *Strike: The Story of the Strike in the Navy* revealed the causes and background leading to the uprising.⁵⁹ British considered it as objectionable. They considered it as a Communist version of the mutiny at Bombay.⁶⁰ The Communist documents detailed the mutiny in a revolutionary perspective. In May, they submitted a memorandum entitled *Towards a People's Navy* to the Enquiry Commission of the RIN mutiny.⁶¹

⁵⁶. *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁵⁷. Mohit Sen, *Revolution: Path and Problems*, New Delhi, 1977.

⁵⁸ . A.M.Dyakov, *New Stages in India's Liberation Struggle*, Crisis of the Colonial System Series, I, New Delhi, 1950, p.1, Contemporary Archives, JNU, New Delhi.

⁵⁹ . G.Adhikari (ed.), *Strike: The story of the Strike in the Navy*, New Delhi, 1946, Contemporary Archives, JNU.

⁶⁰. Public (General), G.O.No.1180, 1946, TSA.

⁶¹ . Jyothi Basu (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Movement in India*, 1944-48, Vol. V, Calcutta, 1997, pp. 219-234.

Gautam Chattopadhyay made an attempt to evaluate the post-war upsurges in India. As a Marxist he argued that it is not an accident that British Prime minister Attlee's announcement that three men Cabinet Mission would soon go to India to negotiate full transfer of power to Indian hands, came on February 19, exactly 24 hours after the RIN revolted. He quotes, "Three days after, Auchinleck, C-in-C of Indian armed forces sent a desperate secret warning to Attlee: we may be faced with complete rebellion, supported by the whole of the Indian armed forces."⁶²

Another leftist who analyzed the RIN Mutiny in a detailed manner was E.M.S.Namboodiripad. He considered it as historically the most important incident in the post-war anti-imperialist upsurge. In his work, *A History of Indian Freedom Struggle*,⁶³ he quoted the statements of B.C.Dutt, one of the participants of the revolt. Dutt blamed all the major political parties including the leftists as well as those known to be revolutionaries that their activities were dependent on those leaders who had adopted the method of negotiation rather than the method of revolution. E.M.S admitted that there is an element of truth in this accusal. The Communist Party had been working during the war by challenging the Congress leadership, it was of the view that a struggle based on the unity of the leaders of the Congress and league was the only solution to the national problems of India. The Communist Party had visualized the path of revolution; they considered either the Congress alone or the Congress-League unity as the main instrument for revolution.⁶⁴ Then he wrote:

It would be wrong to maintain that leftist Congressmen or the Socialists or the Communists were indifferent to the naval mutiny. The strike of the workers in Bombay was not a spontaneous action. The left Congressmen, Socialists and Communists had worked in an organized manner behind it. In the clash that took place between the striking workers and the armed forces of the government, many of them had sacrificed their life. The truth was that they could not raise

⁶². Gautam Chattopadhyay, *Bengal...Op. Cit.*, p. 204.

⁶³ . E.M.S.Namboodiripad, *A History of Indian Freedom Struggle*, Trivandrum, 1970, p.836.

⁶⁴. *Ibid.*, p. 839.

the struggle to the level of an all India revolutionary movement or to spread the mutiny to the other branches of the armed forces.⁶⁵

The leftist historians followed a different treatment towards the RIN mutiny. They generally highlighted the participation of different sections of the society expressing solidarity with the mutineers. They argued that the RIN mutiny was the sharpest expression of national consciousness of the people.

Rajani Palme Dutt, a well known Marxist historian provided a link between resurgent nationalist movement and the oppressive imperial policy was critical to the political developments in and around this period. His *India Today* offers a linear treatment to this problem by linking a range of issues in connection with the mass assertion in all walks of life.⁶⁶ He analysed the RIN mutiny as a part of freedom movement of the masses. He provided a very objective analysis of post-war situation in India. He stated that there arose a revolutionary situation in India. Among the masses, the desire for unity in the struggle against imperialism was overwhelming. This was shown in the great demonstrations in Calcutta, Bombay and other leading cities where Congress and Muslim League flags were carried in unity by the crowds. Unfortunately this unity below found no responding unity at the top. The revolutionary spirit swept forward not only among the civilian population but also among the armed forces. According to him, the rising of the Indian Navy in February 1946 laid bare in a flash all the maturing forces of Indian revolution.⁶⁷ He compared it with 'Potemkin' in Russia in 1905, of 'Kronstadt' in Russia in 1917 or 'Kiel' in Germany in 1918.

The naval rising and popular struggle in the February days in Bombay revealed with inescapable clearness the alignment of forces in the explosive situation developing in India in the beginning of 1946. He argued that it was an important example of Hindu-Muslim unity.⁶⁸ The outbreak of naval mutiny had made it clear that the imperial authority can't continue to hold their sway with a

⁶⁵. *Ibid.*

⁶⁶. Rajani Palme Dutt, *India Today*, England, 1970.

⁶⁷. *Ibid.*, p.578.

⁶⁸. *Ibid.*, p.583.

proverbial might as the army, navy and air force were under their control. Forced by the circumstances the nationalist leadership could neither endorse the revolt nor ignore its ramifications and they were remained non-committal as far as the naval mutiny is concerned even after independence.

Palme Dutt in his work criticized the attitude of the leadership of Congress and Muslim League. He stated that the upper class leadership of the Congress and Muslim League found themselves in opposition to the mass movement and by aligning British imperialism as the representative of law and order against the people.⁶⁹ The Indian national movement as a bourgeois led movement and Gandhi as leader who represented the bourgeois interests did not take the leadership of the masses. He argued that the RIN mutiny led to the sending of Cabinet Mission in India. As the subsequent proceedings of the Cabinet Mission showed the entire British tactics of British imperialism were now directed towards the Congress and Muslim League leadership, simultaneously to play on their hopes of masses and their mutual division and antagonism. He stressed that:

On February 18, Bombay naval strike began. On February 19, Attlee in the House of Commons announced the decision to dispatch the Cabinet Mission to India.⁷⁰

Sumit Sarkar, in his study tries to analyze the RIN Mutiny in its historical perspective. He analyzed the mutiny in his two works *Popular Movements and National Leadership 1945-47*⁷¹ and *Modern India*.⁷² He considered the RIN revolt as one of the most truly heroic, and which was one of the largely forgotten episodes in our freedom struggle. He states that the pattern of events of RIN mutiny unconsciously echoed the course of the mutiny on the Black Sea Fleet during the First Russian Revolution of 1905 that too, had begun over inedible food.⁷³ He argues that communal unity was manifested

⁶⁹. *Ibid.*, p.578.

⁷⁰ . *Ibid.*, p.583 ; See his *A New Chapter in Divide and Rule*, New Delhi, July 1946, p.7.

⁷¹. Sumit Sarkar, *Popular....Op. Cit.*

⁷². Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India* (1983), Reprint, New Delhi, 2005.

⁷³. Sumit Sarkar, *Popular....Op. Cit.*, p.683.

in the RIN revolt. He opined that, “As in the Calcutta explosions, a striking feature was total submergence of communal division; the Naval Central Strike Committee (NCSC) incidentally was headed by a Muslim—M.S.Khan.”⁷⁴ In his analysis, he concluded that the RIN Revolt was a part of massive political strikes in India after the war years.

Another historian of this field is Bipan Chandra.⁷⁵ He has pictured the RIN revolt as a part of mass struggle. He argues that it had a great liberating effect on the minds of the people and it was seen as an event which marked the end of British rule almost as finally as Independence Day, 1947. But at the same time he has also highlighted the weakness of the mutiny. He states that only the more militant sections of society could participated in the mutiny. There was no place for the liberal and conservative groups which had rallied to the INA cause earlier or for the men and women of small towns and villages who had formed the backbone of the mass movements in earlier decades.⁷⁶ Besides, these upsurges were short lived, as the tide of popular fury surged forth, only to subside all too quickly. Interestingly, Calcutta, the scene of tremendous enthusiasm from February 11 to 13, 1946 was relatively quiet during the RIN revolt a week later. One lakh workers went on a one day strike, but the rest of the city, barring the organized working class, remained subdued, despite a seven day ratings strike in Calcutta which had to be broken by a siege by troops. In addition, the upheavals were confined to a few urban centers, while the general INA agitation reached the remotest villages. This urban concentration made it easy for the authorities to deploy troops and effectively suppress the upsurge.⁷⁷

According to him, the communal unity evident in the RIN revolt was limited, despite the Congress, League and Communist flags being jointly hoisted on the ship’s masts. Muslim ratings went to the League to seek advice on future action, while the rest went to the Congress and the Socialists.

⁷⁴. *Ibid.*, p.685.

⁷⁵ . Bipan Chandra, et.al., *India’s Struggle for Independence* (1988), Reprint, New Delhi, 1992.

⁷⁶ . *Ibid.*, p.481.

⁷⁷ . *Ibid.*, pp.481-82.

Jinnah's advice to surrender was addressed to Muslim ratings alone, who duly heeded it. The view that communal unity forged in the struggles of 1945-46 could, if taken further, have averted partition, seems to be based on wishful thinking concrete historical possibility. The 'unity at the barricades' did not show this promise.⁷⁸ Besides he criticized the argument of R.P.Dutt that the RIN revolt led to the sending of Cabinet Mission. He argued that the decision was taken by the British Cabinet on January 22, 1946 and even its announcement on February 19, 1946 had been slated a week earlier.⁷⁹

A recent study published in this field is Sucheta Mahajan's *Independence and Partition*.⁸⁰ She analyses the last years of the Raj in a detailed way. In her work, the author has evaluated the imperialist, nationalist and leftist accounts of the RIN mutiny. She criticizes the imperialist and nationalist perspectives towards the mutiny. A major weakness of imperialist historiography is that it ignores the major political activity going on in India.⁸¹ The nationalist historiography recognizes nationalism as the central cause of the British withdrawal from India. They gave little attention to the political activities like the RIN revolt.⁸² She argues that the histories and commentaries coming from the left tradition are a valuable corrective to both the imperialist and nationalist writings. The leftist argument was that the Congress, frightened by the radical potentialities led out by the mass struggles and violent outbreaks, moved towards the path of negotiation and compromise with imperialism, even at the cost of sacrificing the unity of the country. The British too, preferred to compromise and bargain with the Congress rather than face the alternative of having to surrender power to a radical combination of political forces. The interests of both the British and Congress coalesced in the final transfer of power, which was carried out through the 'bourgeois' path of bargain and

⁷⁸ . *Ibid.*, p.482.

⁷⁹ . *Ibid.*, p.483.

⁸⁰ . Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence....Op. Cit* ; See also her 'British Policy, Nationalist Strategy and Popular National Upsurge 1945-46' in Amit Kumar Gupta (ed.), *Myth and Reality: The Struggle for Freedom in India, 1945-47*, New Delhi,1987.

⁸¹. Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence....Op. Cit.*, p.28.

⁸². *Ibid.*

compromise, rather than through the parallel revolutionary path of mass struggle and seizure of power.⁸³

She argues that coming to the immediate post-war period, a glance at the graph of nationalist activity reveals a new trend. The middle of the year 1945 represented a transition, the popular atmosphere becoming more relaxed. Two of the major lines of war time nationalist activities, constructive work and the nationalist stand taken by various social and political groups faded out. The constructive programme died out, only its organization was retained by the Congress, which combined with the major organizational build up in the post-June period, formed the Congress election machinery. Nationalist activity carried on by the organizations of different social group, such as the trade unions, Kisan Sabha and political parties such as CPI petered out after June 1945. June 1945 also marked a transition in nationalist activity from spontaneous political expression during the war period to open, direct anti-British political activity of a high level of intensity. One reason for this unprecedented popular excitement was that the political energies of the people were surfacing after having been suppressed for three years. Besides, the political constraints were also being loosened on account of certain positive developments.⁸⁴ The RIN revolt was an important manifestation of these new trends.

While toeing the line of Bipan Chandra, she indicates the main features of the revolt being urban in character, limited communal unity and short lived in duration. She also tacitly indicates that the mutiny was shown in greater proportion than what it was by scholars like Sumit Sarkar.

As in the case of South India, no authentic studies have been conducted till date. The nature of the revolt and its ramifications in various regions of the country, have not been adequately addressed. This is not to deny the quantum of sources available for the study but in fact there was no academic enthusiasm shown to the study of these kinds of activities since they do not constitute the

⁸³. *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁸⁴. Sucheta Mahajan, 'British Policy....*Op. Cit.*, p.68.

mainstream historical narrations of the national movement. Considering the volley of unconventional sources and interesting write ups particularly in Malayalam we have made an attempt to probe into the imperatives of naval mutiny and its resonance in the Malayalam speaking, then Madras Presidency.

Apart from these, there are references to the mutiny in auto-biographies and memoirs of people who lived during that time. Joseph Puthenchira's *Katalil Ninnoru Diary*,⁸⁵ M.N.Govindan Nair's *Emmente Atmakatha*,⁸⁶ A.C.Kannan Nair's diary,⁸⁷ Pavanan's *Aadhyakaala Smaranakal*,⁸⁸ Ayiroti Narayanan's *Yuddha Smaranakal*,⁸⁹ M.K.Hemachandran's *Vimuktha Bhatanaya Oru Mun Manthriyute Aatmakatha*,⁹⁰ N.P.Nair's *1946 –le Navika Lahala*,⁹¹ P.K.R.Varier's *Oru Surgeonte Ormmakkurippukal*,⁹² T.P.Gopala krishnan Nair's *Indiayku Swathanthryam Netiya 1946-2-15 Muthal 23 Vare Natanna RIN Lahala*⁹³ etc come under this category. As they are not studies of the problem as such, they have not been considered here. In the present circumstances, more efforts should be made in an academic way.

The above in brief contain the main contributions of social scientists and political activists on the RIN revolt. The list however is incomplete. This review of literature reveals that no academic attempt has so far been made to study the theme, **The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny: a study of its impact in South India**. Therefore the investigator is attempting an objective analysis of

⁸⁵ . Joseph Puthenchira, *Katalil Ninnoru Diary* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1980.

⁸⁶ . M.N.Govindan Nair, *Emmente Atmakatha* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1984.

⁸⁷ . The diaries of A.C.Kannan Nair, a prominent freedom fighter of North Malabar which was found from his attic of his house by K.K.N.Kurup have been published by him with notes, K.K.N.Kurup (ed.), *A.C.Kannan Nair: Oru Padanam* (Mal.), 1985.

⁸⁸ . Pavanan, *Adhyakaala Smaranakal* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1990.

⁸⁹ . Ayiroti Narayanan, *Yuddha Smaranakal* (Mal.), Vatakara, 1994.

⁹⁰ . M.K.Hemachandran, *Vimuktha Bhatanaya Oru Mun Manthriyute Aatmakatha* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1997.

⁹¹ . N.P.Nair, *1946- le Navika Lahala* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1998.

⁹² . P.K.R.Varier, *Oru Surgeonte Ormmakkurippukal* (Mal.), Kottayam, 2010.

⁹³ . T. P.Gopalakrishnan Nair, *Indiayku Swathanthryam Netiya 1946-2-15 Muthal 26 Vare Natanna R.I.N. Lahala* (Mal.), Mangalathukonam, ND.

the mutiny in true historical perspective and evaluates its impact specifically to Malabar region.

Sources and Methodology

Unlike other sources pertaining to the aspects of the Indian National Movement, there is a paucity of sources concerning the RIN mutiny. Governmental and confidential sources are not easily available to a research scholar. However the sources can be classified into two main categories. They are primary and secondary including journals, publications etc. First attention could be accorded to primary source materials. There is the Report of the RIN Mutiny Enquiry Commission which could be regarded as a primary source. The Commission produced a 600 page report which has not been made public even today. Only a short summary prepared by the Defence department was published on January 20, 1947 after the interim Government had been set up. From the National Archives of India, I had collected most of the primary sources related to my topic. The files named 'RIN Mutiny Papers' provide information mainly on birth of the RIN, brief description of early mutinies and brewing discontent in the RIN, events of the revolt and measures taken to quell the revolt and findings of Enquiry Commission constituted to investigate the causes of the RIN mutiny.

The primary sources mainly consist of government reports, police reports, naval reports etc. Memoirs and private letters left by leaders and participants in the struggles as well as by officials and witnesses also form an important source of a primary nature. There were several official letters written between Viceroy and the Governors of Bombay, Madras and Punjab, works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Correspondence of Sardar Patel and INA files included in this category.

Published works also form a kind of primary source in that they contain important files and papers of the period under investigation. Mansergh, *The Transfer of Power*, Vols. I-VII, Penderel Moon's edited work, *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, Durgadas's multi-volume (I-X) edition of *Sardar Patel's Correspondence 1945-50*, Sarveppalli Gopal's edited work, *Selected Works of*

Jawaharlal Nehru, Vols. XIV-XV etc. could be cited as good pages of the same. Besides Home-Political (Internal), Under Secretary's Safe Files, Civil Defence Department Files, the Fortnightly Reports of Madras, Bombay, Calcutta and Karachi, Civil Supplies Department files etc. occupied an important space in the primary sources. In Wavell's autobiographical work, *The Viceroy's Journal* edited by Penderel Moon provided the day to day account of the mutiny and the government's reaction and measures were given. Among the published government records, the important ones include The Census Reports, Madras Administration Reports, Travancore Administration reports, Malabar District Gazette, House of Commons Official Reports, Travancore Legislative Assembly proceedings, Madras Legislative Assembly Debates, Madras Legislative Council Debates etc.

The next category among the primary sources was the memoirs and autobiographies and also the writings by participants. Important among them is participants accounts. *The RIN Strike* by a Group of victimised Ratings, B.C. Dutt's *Mutiny of the Innocents*, Biswanath Bose's *RIN Mutiny: 1946*, Subrata Banerjee's *The RIN Strike* etc deserve special mention. To this may be added Percy S Gourgey's eye witness account, *The Indian Naval Revolt of 1946*. Joseph Puthenchira's *Katalil Ninnoru Diary* (Mal), N.P. Nair's *1946-le Navika Lahala* (Mal), also come under this category.

Oral evidence through interviews is collected. I conducted interviews with about fifteen people who participated in the mutiny. This included M.V.Kunhiraman, B.Hussain, E.Narayana Kitavu, T.Raghavan Nair, T.V.Govindan Nambiar, Mamiyil Unneerikutty, P.Krishnapillai and P.M.Karunakara Menon. Besides I have interviewed some of the freedom fighters like Subramanya Shenoy and K.Madhavan who were not participants of the mutiny, but freedom fighters and Communist leaders.

I have consulted for the study the following archives: National Archives of India (New Delhi), Tamil Nadu State Archives (Chennai), Maharashtra State Archives (Mumbai), Andhra Pradesh State Archives (Hyderabad), Nehru

Memorial Museum & Library (New Delhi), Kerala State Archives (Tiruvananthapuram) and Regional Archives (Kozhikode) etc.

The Communist Party documents collected from Ajoy Bhavan (New Delhi) and Contemporary Archives (JNU, New Delhi) were also of great value. Newspapers formed an important category of primary source. The revolt gets a detailed coverage in the papers. The first report came on February 19, 1946. On February 22, most of the press had written editorials. National, international and regional newspapers come under this category. Regional papers in Malayalam, Tamil, and Telugu deserved special mention. *Free Press Journal* (Bombay), *The Blitz* (Bombay), *People's Age* (New Delhi), *The Statesman* (New Delhi), *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, (Calcutta), *The Bombay Chronicle* (Bombay), *The Times of India* (Bombay), *The Dawn* (New Delhi), *The Times* (London), *The Pioneer* (Calcutta), *The Deccan Chronicle* (Hyderabad), *The Hindu*(Madras), *The Indian Express* (Madras), *Mathrubhumi* (Calicut), *Deshabhimani* (Calicut), *Malayalarajyam* (Kollam), *Dravida Nadu* (Madras), *Ananda Vikatan* (Madras), *Janasakthi* (Madras), *Dravida Nadu* (Madras), *Meezan* (Hyderabad), *Andhrapatrika* (Hyderabad) etc. deserve special mention.

I have made use of the materials available in the following libraries: JNU Central Library (New Delhi), CHS library, JNU (New Delhi), Parliament library (New Delhi), Central Secretariat library (New Delhi), ICHR library (New Delhi), ICSSR library (Mumbai), Ashuthosh Mukherjee Bhavan Library (Mumbai), Hyderabad Central University Library, C.Rajeswara Rao Foundation (Kondapur), P.Sundarayya Bhavan (Bagalimgampally), Afzalganj Public library (Hyderabad), SalarJung Museum (Afsal Ganj), Connemara Public Library (Chennai), CPI office(Chennai), Madras Mahajana Sabha library (Chennai), Roga Muthaiah library(Mogaipah east), Periyar Rationalist library & Research Center (Chennai), M.N. Smarakam (Thiruvananthapuram), Kerala State Legislative Assembly Library (Thiruvananthapuram), CDS library (Thiruvananthapuram), Vanchiyoor Library (Thiruvananthapuram), Deshaposhini Vayanashala (Kottoli), Keluvettan Patana Gaveshana Kendram (Kozhikode),C.H.Muhammed Koya Memorial Library (University of Calicut),

History Department library (University of Calicut), etc. These are in the form of out of print books, pamphlets, articles in periodicals, obituary notes in magazines etc.

Scope of the Study

By studying a largely unexplored research problem we hope to add on to our existing understanding of the Indian National Movement which cannot be seen as one of unilinear progression but one which had great complexity.

Organisation of the Study

A thematic approach is being followed in the study. However, the thematic arrangement is done without overlooking the importance of chronology. As a result of the analysis and interpretation of data and theorization the chapterisation is designed as follows. The study has six parts.

The first chapter provides background information regarding the Royal Indian Navy, its recruitment propaganda in Malabar and elaborates how recruitment to the navy was made and how it led to the mutiny.

The second chapter deals with the immediate reasons that led to the mutiny like inadequate resolutions for the grievances of the ratings and the impact of the protests against Indian National Army trials. The influence of political ideology among the ratings and impact of heroic adventures of the INA over the armed forces also are analyzed.

The third chapter describes mutinies. It consists of four sections. In the first section, minor mutinies before the February revolt are described. In the second section the beginning of the revolt and the events leading to the ultimate surrender of the ratings is narrated. The third part analyses the civilian participation in the uprising. The fourth part focuses on the mutiny in other naval bases i.e in Karachi, Calcutta, New Delhi, Jamnagar and overseas.

The fourth chapter focuses on the RIN Mutiny in South India and surveys its impact. The chapter has four sections. The first one deals with the events in the Madras port while the second and third sections describe the events that took place in Vishakhapatnam and Cochin ports respectively. The final portion is devoted to the impact of these events in Malabar. The

involvement of the students in the RIN mutiny related outbursts cannot be left out in describing the events.

The fifth chapter deals with the reactions towards the February uprising. It consists of three sections. The focus of the first section is the attitude of different political parties towards the mutiny. The second section focuses on the attitude of British government, the court martial proceedings, discharge and punishments. The last part is on the manifestations of the mutiny in the Assemblies and media.

This is followed by a brief summary and conclusion in which findings of the study is summed up. The study is narrative, analytical and interpretative in nature. The pattern of documentation followed in the study is in the conventional style. The Arabic and Malayalam terminologies are given in Italics and their corresponding meaning in English has been given in brackets. A separate glossary of such terms has also been given.

For reasons of convenience, we have used the term, 'Mutiny' throughout the study. This should not however be taken as an approval of the terms of reference used by the British naval officers and administrators who referred to the uprising as 'Mutiny.'

The present study employs the scientific system of academic research. It is conceptual in the overall system of analysis which takes into account the political importance of the uprising under study.

Chapter 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Priya P. “Royal Indian Navy Mutiny: a study of its impact in South India” Thesis, Department of history, University of Calicut, 2014.

Chapter 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Though the sea marked the boundary of three fourth of British India, its Indian navy was not comparatively large. Recruitment was on the basis of contingency as in Second World War. How the Royal Indian Navy became what it was in the twentieth century? How were recruitments made? The recruitments were largely through publicity and propaganda. Such details form the background of our study with special emphasis to Malabar.

The navy had played a significant role in British annexation of India. The Honourable Company of the Merchants Trading with East Indies was founded by Royal Charter of Queen Elizabeth on December 30, 1600 AD. In 1612 the Company sent out a squadron of fighting ship - the Dragon, the Osiander (Hoseander), the James and the Solomon under the command of Captain Thomas Best which arrived in the Swally, the roadstead of Surat on September 5, 1612 – the date which should be kept as the foundation date of the British Indian Navy.¹ Its official title was ‘The Honourable East India Company’s Marine’ which held till 1686. The main aim was to protect their commerce from the Portuguese, Dutch and the pirates. On October 29, 1612, the Indian Marine fought its first battle.² The marines lived in a constant state of alarm which acted as the best provocative to keep guards. A small establishment of peons protected trading crafts. A small fleet of *grabs*³ and *galivats*,⁴ the germs of the Indian navy were added. Their seamen were landed when necessary to defend the hostile assaults of fanatical mobs or the attacks of Shivaji’s Marathas. Later on the Company was convinced of the necessity of having an insular emporium for their trade peacefully and without being

¹ . D.J.Hastings, *The Royal Indian Navy 1612-1950*, North Carolina, 1988, p.1.

² . C.R.Low, *History of the Indian Navy, 1613-1863*, Vol.I, London, 1877, p.2.

³ . *Grabs* were beamy craft of about 300 tons, of shallow draught, mounting up to 6 guns of (9 and 12 pounders). A typical *grab* carried a crew of 80 Europeans and 46 Lascars and Marines.

⁴ . The *galivats* were smaller craft – the largest of them being only of 70 tons, armed with half a dozen, two and four pounders and propelled by a single bank of 40 oars with a triangular sail as ‘auxiliary.’ A *galivat* carried 12 Europeans and 18 Lascars and Marines.

subjected to their attack. They were officered by volunteers from the Company's ships and their crews were the first Indian employees of the Company.⁵ They were employed on convoying and also carrying trade goods in the Gulf of Cambay and in the rivers of Tapti and Narmada.

In its earliest years the *grabs* formed the regular nucleus of the RIN. The larger ships came out from England and went back again. Later on many fine ships were built in India both for the Bombay Marine and Royal Navy (RN). But the main service has been throughout its history as a small-ship navy, fighting in collaboration with the RN and serving in waters as far as North Atlantic and New Zealand.

An important landmark in the history of the 'Marine' was their defence of the Company's facilities in Surat against Shivaji. The officers and men of the Marine were disembarked for the defence. They fought bravely and this opposition not only foiled the attacks but also protected the town from destruction.

In 1660 Charles II got Bombay as dowry. After a brief and unsuccessful attempt by Charles to administer Bombay for the crown it was transferred to the English East India Company by letters patent dated March 27, 1668 – "To be held to the said Company and their successors of the Crown of England; as the manor of East Greenwich in perpetuity and in free and common soccage at a free-farm rent of \$10 payable on the September 13, yearly at the custom house."⁶ Thus the British Indian navy served British colonial interests.

The British Indian Navy played a significant role in the suppression of the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. Two naval brigades were landed for service in the suppression of the mutiny, one such from HMS Shannom 51 under Captain William Rheel and HMS Pearl 21 under Captain Edward Southwell Sotheby.⁷ C.R.Low in his *History of the Indian Navy* says, "It was almost the last and

⁵ . D.J.Hastings, *Op. Cit.*, p.2.

⁶ . Baldeo Sahai, *The Ports of India*, New Delhi, 1986, p.65.

⁷ . Ministry of Defence, Government of India (GOI), *The Indian Navy*, 1946, p.13.

certainly, it was not the least important, of the long roll of services rendered by the Indian navy during the two and half centuries of its existence.”⁸

In 1613, the ‘Indian Marine’ was formally established. From then till 1830, it was named as the Bombay Marine; from 1830 to 1863, as the Indian Navy; from 1863 to 1877, the Bombay Marine again; from 1877 to 1892, H M Indian Marine; from 1892 to 1934 it was titled as the Royal Indian Marine; from 1934, the Royal Indian Navy (RIN).⁹

During the First World War (1914-18), the six ships of Royal Indian Marine served as auxiliary cruisers.¹⁰ Officers of the service served at sea with the RN in many theatres of war and they carried out some transport duties in India, the Mediterranean and East Africa. On the entry of Turkey into the war they were employed in manning river craft, towing barges to Mesopotamia and on other duties in that area of operations. The total temporary enlistment was 240 officers, 60 warrant officers and 2000 ratings.¹¹

After the war the Government of India (GOI) obtained various proposals for the reorganization of Royal Indian Marine. The Admiral of the fleet, Lord Jellicoe, the Esher Committee and Rear Admiral Mawby who was the Director of the Royal Indian Marine, all made recommendations which were rejected for various reasons, mainly financial. As a result, the RIN reached very low ebb. Finally as per the Inch Cape Committee, the Royal Indian Marine was reduced to little more than a survey department and a dockyard. The service was left with Clive (sloop) for lighting and buoying duties on the Burma coast where she also carried out political duties; Lawrence (sloop) was employed similarly in the Persian gulf; Minto was station guard ship for the Andaman and Nichobar islands; Cornwallis (sloop) lay in the deckyard unconverted and two small ships ‘*Pathan*’ and ‘*Balichi*’ were used for local training at Bombay.

⁸ . C.R.Low, *Op. Cit.*, p.19.

⁹ . *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹⁰ . *Summary of the Report of the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny Commission of Enquiry*, September 1946 (Hereafter SR), Sl. No. 18, RIN Mutiny Papers, NAI, p.1.(After the Mutiny, the Government appointed a Commission of Enquiry to report on the causes and origin of the mutinies. The Commission submitted the Report in July).

¹¹ . SR.

Elphinston, an old sloop of the Royal Navy was used as a relief ship until her loss in 1926.¹² The decisions taken on the recommendations of the Inch Cape Committee have had far reaching results particularly the severe shortage of experienced officers during the war which was caused by the stoppage of recruitment at that time. The coast of India was guarded by the Royal Navy at a cost to India of dollar 1, 00,000 annually.

In 1925, the GOI appointed a committee for the purpose of submitting a scheme for reorganization of service as a combatant force.¹³ The chairman was Lord Rawlinson, the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) and Defence Minister. The Rawlinson Committee was set up to submit a scheme for reorganizing the service as a combatant force with the style of RIN and with an initial strength of four armed sloops or escort vessels, two patrol vessels, four minesweeping trawlers, two surveying ships and a depot ship. It was to be commanded by a Rear Admiral of the Royal Navy on the active list. Ultimately in August 1934, by the Indian Naval Discipline Act based on the Rawlinson Committee Report, the RIN was born.¹⁴ After an initial plan for a five year expansion in 1937, the Flag Officer Commanding RIN (FOCRIN) in 1938 suggested a nine year expansion plan, the GOI later ratified.¹⁵ In the same year the GOI agreed with the British government to develop a force for the local defence of the Indian coast line. In 1939 these plans were abruptly swept aside, and the RIN went to war as an infant service with limited tasks to active combat. Therefore, the role of the RIN remained the local naval defence of the major Indian ports and co-operation with the RN in safeguarding the sea lines of the Indian Ocean.¹⁶

The Second World War and the Recruitment Drive

The British Indian army was the strongest land force in the nineteenth century Asia. Except for its official corps, it was composed of Indians. It was

¹² . SR., p.2.

¹³ . SR.

¹⁴ . SR., pp.2-5.

¹⁵ . SR., p.5.

¹⁶ . Bisheshwar Prasad (ed.), *Expansion of the Armed Forces and Defence Organisation, 1939-45*, New Delhi, 1956, p.32.

an old force and had long traditions of bravery and discipline. Recruitment to all these forces was absolutely voluntary and was largely confined to a limited area and a few selected classes, whose manpower had long been drained to fill the ranks of the defence forces. The vast demographic resources of India, and the limited demands of the army, made it necessary for the British to decide on which groups to recruit for the army and on what basis. The armed forces of India had a very limited role which included internal security, frontier defence, particularly against the war like tribes inhabiting the region, containing an invasion from the north west pending the arrival of imperial forces, and the supply of a fixed force for garrisoning the external defences to the east and west, which were important in the imperial interest. For this restricted task, the Indian armed forces had no need to be large.¹⁷ Their varying perception of the loyalty and courage of the different groups shaped the recruitment. There was no automatic method of expanding this force in an emergency. Conscription was neither necessary nor practicable and so was never implemented.

Scholars like Stephen P.Cohen,¹⁸ Philip Mason¹⁹ and David Omissi²⁰ argue that from the late nineteenth century onwards, the ‘Martial Race Ideology’ shaped the army’s enlistment pattern. It held that some Indian races such as the *Dogras, Garhwalis, Gurkhas, Jats, Kumaonis, Marathas, Pathans, Punjabis, Rajputs, Deccani, Hindustani* and *Mappila* (native Muslims of Malabar) Muslims made good soldiers.²¹ The Martial race ideologues argue that in the occident, any one could become a soldier, but in the orient, due to its peculiar historical and ecological conditions, only some groups were suited for soldiering.²² They argued that people living in the North and North West of

¹⁷ . *Ibid.*, p.xx.

¹⁸ . For details, see Stephen P.Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its contributions to the Development of a Nation*, New Delhi, 1971.

¹⁹ . For details, see Philip Mason, *The Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army, Its Officers and Men*, Dehradun, 1974.

²⁰ . For details, see David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army 1860-1940*, London, 1994.

²¹ . David Omissi, “Martial Races: Ethnicity and Security in Colonial India, 1858-1939”, in *War & Society*, 9, No.1, May 1991, p.3.

²² . Cited in Kaushik Roy, “Recruitment Doctrines of the Colonial Army: 1859-1913”, in *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, Vol.34, No.3, 1997.

India, such as *Gurkhas*, *Sikhs*, *Pathans* and *Dogras* were martial races. Major George F. MacMunn, a prolific writer on the colonial army declared, in Europe as we know, every able bodied man, given food and arms, is a fighting man of some sort, in the east, certainly in India, this is not so. In the orient, only a few groups bear arms. The other groups lacked the physical courage to become warriors.²³

Other important scholars who promulgated the martial race theory were Earl Roberts,²⁴ W.H.Goodenough and J.C.Dalton.²⁵ For them the martial people were well built, smart, fair and handsome. They assumed that truly martial groups with excellent physiques, such as the Sikhs were culturally conditioned for combat. Roberts argued that ‘they love fighting and the excitement of war.’ So they joined the army. Goodenough and Dalton believed that these groups, whose hereditary profession was fighting, were martial. The *Jats* ate wheat and drank milk. So they were awarded the status of soldiers. Since the *Tamils* ate rice they were rejected. The martial race ideologues believed that martialness was the monopoly of selected groups. This was expressed in the military regulations of 1765 which confined recruitment to the *Rajputs*, Muslims and three unspecified *Telugu* castes. They argued that only followers of certain occupations who belonged to the groups possessed military instincts. Hence weavers were declared unfit for soldiering. They held that war like spirit was confined to certain groups in particular areas and the *Purbiyas* in Bengal, were the best soldiers. The Muslims and *Rajputs* of Punjab were categorized as ‘martial’ by MacMunn because they were regarded as the descendants of the Central Asian invaders who occupied the land by driving out the original inhabitants.

Earl Roberts saw the climate and a frontier as crucial. He said that in the hot climate of India, even erstwhile war like races rotted. Cold temperate

²³ . *Ibid.*, p.324; See also, G.F.MacMunn, *The Armies of India*, London,1911 and *The Martial Races of India*, London, 1935.

²⁴ . An elaborate discussion of this argument is available in Earl Roberts, *Forty One Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief*, London, 1897.

²⁵ . For details, see W.H. Goodenough & J.C. Dalton, *The Army Book for the British Empire*, London, 1893.

regions produced better warriors than hot tropics. As Northwest India was colder than South and West India, Roberts felt that all the martial races were in the North West corner of India. He saw a connection between martialness, cold climate and skin colour. He felt that as one moved from North to South, the temperature increased and the inhabitants became darker skinned and progressively unmartial. In their eyes, low temperatures produced fair skinned war like inhabitants.

In the scenario of Malabar, the colonial masters recruited mainly *Nairs* (an upper caste) whom they considered as belonging to martial races and after them they preferred *Thiyyas* (a caste group, belonging to the OBC category) and *Mappilas*.²⁶ Before the outbreak of the First World War with the single exception of the *Mappila* regiment recruited in 1901-1902 and disbanded in 1907, Malabar was not and had never been a recruiting ground for the Indian army. The enlistment of Indians from Malabar in the regular Indian army was not begun until 1915. The First World War necessitated wider recruitment but at first recruitment was thrown open to *Mappilas* only.²⁷ They were enlisted for two battalions - the 73rd Carnatic Infantry and the 88th Carnatic Infantry (CI). Later in August 1915 it was decided to start recruitment among the *Nairs*. They were enlisted for the 75th CI and the 86th CI, recruiting being in the hands of a British officer with recruiting parties from those Carnatic regiments. Recruitment was restricted to *Nairs* at first because of the difficulties of arranging in existing regiments for the messing and training of entirely new castes speaking a language unknown to the existing Indian officers and drill instructors. In April 1916 recruitment was handed over to a civil officer, Captain Hitchcock, then district Superintendent of Police. It was extended to six Carnatic regiments for *Nairs* and five out of the six soon began to recruit also *Thiyyas* and Christians. A few direct commissions were given. This change was introduced in the hope of eliciting greater support from the public.

²⁶ . *Recruitment Files, Correspondence Series, 1915-18* (Hereafter RCS), Bundle No.293, Regional Archives, Kozhikode (Hereafter RAK).

²⁷ . RCS., Bundle No. 293.

The *Malayalees* enlisted in the Carnatic regiments had been kept in separate platoons and have had officers of their own castes as far as possible. Later the military authorities had sanctioned the constitution of a separate battalion to be called the 73rd Malabar infantry consisting entirely of *Malayalees*.²⁸ Many people from Malabar enrolled in the 5th Madras Battalion.²⁹ The numbers recruited in Malabar for the CI regiments from April 1916 to July 1918 were more than 2500. Figures up to April 1916 are not available. The men enrolled were mostly *Mappilas* and the number was not large. In the two and quarter years since, out of 2500 enrolled a little over 50% had been *Nairs*, about 25% *Thiyyas*, 15% *Mappilas* and 10% Christians. There had been steady progress in the numbers. From April to June 1916, 122 recruits were enrolled. From July to December 1916, there was an average of 37 a month, from January to June 1917 an average of 78 a month, from July to December 1917, an average of 112 a month and from January to July 1918 an average of over 200 a month. These highest figures were reached in June 1918 when Captain Hitchcock enrolled a total number of 338 for the six Carnatic infantry regiments - 156 *Nairs*, 117 *Thiyyas*, 31 *Mappilas* and 34 Christians.³⁰

The native loyalists had given assistance to the recruiting process. They attended the recruiting meetings held in different parts of Malabar. *Jenmis* (landlord) such as Kollankode Raja, the Mannarghat Mooppil Nayar, the Katathanat Raja, Vengayil Nayanar, the Kavalapara Nayar, Muthukoya Thangal and Rarichchan Mooppan had offered land on favourable terms to recruits.³¹ Besides they had offered and subscribed to the funds raised by Recruiting Committee for special rewards to men who have been done good service in recruiting. The Kollankode Raja offered 100 scholarships to the students in his schools who were the relatives of recruits and similar

²⁸ . *Civil Defence Department Files (Hereafter CDD)*, 1943, Bundle No. 8, Sl. No.35, RAK.

²⁹ . *CDD.*, 1943, Bundle No. 8, Sl. No.35.

³⁰ . *RCS.*, Bundle No. 293; See Appendix A, Table 1, for figures for Caste wise Recruitment from Malabar.

³¹ . *RCS.*, Bundle No. 293.

concessions were also given in the Zamorin's College and Local Board schools.³²

From the recruitment process, we can assume that the colonial authorities followed the martial race ideology but its application was limited in the sense that martial trait was identified only with some upper castes. Folklore and ballads associated many groups - Muslims, *Thiyyas* and *Nairs* - with martial traditions and the *Kalari* (gymnasium) system. The traditional martial art form of *Kalari* was not associated with only *Nairs*. So the question arises: why did the British identify some castes as martial?

The Second World War (1939-45) forced the British to shelve all these theories. On September 3, 1939, then Viceroy Linlithgow unilaterally associated India with Britain's declaration of war on Germany, without bothering to consult the provincial ministries or any Indian leaders. Congress hostility to Fascist aggression had been incomparably more forthright and consistent than Britain's own record so far. Several leaders of the independence movement, including Mahatma Gandhi, expressed strong opposition against Nazism and Fascism and termed Britain's 'war to save democracy' as hypocrisy since it was denying democratic rights and individual liberties to Indians. The Congress Working Committee protested against the exploitation of our resources for imperialist ends and openly declared that 'India cannot associate herself with a war said to be for democratic freedom, when that very freedom is denied to her, therefore invites the British government to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism. The new order that is envisaged, in particular, how those aims are going to apply in India and to be given effect in the present?'³³ The All India Congress Committee (AICC) endorsed this resolution on October 10, 1939 and demanded that India must be declared an independent nation.³⁴

³² . *Ibid.*

³³ . Jean Alphonse Bernard, *From Raj to the Republic*, New Delhi, 2001, p.63.

³⁴ . Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India* (1983), Reprint, New Delhi, 2005, p.375.

Yet Linlithgow rejected numerous offers of full co-operation in the war effort provided some minimum conditions were met: a promise of a post-war Constituent Assembly to determine the political structure of a free India, and the immediate formation of something like a genuine responsible government in the center. Such conditions the Congress argued considerable justice were essential if Indian opinion was to be really mobilized for a war which in 1939 was still a very distant one, for otherwise the Allied propaganda that the conflict was one between democracy and the principle of self-determination of nation against tyranny and aggression was bound to seem extremely hollow.³⁵ The attitude of the Muslim League however hardened and its conditions for support in war were laid down in a resolution passed by the Working Committee of the Muslim League. It was critical of the plight of Muslim minority in the Congress governed provinces, condemned the scheme of All India Federation and appealed the Raj for greater protection for Muslims against 'Congress oppression.'

Linlithgow's statement of October 17, merely repeated old offers of Dominion Status in an indefinite and presumably distant future, promised post-war consultations with representatives of the several communities to modify the 1935 Act and the setting up for the present of a purely consultative group of Indian politicians and princely representatives with no real executive power whatsoever. He tried to use Muslim League and the Princes against the Congress and refused to define British war aims.³⁶ Privately the Viceroy repeatedly declared his intention to 'lie back for the present' and avoid running after the Congress.³⁷

Despite this attitude in the central administration, Britain was cautiously aware about the crisis which they began to face. After the First World War, Britain lost its position of world power. When the Second World War broke out, they were most aware about the world situation. In order to

³⁵ . *Ibid.*

³⁶ . Bipan Chandra, et.al., *India's Struggle for Independence* (1988), Reprint, New Delhi, 1992, p.449.

³⁷ . Linlithgow to Secretary of State, 3-13 February, 1942 in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power 1942- 47*, Vol. I, London, 1970, p.32.

tackle the situation, they applied the theory of collaboration in India. They tried to make the war as the war of the Indians. The British needed the support of the Indians. For this they applied wide strategies by creating a pro-war mentality among the Indians. This was clear from their war propaganda strategies.

The need for expansion was apparent soon after the commencement of the war. The Russo-German treaty of August 1939 revived the fears of Russian invasion of Afghanistan and India.³⁸ The international situation was announced to be threatening and that tied up the troop earmarked for the defence of the imperial outposts around India. The danger to the Middle East was also growing. Moreover the political situation inside the country was believed to be aggravating the task of internal security. All these factors called for larger forces in India. British resources were fully committed against Germany, while the sea routes through which these resources might reach India, were partially closed from 1940 onwards. The extra forces required therefore had to be largely obtained by expanding the forces in India.

The sudden inflation of the armed strength of India during the period of war, sweeping away all artificial and irrational restriction relating to class or race and stimulating the speed of Indianisation.³⁹ It was undoubtedly a remarkable step which falsified the fears of the tradition, bound an English officer who clung to politically inspired instincts of martial and non-martial classes, and who did not hesitate to decry the technological inexperience or incapability of the Indian people. The war compelled the pace of indianisation which normally should have taken half a century to attain.⁴⁰

The pre-war strength of the Indian army was 1,82,000. By the middle of 1945 the army numbered over 20,00,000 men although recruitment had continued all along on a voluntary basis.⁴¹ The RIN with its personnel raised from 1200 officers and men at the commencement of the war to about 30,000

³⁸ . *Ibid.*, pp.47-48.

³⁹ . Bisheshwar Prasad, *Op. Cit.*, p.xxix; For the expansion of RIN, see Appendix A, Table 2.

⁴⁰ . *Ibid.*

⁴¹ . D. J. Hastings, *Op. Cit.*, p.123.

by the beginning of 1944, had notable services and exploits to its credits.⁴² In September 1939 the RIN was a skeleton service comprising six ships, two tenders, 109 commissioned, 63 warrant officers and 7443 ratings.⁴³

The naval ratings were divided into two broad categories, viz, Permanent and Temporary. Permanent ratings were of two cadres – Continuous Service and Non-Continuous Service ratings. Continuous Service ratings were the normal recruitment for the navy except for ‘domestic rates.’ They were recruited for ten years. The Non-Continuous Service ratings as the cook, steward, topass etc of the domestic branches were recruited direct as men and served for three years from the date of entry. The temporary cadre fell into two categories – Special Service ratings (SS ratings) and Hostilities Only ratings (HO ratings). SS ratings were required to have no previous experience of the sea. And they entered direct to men’s rates. The HO ratings were the trained sailors from the Mercantile marine and were enrolled on terms of similar to those of the Merchant shipping Agreement, for service in a particular ship for 12 months.⁴⁴

All the main centers were contained in Bombay and the ports had only transport officers. During the war years 1939-45 the service witnessed rapid expansion of manpower.⁴⁵ The expansion of infrastructural facilities ie., accommodation etc, however was not commensurate with the massive increase in personnel. In the first few months of the war the strength of the RIN increased rapidly mainly due to the requisitioning of the merchant vessels. Then during the first half of 1940 the manpower target of the service remained steady, till another expansion started with the fall of France and the entry of Italy into the war in 1940.⁴⁶ Up to December 1941, expansion of the RIN continued owing to the difficult situation in the Mediterranean.⁴⁷ Despite expansion and exigency of war, the higher ranks of the service and the key

⁴² . *Ibid.*, p.132.

⁴³ . Bisheshwar Prasad, *Op. Cit.*, p.122.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ . See Appendix A, Table 2,3 & 4 for Expansion figure.

⁴⁶ . Bisheswar Prasad, *Op. Cit.*, p.109.

⁴⁷ . *Ibid.*

positions were held by Europeans.⁴⁸ Secondly contrary to usual official opinion, the RIN was never under officered.⁴⁹

Recruitment

War time expansion of the RIN had brought in men from all parts of the country, weakening the old military tradition of recruitment from politically undeveloped martial races. The colonial authorities applied vast propaganda measures for the recruitment apparatus. Overriding priorities were secured for recruiting and intensive publicity for the RIN was carried out.⁵⁰ Mass recruitment necessitated wide propaganda.

Let us now examine samples of this recruitment propaganda from 1942-1945. The hegemony of the colonial state manifested itself in many forms such as passive acquiescence, apathy, submissiveness, resignation and unquestioned obedience of the colonial people to the state apparatus.⁵¹ The British used all the government machinery for war time propaganda. The hegemony over the native officials was utilized by the British for the successful implementation of propaganda. The physical force and ideological onslaught on the part of the colonial state created in Indian people, what the nationalist called 'a defeatist slave mentality.' This created a mentality of fetters. It helped the British to use the official native structure to mobilize the people to the war front.

Each Presidency was divided into many recruiting circles and each under the control of Assistant Recruiting Officers and there were District Recruiting Officers. The Assistant Recruiting Officer toured different parts of the circle. They mainly concentrated the schools and colleges.⁵² The Madras Presidency was divided into eight recruiting circles, each in charge of an Assistant Recruiting Officer. South Canara, Malabar and Cochin were included in one

⁴⁸ . SR., p.9.

⁴⁹ . See Appendix A, Table 5.

⁵⁰ . Bisheshwar Prasad, *Op. Cit.*, p.117.

⁵¹ . Bhagwan Josh, *Struggle for Hegemony in India, 1920-47*, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1992, p.17.

⁵² . CDD., 1941, Bundle No.6.

circle.⁵³ Calicut was its headquarters. Besides, there was a District Assistant Recruiting Officer and District Recruiting Committee. In Malabar, Calicut, Tellicherry and Cannanore were important recruiting centers.

The British applied several strategies to propagate recruitment among the natives. They formed 'National War Front' (NWF) under the Director of War Publicity in each Presidency.⁵⁴ There were provincial organizers in the presidencies. The Director of War Publicity is the Provincial organizer. In each district usually had a District organizer, Honorary Divisional Organizers, District Lecturer, an Additional Lecturer, Special Lecturer for Muslims, Propagandist Ballad Master, Special Lecturer for Scheduled Tribes, Lady Lecturer etc.⁵⁵ In the *taluk* (revenue and administrative division) level there were *Taluk* Organizers. Below them there were propagandists in each sub-*taluks*. Besides, there were Village Guards, Propagandist Inspectors, Athletic propagandists, Special Coastal Inspectors etc.⁵⁶ All these machinery were systematically used for war time propaganda. It is very interesting to note that official recruiting machinery was composed of natives from the district level to bottom. They were the beneficiaries of British rule and loyal.

Besides NWF, there were two more channels of the propaganda organisation. The first of these were the Provincial Propaganda Sub-Committees, District Divisional and *Taluk* Propaganda Sub-Committees. These Committees comprised officials and non-officials. The second channel of Propaganda was 'Victory House.' In the Victory House at Madras where the administrative work is carried on by the Director of War Publicity, his personal Assistant, the Assistant Director of War Publicity, and the sub-ordinate staff. Victory House has a press section which published the weekly *Madras War Review*. It had an editor, an assistant editor who was employed on the preparation of cartoons, posters, illustrations and advertisements and vernacular journalists and translators. In addition to this press section, the Victory House

⁵³ . *Madras Administration Report* (Hereafter *MAR*), 1939, 312, RAK.

⁵⁴ . *CDD.*, 1943, Bundle No.7.

⁵⁵ . *CDD.*, 1943, Bundle No.9.

⁵⁶ . *MAR.*, 1942.

has a large publicity 'Showroom' with models, charts, maps, posters, show windows and various other exhibits and functions as a 'Central Information Bureau.' Local Victory houses on the model of the Madras victory house had been established at Dindigul, Bezwada, Anantapur, Cuddappah, Chittoor, Cuddalore, Ellore, Bellary, Calicut and Madura. They served as war Information Bureau and also the official headquarters of the NWF. In the Madras Presidency, there were district organizers in 17 districts.⁵⁷

From 1942 onwards the British war machinery worked out in Malabar. It can be assumed that from the Quit India movement (1942) onwards the British were aware about the internal danger. Victory House at Calicut was the official headquarters of the NWF, Malabar. It served as the War Information Bureau. The Malabar district organizer during the war period was Rao Bahadur Kunhiraman Nair. Under him there were *Taluk Organisers* in the *taluk* level⁵⁸ and propagandists in the sub-*taluks*.⁵⁹ District Lecturer was the main spokesman of the war propaganda machinery. Usually he delivered speeches about war; progress of war, recruitment, collection of war relief fund etc. In all the meetings, he appealed the whole hearted co-operation of the people to the various branches of war efforts.⁶⁰ He was in charge of the propaganda van. He usually made house visits to make aware the people about the war. Propaganda was mainly aimed to get recruits from able bodied men. The propagandists toured every nook and corner of the district. They conducted public meetings in schools, public places and visited houses to propagate the war strategy.⁶¹ Recruitment of natives to the army was their important aim of the propaganda campaigns.' Such campaigns assisted of:

⁵⁷ . North Arcot, Malabar, Chingleput, Tinnevely, South Arcot, South Canara, Cuddappah, Chittoor, Nellore, Guntur, East Godavari, Kurnool, West Godavri, Anantapur, Kistna, Bellary and Vishakhapatanam, CDD, 1943, Bundle No.7.

⁵⁸ . Chirakkal, Kottayam, Kurumbranad, Wayanad, Calicut, Ernad, Ponnani, Valluvanad and Palghat were the nine taluks of the Malabar district, The Census of India, 1941, p.41; CDD., 1943, Bundle Nos.1-10.

⁵⁹ . Taliparamba, Cannanore, Tellicherry, Kuthuparampa, Mananthavady, Badagara, Quilandy, Kunnamangalam, Manjeri, Tirurangadi, Perinthalmanna, Ottapalam, Palghat, Alathur, Tirur, Ponnani, Chowaghat were the sub-*taluks* of Malabar district. See CDD., 1944, Bundle No. 10, Sl. No.58.

⁶⁰ . CDD.,1943, Bundle No.9.

⁶¹ . CDD.,1943, Bundle No.10.

Advertisements

The Recruiting Directorate built an Advertising section which sought to popularize the service through all publicity media.⁶² The British used advertisements as an important recruitment technique. Advertisements were given in regional newspapers.⁶³ These inspired the people to join the army and strengthen it. These were sometime accompanied by illustrations to make it more attractive. In some advertisements, emphasis was given to education. One such advertisement was ‘Wanted Matriculates.’⁶⁴ It normally attracted the educated youth to join the force. Some advertisement pointed out the adventurous spirit of the people. It invited the youngsters to join the navy and wander the world.⁶⁵ Some advertisements were entitled, ‘Join navy and enjoy life.’⁶⁶ Obviously it targeted young people.

These advertisements were very attractive and led to large scale enrolment in the navy. Some of them later reminiscence that the glory which the advertisements shown by the British fascinated them.⁶⁷ The good life situations promised by the British attracted them. It is very interesting to note that a navy man recollects that he sent a picture along with his application in which Hitler is being murdered by a person. Then he was selected to the navy in 1943.⁶⁸

Posters

The British used different posters to attract the people to the recruitment. A poster pictures a sailor on guard and it said:

⁶² . Bisheshwar Prasad , *Op. Cit.*, pp.124-125.

⁶³ . *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Calicut, 1944-45; *Malayalarajyam*, Kollam, 1944-45.

⁶⁴ . *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ . *Malayalarajyam*, Kollam, 9 April, 1945.

⁶⁶ . *Ibid.*, 23 April, 1945.

⁶⁷ . Interview, M.V.Kunhiraman, a participant of the mutiny, at his residence in Kanhangad on 21 December, 2001; Joseph Puthenchira, *Katalil Ninnoru Diary* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1980, p.10.

⁶⁸ . M.K.Hemachandran, *Vimuktha Bhatanaya Oru Mun Manthriyute Aatmakatha* (Mal.), Kottayam,1997, p.81.

Many hundreds of young men are today building their careers in the Navy and ‘Be proud of your son, let him join the RIN if he wishes to. Give him your blessings.’ The navy will give your son a healthy open air life with good clothes. He will meet the best of his countrymen and be a real man. The RIN has a great tradition and glorious future. Let him join up. On the reverse of side of the poster, at the top were the words: ‘A sailor’s life is a happy one’ and below were pictures depicting seven days free rations and articles of clothing. At the end, by stating the payment, the poster mentioned that there were all this ‘plus many allowances.’⁶⁹

The Enquiry Commission commented rightly that the significance of this poster could not have been lost on the recruit and his parents and family. He would have a fine career in the navy, a navy with a glorious future, not a navy which would be wound up in large part. He is expected to be come as real man. A youth in his teens cannot become a real man during four or five years of a temporary service.⁷⁰

An important poster in Malayalam was ‘joliyum vidhyabhyasavum Naviyiloote’ (Career and Education through the Navy). It encouraged large number of youths to join the navy.⁷¹ It was pasted near educational institutions, mainly to attract the educated youngsters.⁷²

Pamphlets

An important pamphlet of 1943, ‘The Story of Kishore and Khalil’ deserves special mention. It portrays Kishore in naval uniform and Khalil, his friend in civilian uniform. The story is related in the form of a dialogue:

⁶⁹ . *Report of the RIN Mutiny Commission of Enquiry* (Hereafter *CER*), Sl. No.6, RIN Mutiny Papers, NAI, pp.128-129.

⁷⁰ . *CER.*, p.129.

⁷¹ . Pavanan, *Adhyakaala Smaranakal* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1990, p.23.

⁷² . He joined the navy in 1943. In his autobiography, he noted that there were many such posters near Brennan College, Tellicherry where the Recruiting Center worked. For details, see Pavanan, *Ibid.*

Kishore, a lawyer's son had run away from his home and joined the navy as a communication rating on Rs.60 per month. He comes back home on leave and meet Khalil in a picture house. He advises Khalil to join as Artificer and earn Rs.40 more than he himself did at that time. Khalil and Kishore persuade Khalil's parents to agree after telling them about the service in the RIN and its benefits. Khalil's father tells him that the war would not last indefinitely and as soon as the war is over, he will be asked to leave. Kishore replies to Khalil's father, No sir, the contract is for ten years and it is believed that after the period is over a great majority would be retained in the permanent service. In answer to Khalil's father's enquiry about scale of pay, Kishore tells him, 'I believe the pay goes up to 460 per month.'⁷³

The following among others are the representations and suggestions in this pamphlet. Parents and sons are given to understand that 'a recruit will have a career in the navy which will not end with the war. The ratings will have quick promotion from the starting pay of Rs.90 as an artificer to Rs.460. Facilities for good food, vegetarian and non-vegetarian are available. The officers are sympathetic and helpful. It is a very good service. Artificers are keenly in demand. Kishore ran away from his home without his father's leave and now feels happy.

The pamphlet was designed to attract SS ratings. The Enquiry Commission was of the opinion that this pamphlet is definitely misleading on the question of SS ratings that are taken as a period of five years as disclosed in the booklets and regulations. It was doubtful if the real position was ever brought home to these ratings. In any case they would have left their native homes and signed their enrolment on the strength of assurances such as those conveyed by this pamphlet.⁷⁴

⁷³ . CER., p.129.

⁷⁴ . CER., p.130.

The pamphlet clarifies two things. In the first place the pamphlet reflects war time middle class insecurity. These uncertainties are then allayed for the forthcoming recruit. Secondly the economic advantage to attract young man is stated but while the raise in pay is mentioned the corresponding rank is not mentioned. In short, to the SS ratings, this pay raise was an illusion.

Specifically addressing the English educated Indians stated, ‘There is no place for illiterate men in the Navy.’⁷⁵ Such strongly worded appeals from a beleaguered Britain attached enormous prestige to the RIN and were largely successful in attracting large numbers of middle class youths to the service. Here the RIN expansion and rebellion can be visualized as part of a historical India wide tendency. In the First World War the nationalist supported the British war efforts and thousands of Indians joined the army in the hope of getting concessions after the war. Similarly during 1939-45 thousands of Indians, despite nationalist protest at home, joined up to form the largest volunteer army to have served a colonial power.⁷⁶ The Indian army grew from 1,89,000 men in 1939 to two and half million in 1945, the largest volunteer army ever to serve under any flag as a panegyrist said. Although Indian national consciousness was far stronger now than a generation earlier, far more soldiers were raised than in 1914-18, and more easily. There was more pressure now of need, for jobs and opportunity for more diversified talent. There was hopes and expectation behind this fact. The end of the war, like in 1918, belied their hopes.

Yet another pictorial pamphlet summed up the essence of the ongoing recruitment propaganda. The wireless operators of the RIN were the men upon whom vital communications depended. The communications branch provided an invisible link between ship and ship between ship and shore, and the link with the future promotion for keen intelligent men were seen as coming quickly.⁷⁷ The Commission commented that the advertisements are definitely

⁷⁵ . CER., p.130.

⁷⁶ . V.G. Kiernan, *European Empires from Conquest to Collapse 1815-1960*, Fontana, 1962, p.206.

⁷⁷ . CER., p.135.

misleading as regards the prospects of promotion and career of SS ratings in the communication branch. In view of their educational and other qualifications their disappointment arising from frustrated hopes of a career in the navy would naturally be very keen, keener than in the case of ordinary ratings.

Booklets

A booklet is entitled ‘The Navy and its job’ deliberately confused things by claiming that the ‘RIN was based on the RN because the RN was, without exception the oldest and most efficient and finest fighting service in the world.’⁷⁸ It stated further: “India’s Navy is growing fast. It needs to grow faster if security is to be ensured the navy needs men of intelligence and singleness of purpose.” Today it is difficult to measure the psychological impact of such propaganda on the young desperate minds of the times but if figures indicate meaning we can venture to say that this blast of empty words did not go waste.⁷⁹

Another booklet ‘India’s Navy’ set out duties, terms and condition of service of ratings.⁸⁰ It listed the duties of seamen, stokers, artificers and shipwrights, communication branch, accountant branch and medical branch are separately catalogued. It is worthy of note that cleaning ship was not among the duties of artificers and shipwrights. The grievances of this class of ratings who were compelled to do that duty can on this ground alone be held to be justified, not to speak of other grounds such as misleading conduct of recruiting officers who did not tell them about these duties and the fact that they were recruited from a social class to which the performance of such a duty will be a matter of disgrace. One participant from Malabar remembers, the promises given by the

⁷⁸ . CER., pp.130-31.

⁷⁹ . See Appendix A, Table 3.

⁸⁰ . CER., pp. 131-132.

British prior to recruitment were bogey. Though recruited as a clerk, he was made to clean the decks and bathrooms.⁸¹

The communication branch propaganda made special appeals for enlistment of skilled workers. These contained profitable sounding propositions for the future asserting that the communication branch was the most important one in the navy and training obtained there would be in great demand after the war. Then powerful rhetoric was switched on:

‘Have you intelligence?’ If you have passed the matriculation or equivalent exam, you can join the RIN either as an ordinary signalman or an ordinary telegraphist. If you possess a diploma in radio engineering you can join as a radio mechanic.⁸²

Another poster set a pride questioning tone:

Are you young and you are between 17½ and 24 years of age and have studied up to matriculation. There are good opportunities and prospects for you in the RIN. Your job will be interesting. Free food, clothing, accommodation and medical allowance, good prospects, opportunities exist. For promotion to warrant ranks where the rate of pay will be Rs.300 rising to Rs.460 per month and Rs.2 per day in lieu of rations when serving afloat.⁸³

Such was the illusion which lured the young ratings to sacrifice their five precious years to the RIN. Evidently disillusionment during and at the end of the war was quite natural among the ratings. However, despite feeling conned and the massive desertion, those who stayed must have entertained extremely solid hopes for themselves in the post-war phase. The rapid evaporations of such aspirations thus became, after the war, an important cause of widespread rebellion in the RIN.

Handbills

⁸¹ . Interview, E.Narayana Kitavu, a participant of the mutiny, at his residence in Nallalam on 20 May, 2005.

⁸² . *CER.*, pp.133-34.

⁸³ . *CER.*, p.194.

Several thousand copies of handbills were printed and widely distributed.⁸⁴ The handbills were in Malayalam and English. It was distributed in schools, institutions, meeting places, war camps and reading circles. Public meetings were held throughout the district. Large supply of postage labels were circulated among the government offices.⁸⁵ These labels were intended to assist recruitments. War news had been published in the local press from time to time.

Film Exhibition

It was an important propaganda strategy applied by the British.⁸⁶ Propaganda vans toured the district showing films related to war. There was a supply of at least one van to each district. These vans moved from all parts of the Presidency into the interiors. The vans in operation were equipped with a 35mm talkies projector, a generating set, a magic lantern, public address system, pick-up gramophone and radio. There was a qualified operator and driver for each van to work the various items of equipment. Magic lantern slides, war shorts, comic films, gramophone records and other propaganda materials were regularly supplied to all vans. Talkie films were exhibited for war propaganda. A six reel film entitled 'Unexploded Bomb' was exhibited.⁸⁷

In Malabar, the coronation Talkies and Radha Picture Palace of Calicut co-operated with the propaganda programmes and exhibited films in their talkies.⁸⁸ They had provided venue for war propaganda meetings. Besides they organised open air cinema shows also to attract the people. For instance a film named 'Warriors of the South' was shown to stimulate recruitment.⁸⁹ Cinema slides were drawn up. In the 1940s movies were very rare and expensive. The

⁸⁴ . CDD., 1942, Bundle No.9.

⁸⁵ . CDD., 1944, Bundle No.13.

⁸⁶ . CDD., 1943, Bundle No.8.

⁸⁷ . CDD., 1942, Bundle No.3.

⁸⁸ . CDD., 1942, Bundle No.6.

⁸⁹ . MAR., 1945.

British authorities reported that the exhibition of these entertainment activities attained massive attraction.⁹⁰

War Camps

War camps were an important propaganda strategy implemented by the British. A very interesting thing is that the British conducted propaganda war camps in connection with the temple festivals and *Nerccha* (a Muslim festival, an annual programme of devotion at the shrine of a saint (Sufi) or a martyr) festivals in the *Maqbaras* (tomb of a Sufi). The official records of Malabar provide information about the propaganda war camp and exhibitions during the Trichambaram festival in Taliparamba, Koottayi *Nerccha*, Jagannatha temple festival at Tellicherry, Mannarghat *Pooram* festival (temple festival), Valliyoor Kavu festival in Wayanad, Malappuram *Nerccha* etc.⁹¹ Exhibitions were organised in all the war camps and propaganda meetings.⁹² In the camp exhibitions, war models, pictures, pamphlets, posters and slides of war were exhibited. War models include Submarines, Corvette, American Clipper, Destroyer, Anti-Aircraft Gun etc.⁹³

They used our cultural forms as a tool for war propaganda. For example they mobilised the people through local art forms in that particular locality. In the war camps and exhibitions, performance of local art forms attracted the people. In Malabar, in the Kurumbranad areas they mainly played the martial art forms like *Valpayattu* (a form of sword play in Kurumbrand *taluk*. Kurumbranad was famous for martial arts) and plays like *Thacholi Othenan* (a legendary hero of Northern Ballads) to utilise the regional sentiments of the people. They organised *Ambeythu* (using bow and arrow, archery) competition in the war camps during the Valliyur Kavu festival. Valliyurkavu belonged to an *adhivasi* (Tribal) area. In the Muslim dominated areas, *Kolkali* (a dance form using sticks usually performed by the Muslims) was performed. All the popular art forms *Kathakali*, *Ottamthullal*, *Harikatha*, *patakam*, *Chakyar*

⁹⁰ . CDD., 1943, Bundle No.8.

⁹¹ . CDD., 1943, Bundle Nos. 6-8.

⁹² . CDD., 1943, Bundle No.10.

⁹³ . CDD., 1943, Bundle No.10.

Koothu, Theyyam, Payattu, Kalaripayattu, Kolattam, Music programmes, Dance programmes etc were commonly performed in the war camps and public meetings.

Several large public meetings were held throughout the area. Propaganda meetings were held in different parts of the Calicut city mainly in the schools.⁹⁴ *Mananchira maidan* (a ground, open space) was an important venue. In the meetings, the NWF Lecturers spoke to the people about the recruitment.⁹⁵

Notices

Notices were another propaganda strategy utilized by the British. Notices about war camps and meetings were distributed. Gramophones were used in the public meetings to attract the people. Radio was used as an important war propaganda strategy to mobilize the people. It was mainly under the District Lecturer. The official machinery granted licences for broadcasting.⁹⁶ They used drums for all meetings and camps. *Kinnam muttal* (literally clanging the plate) was used to inform the people about the programmes.⁹⁷

To stimulate recruitment, a recruiting party visited Malabar and South Canara in a naval ship, HMIS Dipavati. It included a demonstration party of South Indian ratings from HMIS Akbar, together with a 'Pipe Band' of the ship. The government claimed that it was mainly aimed at the welfare of the ratings. So it included an officer-in-charge of Welfare organization from the Naval Headquarters (NHQs). The ports visited were Ratnagiri, Mangalore, Cannanore, Tellicherry, Calicut, Cochin, Ernakulam, Alleppey and Trivandrum.

⁹⁴ . Propaganda meetings were mainly held in the schools of the Calicut City like Kuttichira Mappila Elementary School, Nagaram Mappila Elementary School, East Nadakavu Hindu Elementary School, Kallai Mappila School, Municipal Town Hall etc., *Miscellaneous Files*, Bundle No. 209, Sl. No.34, RAK.

⁹⁵ . For details, see Priya P, *Fighting Your Master's War: British War Propaganda Strategy, Mobilization and Recruitment in Malabar (1939-45)*, Paper published in *the Proceeding Volume of 73 Session, IHC*, held at Mumbai University, 28 to 31 December, 2012.

⁹⁶ . *Miscellaneous Files*, Bundle No. 209, Sl. No.34.

⁹⁷ . *CDD.*, 1943, Bundle No.13.

HMIS Travancore joined Dipavati for the visit to Travancore state.⁹⁸ Rallies were held at each of these places. The Welfare organization tried to contact the relatives of the ratings in their houses and to discuss welfare measures with the local officials. The official sources stated that the tour both from the recruiting angle and the welfare angle was an outstanding success.⁹⁹

Reading Circles

As a part of their strategy they established reading circles in the village and *taluk* centers. Among the reading circles, newspapers were subscribed, mainly pro-war papers like, *The Madras Mail*, *The Times of India* and *Mathrubhumi*.¹⁰⁰ Books on regional languages were purchased and given to these reading circles. They mainly purchased religious books satisfying the three main communities of that time - Hindu, Muslim, and Christian. At first reading rooms were established in the teashops in that particular locality. But later some of the reading rooms were shifted to the premises of the village *Adhikaris* (Village Headman) or such people.¹⁰¹ These reading rooms were disposed off after the war.¹⁰²

The reading room culture developed in Malabar, a district known for high rate of literacy, from the early twentieth century onwards. One of the novelties in the organization of the reading rooms was the communal drinking of tea, as one person read the newspapers and the others listened. Tea and coffee lubricated discussions on the veracity of news and of political questions, and a new culture emerged around the reading rooms. Tea shops and reading rooms all over Malabar provided a common space for people to meet and to drink together regardless of caste - though there were discriminations towards scheduled castes in respect of seating arrangements and drinking cups. It was a space for open discussions. One can assume that British authorities were aware

⁹⁸ . Bisheswar Prasad, *Op. Cit.*, p.129.

⁹⁹ . Cited in *Ibid*; For Recruitment of South India, see Appendix A, Table 6, Region wise Recruitment.

¹⁰⁰ .*CDD.*, 1943, Bundle No.13.

¹⁰¹ .*CDD.*, 1942, Bundle No. 8; This refers to receipt of several letters written by Village Officials stating that they were not in a position to visit the teashops.

¹⁰² .*CDD.*, 1942, Bundle No. 8.

of this 'space' and decided to utilize it for war propaganda. It shows that how did the indigenous knowledge system utilized by the imperialist power. Here the important problem identified is that why the British adopted the existed strategy to mobilize the people into the war.

Arrangements were made for the publication of speeches made at the various meetings. The authorities sent personal appeal to influential people in the locality, offices, schools, churches etc for participating in the recruitment process. They organised 'Recruitment Prize Weeks' in different parts of the district. In these camps, Voluntary Speakers of that locality delivered lectures. It aimed to utilize the local influences to the recruitment drive.¹⁰³ 'Recruitment Drive Week' was conducted under the Assistant Recruiting Officer and Recruiting Committees. Its objective was to hasten the recruitment procedures. There were many Voluntary Speakers who delivered lectures about the importance of recruitment. Usually the Voluntary Speakers were influential personalities on that locality. It aimed to attract common people to the recruitment drive.

The interesting thing is that British were enrolling the people to the war. It was mainly done through schools. The District Education Officer was in charge of the enrolment.¹⁰⁴ For this there were enrolling officers. Possibly the managers of schools, Headmasters and Assistant Masters assisted the British in such efforts. They were submitting list of persons who enrolled as members of war front. From the schools they were enrolling mainly the teachers, staff and students. Besides, there were house wise enrollments. They enrolled the public also to the war front. This was mainly in weekends. In the enrollment list there was a pledge which the persons who are enrolled had to be taken. The pledge was both in English and Malayalam.¹⁰⁵ The pledge mainly aimed to make the people aware about the rumours related to the war.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ . For example, as a part of Recruitment Prize Week, recruitment camp was organised in the Thazhekkad *Pooram* where Thazhekkad Janab N.P.Muhammed Ali acted as Voluntary Speaker and delivered lectures, *Miscellaneous Files*, Bundle No.218, Sl. No.12.

¹⁰⁴ . *Miscellaneous Files*, Bundle No. 218, Sl. Nos., 1-44.

¹⁰⁵ . *Ibid.*

The enrollment period is very remarkable that is, in the early 1941-42, during this period; the Indian National Army (INA) was formed in Singapore which was an important attracting force to the people. About 60,000 Indians were mobilized by INA. Many rumours had spread in the country during this period. One was Subhash Chandra Bose intending to attack India with the help of Japan. There were many rumours about German invasion also. So we can assume that the British were aware about the popularity of INA and German invasion. As there was a sizable number of *Malayalees* in Singapore, Malaysia, Penang etc, many of them might have joined the INA. The British officials were very nervous about the support INA was likely to get in Malabar. Obviously the pledge was aimed to eradicate such confusions created by INA and Germany. It is mainly to mobilize the people to the war front and create anti-German feelings. To raise the morale of the people during the war period is very much important. The British were most aware about it. Apparently British used it as an important strategy to raise the morale of the people.

Recruitment to the RIN was done by the RIN itself till January 1942 and then was transferred to the Recruiting Directorate in the Adjutant General's branch of the War Department, GOI. In the work of the Directorate in relation to naval recruitment RIN officers were associated but not in sufficient numbers to impart knowledge of or acquaintance with the conditions and requirements of naval service to the recruiting service all over the country.¹⁰⁷ Hence they could not control the recruitment drive. The Recruitment propaganda was wide enough to attract attention of the higher authorities. The latter and the GOI were squarely responsible for whatever happened. Above all we can see, it was official policy and callousness towards the RIN which underlined the fake assurances contained in the propaganda.

In short, the wide recruitment propaganda campaigns prompted the people to join the navy. During the war, world nations used nationalism as an

¹⁰⁶ . Pledge - "Because I am proud to be a citizen of India and I solemnly pledge myself stamp out defeatism and suppress alarmist rumour to face and defy every peril threatening India's national honour and security and work day by day in sure and certain hope or victory." - India's National War Front. ; For details, see *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁷ . *CER.*, p.125.

important propaganda strategy to induce the people to enroll in the army. For example, their advertisements inspired the spirit of nationalism. But the colonial masters utilized the poverty, backwardness, ignorance of the people and unemployment of the colonized people to recruit them to the armed forces. The economic hardships, unemployment, poverty, epidemics also pressed them to join the armed forces.¹⁰⁸ A survey was made among the recruits from the present districts of Malappuram, Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasaragod who joined the navy during the period 1939-45 and it is clear from this that majority of them enrolled in the armed forces due to their economic constraints.¹⁰⁹ They considered the army as a means to escape from starvation and unemployment. One participant of the mutiny memorised that the money orders that regularly went to the houses of soldiers motivated him to join the navy.¹¹⁰

The recruitment process was mainly centered in the towns and cities. On the basis of the participants' accounts we can make the assertion that most of the recruits were from the cities and nearby areas.¹¹¹ In Malabar, it mainly concentrated in Calicut, Tellicherry and Cannanore which were the important recruiting centers. During the colonial period, Cannanore cantonment was an important military area.¹¹² It was the headquarters of the British in their fight against Tippu Sultan in the eighteenth century. Upto 1887 it was the HQs of the Malabar-South Canara Brigade. During the First World War it was the HQs of many regiments and acted as war depot. In the Second World War period it was an important recruiting center. Besides the cantonment area, there were many schools which acted as recruiting centers. The Town *Mappila* School, Cannanore, the Basel Evangelical Mission School at Tellicherry and Brennan

¹⁰⁸ . Interview, T.Govindan Nambiar, a participant of the mutiny, at his residence in Thondayad on 15 October, 2001.

¹⁰⁹ . This conclusion has been arrived at after interviews with a number of people who were recruited in the navy during the period from 1939-45 from Malabar. For details, see Appendix C, Biographical Sketch; Ayiroti Narayanan, *Yuddha Smaranakal* (Mal.), Vatakara, 1994, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ . Interview, P.Krishna Pillai, a participant of the mutiny, at his residence in Kokkivalavu on 20 January, 2013.

¹¹¹ . Interviews with a number of people who were recruited in the navy during the period from 1939-45 from Malabar. For details, see Appendix C, Biographical Sketch.

¹¹² . RCS., Bundle No.293.

College, Tellicherry were the important venues.¹¹³ In Calicut, Malabar Christian College was an important recruiting venue.¹¹⁴ Naturally students of these institutions attended the recruitment camp. People living in the premises of the city naturally joined the army. Recruits were mainly from West Hill, East Hill, Natakavu, Pokkunu, Mankavu, Chevayur, Eranhipalam, Puthiyangadi, Karaparambu, Kallai, Thodayad, Cannanore Cantonment area, Chovva, Thana etc.¹¹⁵

Among the recruits most of them belonged to upper caste strata of the society i.e. especially from the *Nair* castes. During the war period, among the recruits, 45% were *Nairs*, 30% were *Thiyya*, 15% Muslims and 10% Christians. An attempt to evaluate the reason for these recruitment patterns will have to take the social condition of and the impact of western education on these social groups. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, an articulate class or social group had come into existence as a result of colonial transformation in the country. Some scholars called it as ‘salarit’ consisting of those who had received modern education that equipped them for employment in the state apparatus at various levels as scribes and functionaries.¹¹⁶ The salarit was an auxiliary class whose class role was closely enmeshed with the destinies of the fundamental classes (Indigenous and foreign capitalists and the landowning classes on the one hand and the sub-ordinate classes, namely the working classes and the peasantry on the other). The material interests of the colonial salarit had underpinned the emerging politicisation of caste and ethnic groups in the sub-continent.

This was presumably because the salarit loomed large in societies in which the production base and the bulk of the population were mainly rural and agricultural. Moreover in such societies, the educated urban population looked

¹¹³ . Many Autobiographies mentioned the Recruiting Centres and Advertisements. For details, see Pavanan, *Op. Cit.*,p.23.

¹¹⁴ . Interview, Gopalakrishna Menockie, a participant of the mutiny, at his residence in Kakkoti on 11 May, 2013.

¹¹⁵ . Interviews with a number of people who were recruited in the navy during the period from 1939-45 from Malabar.

¹¹⁶ . Hamsa Alavi & John Hams, *Sociology of Developing Societies*, London, 1989, p.225.

primarily to the government for employment and social advancement. Seema Alavi included in salarit, not only those who were in white colour employment, notably in the state apparatus but also those who aspired for such jobs and sought to acquire the requisite credentials. The colonial salarit of Malabar was undoubtedly dominated by the savarna castes from its inception. A more important factor was the manner in which the members of the upper castes particularly the *Nairs*, were able to make use of the employment opportunities afforded by the British administration. Already well-versed in traditional knowledge, the *Nairs* were the first to take to western education which gave them an advantage over others in government employment.¹¹⁷ The overwhelming majority of the 1000 graduates, undergraduates and matriculates in the Malabar district at the end of the nineteenth century came from upper caste Hindus. By the middle of the twentieth century also they retained their educational status. During the war period, it helped them to co-operate with the war efforts and recruitment process of the colonial government.

We can see that the upper class/upper caste Hindus was collaborated with British war efforts and recruitment process during the Second World War. This must have had an effect in the patterns of recruitment we saw. Another reason which prompted the *Nairs* to join the military was their association with the British and English education. Besides, their traditional assumption as 'martial race' also may have prompted them to join the army. The most important reason was however changes in the society due to the social legislations i.e. Madras *Marumakkathayam* (matrilineal system of inheritance) Act of 1933. It paved the way for the economic decline and disintegration of the traditional family organizations, notably the matrilineal joint family of the *Nairs*. Naturally they had lost the economic security which they enjoyed under the *Marumakkathayam* system. The absence of adequate economic opportunities compelled the upper caste youngsters to find out new occupational strata which led to the joining of military.

¹¹⁷ . K.N.Panikkar, *Against Lord and State: Religion & Peasant Uprisings in Malabar 1836-1921*, New Delhi, 1989, p.79.

As Malabar lagged behind in industrial growth there were very few opportunities for an educated youth in the region. Lastly there was no political counter propaganda to recruitment. Congress was ambivalent towards the war in 1939 and later launched the Quit India Movement which led to the arrest of all the leaders. So the Congress was not in a position to effectively counter the British war time propaganda. The Socialists had a better understanding of the war and characterized it as an ‘imperialist’ one in 1939-40. They also conducted a vigorous anti-war, anti-recruitment campaign. But with the entry of Soviet Union in the war, they began characterising it as a ‘Peoples’ war.’ This was followed by calls to join the army. Thus many were prompted to join the armed forces.¹¹⁸ Many autobiographies and interviews stated this matter. M.Madhavan Atiyoti was a member of the Cherukulam branch of the Communist Party in 1943. Encouraged by the Party, he joined the navy in 1943 and relieved from service after the war in September 1945.

When the war broke out in order to procure more and better recruits, college students were recruited. These newcomers knew nothing about the conditions of life and routine in the RIN.¹¹⁹ Hence they objected to the performances of menial tasks of recruiting propaganda led, in Commander Gush’s words, “To a type man joining the navy who is dissented when serving in the junior rates and looks upon rapid promotion even to officer ranks as his due.”¹²⁰ The ratings had expressed their complaints about their having been misled by promises at the time of recruitment. Such complaints have been made to naval authorities during the last few years. The following reports and statements evidence this fact:

- a. The morale reports of the quarter May-June and July 1945 sent by Commanding officers of various ships and establishments refer to such complaints. The comprehensive morale reports issued by NHQ on the strength of these reports says, ‘Commanding Officers still complain of misrepresentation of recruiting propaganda and as a consequence having

¹¹⁸ . Interview, M.Madhavan Atiyoti, at his residence in Cherukulam on 12 February, 2012.

¹¹⁹ . *CER.*, p.125.

¹²⁰ . *CER.*, p.126.

to deal with men who are led to expect something different from service life. There is little doubt that many ratings who complained of service conditions are those who are misled by promises which could never be fulfilled.'

- b. Commodore J.W.Jefford in his evidence before the Enquiry Commission referred to eight complaints received in the year 1944-45.
- c. A complaint dated on January 4, 1944 from the Officer-in-charge, Mechanical and Training Establishment (MTE) of Pilani that on two occasions certain artificers from Pilani had asked for discharge on the ground that the performance of cleaning ship duties and the acting of food cooked in a common galley was against their religious susceptibilities.
- d. A Complaint dated April 12, 1944 from the Flag Officer Bombay stating that 19 artificers in MTE Bombay were dissatisfied with their service conditions and was giving trouble, the reason being according to them they had been misled by the Recruiting officers with promises of promotion and had not been informed that they had to perform clean ship duties.

In certain establishments the complaints of ratings about false promises and misrepresentation at the time of recruitment resulted in mutinies and minor disturbances of discipline on several occasions. The artificers in HMIS Shivaji, a mechanical training centre now located at Lonavala protested against their being asked to do clean ship duties. The recruiting propaganda did not give any indication that ratings under training would be required to do clean ship duty. The artificers therefore complained of enlistment under false pretences and refused to perform duty. Several incidents of this kind took place in 1944 and 1945. Many of them came from families of some social status and felt they would be disgraced by doing such duties. Hindu ratings raised also religious objection. The correspondence that ensued and the reports of Boards of

Enquiry which reported on these incidents show that the complaints about misrepresentation were found to be true after investigation.¹²¹

In fact so deceitful was this advertisement that one recruiting officer later said that if the true conditions of service were known, not a single recruit would have enlisted in the technical branches.¹²² And technical branches were considered superior to ordinary ones. According to the recruiting officer the prospects of pay and promotion were much better in the army and the RIAF. In the RIAF, it was reputed that 30% of the officers came from lower decks i.e. lower than Commissioned ranks. Upward mobility was easier to achieve in the RIAF and the Army and the warrant rank was much easier to attain in these two services compared to RIN employment was more lucrative and finally an average rating candidate was averse to a sea going life. The Committee of Enquiry into the mutiny in HMIS Shivaji suggested that artificers should have come from a different class of people. Because then the social structure for which the holding of a Chief Petty Officers (CPOs) rate would be an advance on the family's existing circumstances would induce loyalty and would not be a 'matter to be ashamed of ' by being misrepresented as a 'sort of officer.'¹²³ In short a change in the class composition of the force was being demanded to suit the existing conditions of service.

Paradoxically then successful nationalism in India during the war was one of the important causes of such recruiting propaganda. But recruiting propaganda by and large was not without a legacy of planned craftiness in armies where the majority of the labouringly ranks came from the usually under privileged masses, including the British army, and the hiatus between recruiting propaganda portrayals and reality of army life was usually great for, for joining the ranks poverty was the chief inducement, but recruiters did their best to paint the charms of army life in the brightest colours.¹²⁴

¹²¹ . CER., p.140.

¹²² . CER., p.156.

¹²³ . CER., p.157.

¹²⁴ . Kiernan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 20.

In this section we have surveyed the recruitment policy followed by the RIN and the condition obtained in that service. We can see that the recruitment to the navy and distress of the times were interrelated. We have also noted the disillusionment of the ratings inside the RIN. The RIN bore no specific proletarian or peasant character and was in large portion composed of English educated middle class youths. This is made clear by the Enquiry Commission which, while mentioning that the majority of the ratings came from upper caste Hindu households said that very many of the new recruits, unlike the older ratings, was educated young boys pre-matriculantes, matriculantes and even intermediaries. Educated men were demanded by recruitment propaganda and preferred by the RIN. The class background of these men enabled them to perceive oppression and exploitation in their own specific way. Contact with foreign navies and sensitivity to racial discrimination in all its forms over a time combined to make these men to rebel.

It is said that the wars are seldom fought only in the war fronts but also in the minds of the people. This is reflected in the war propaganda of the British in Malabar. The British war propaganda strategy was employed throughout Malabar during the war period. Observably it is clear that their propaganda campaign aimed to mobilise the people. They used all the native structures, cultural forms, knowledge systems as tools of propaganda strategy. The propaganda strategy mainly aimed to create war readiness. The person had to be mobilized not just as recruits but also to be vigilant, identify spies and segregate the people who followed an anti-war approach. It also aimed to keep the morale of the people high.

In this context Noam Chomsky's famous theory of 'Manufacturing consent' is very much applicable. In his book, *Manufacturing Consent*,¹²⁵ the well-known linguist, Chomsky highlighted one of the manipulative techniques employed by American imperialism. He explained that the public opinion or consent of the people was not the real one; rather it is manufactured by the government according to its needs by propaganda through different types of

¹²⁵ . Noam Chomsky & Edward S Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political economy of the Mass Media*, New York, 1988.

media. For instance, a change in the foreign policy will not be a reflection of the opinion of Americans, but the result of the pressures of interest groups whose representatives are entrenched in the 'White House.' Later on the people will be taught about it as their own opinion through propaganda. In this way the administration will be able to produce the consent of the people for its needs as and when required. This type of construct is called 'Manufacturing Consent' by Chomsky. The British imperialism wanted to manipulate and obtain the consent of the Indians for its participation in the Second World War and it cleverly used propaganda for this purpose.

Chapter 2

GRIEVANCES OF THE SAILORS AND THE QUEST TOWARDS A POLITICAL RESOLUTION

Priya P. “Royal Indian Navy Mutiny: a study of its impact in South India” Thesis, Department of history, University of Calicut, 2014.

Chapter 2

GRIEVANCES OF THE SAILORS AND THE QUEST TOWARDS A POLITICAL RESOLUTION

The Second World War (1939-45) affected all walks of life of people in India. Ordinary life came to a standstill and the military ruled over the nation. Mobilisation was in support of the military and the entire machinery of the government was geared for victory in the war. The economic condition was dreadful during the war period and the worst affected sections of the society were naturally the peasants and workers. They found it very difficult to make both ends meet as the prices of essential commodities had gone very high thereby making them available only in the black market. Hunger and unemployment prevailed. In this time of affliction, many joined the navy lured by the British promise of good life and salary but they were in for a rude shock. They had expected better living conditions, better food, pay etc. But when they joined the navy, all their hopes were shattered. The unfulfilled promises given to the recruits formed an important cause that led to the mutiny in 1946.

War time emergency urged the government to formulate colourful recruitment propaganda and attract maximum number youth towards their recruitment drive. Fascinated by the high promises offered by the government many young men joined the navy. During their service period itself the offers made to them were not fulfilled, to be worse, when the war was decided in favour of the Allies the British forgot the remaining promises given to the ratings regarding their rehabilitation and other vital concerns. Various grievances of RIN sailors have been mentioned in the previous chapter. The present chapter considers some of them in detail. Inadequate resolutions for the grievances of the ratings and the impact of the protests against Indian National Army (INA) trials form the central concern of this chapter. The influence of political ideology among the ratings and impact of heroic adventures of the INA over the armed forces also are analysed with same interest.

The navy, needless to say, consists of officers and ratings. The performance of an armed force depends; to a great degree upon the kind of relations exist between the officer and the ratings. Trust of subordinates in officers and the healthy power relations between the officers and subordinates are vital for the survival of an armed force. History is abounds with such examples. However, the relations between officers and men of an army depend upon the social system they are a part of. The army comprises social beings in constant interaction with the socio-political situation in which the armed forces exist. This accounts for the differences in the nature of various national armies. It also underlies the change from feudal to modern armies. The relations of power, control and obedience acquire specific complexity if an army is made up of different nationalities. The RIN was such a force in which the majority of subalterns came from India where as the officers were predominantly the British.

The ‘interior economy’ of the RIN comprised of man-management and administration based on the ‘divisional system.’ The failure of this mechanism meant the erosion of power in the RIN. The RIN, before 1939, contained some officers conversant with and sympathetic to Indian culture. These veterans shifted over to the various head quarters and the Naval Head Quarters (NHQs) in Delhi. During the war, the newer expanded officer group was filled with many who had planter or official backgrounds. Due to the circumstances conditioning the RIN’s conception and the backwater status it commanded, the RIN Officers could not crystallize into an efficient control group with specific traditions of glory and loyalty and with time, there developed a gap between officers and ratings.¹

According to the Enquiry Commission, “There were two ‘vital requisites’ for making good officers, the necessary sprinkling of senior officers, good Petty Officers (POs) and a strong deeply rooted tradition.”² But, since the RIN as a low priority venture of the Raj lacked any substantial historical

¹ . *Report of the RIN Mutiny Commission of Enquiry* (Hereafter *CER*), Sl. No.6, RIN Mutiny Papers, NAI, pp.247-248.

² . *CER.*, P.248.

tradition, and these conditions were not obtained in it. Consequently, racked with chronic desertion and open collective disobedience from 1942 onwards, the RIN failed to stabilise as a modern standing force. This was in striking contrast to the British Indian army, which despite the INA episode held out during and after the war.

According to MacRae, an Officer trained in the British army:

The Indian army, the RIN, in the former two, a considerable amount of time was spent teaching the all important subjects of man-management, whereas in the latter, not one single period was devoted to teaching the new entry Reserve Officer that one of his duties, or the army might say, by far the most important of his duties, was to care for his duties, was to care for his men.³

Obviously the maxim, ‘as the old cock crows, the young cock learns’⁴ was effectively applied to forces which fought with exemplary courage in North Africa and Italy was absent from the RIN. Unlike the *Gurkhas*, the RIN did not receive officers from Sandhurst and ultimately the RIN officer corps turned out to be a motley crowd of men drawn from various services and nationalities and never gained sufficient understanding of Indian conditions and specific traditions.⁵

The divisional system which untitled the division of a company on a ship or shore establishment was divided into administrative sections. Each division was under a divisional officer. This was a convenience superimposed upon the prevailing division of labour in the RIN. The code of conduct for officers in this format was elaborated in three pamphlets, two prepared by the defence department of the Government of India (GOI) and one by Admiral Godfrey called ‘leadership and discipline.’⁶ Divisional Officers were supposed

³ . *CER.*, p.251.

⁴ . Scottish proverb quoted by MacRae, *CER.*, p.251.

⁵ . See Appendix A, Table 7, for information about Officers.

⁶ . *CER.*, p.261.

to fulfill the role which the crucial Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) played in the army.⁷

This system was designed to effect strong mediation between higher authorities and ordinary ratings by granting the power of control to lower level officers. The task of divisional officers was to help to create, compile and develop a tradition of high morale. They were supposed to aid in the promotion of a unity of purpose and esprit de corps, which would stand, the ships company in good stead in an emergency.⁸ However, the caliber of officers chosen for the said task and the conditions of service rendered this plan impractical. The reasons for the failure of the system were numerous. The rigid compartmentalization of officers and men, the poor quality of the commands of officers lack of confidence among the ratings, blatant racial discrimination, unnecessary bureaucratization, due to which complaints went unheeded, inapproachability of Captains and higher authorities and finally the purely mercenary approach and motive of officers combined together to destroy the legitimacy of British power in the RIN.

Confirming ratings experience Lt. Shepherd stated:

Officers have definitely been recruited whose sole object has been to a well-paid job; pride of ship or pride of service is not in their make-up. Very few officers regular or reserve all prepared to forego a party at the cricket club or yacht club in order to watch a game of hockey or boxing match in which their men are taking part. Most officers have taken virtually no interest in their men or troubled to get to know about them or their homes, their religion or their language.⁹

Food and Salary

Food is foremost among the primary urges of every animal including human being and if not satisfactory it is always one of the most potent causes

⁷ . For details, see Appendix D, Table 1, for the Hierarchy of Ranks in the Navy.

⁸ . *CER.*, p.263.

⁹ . *CER.*, p.265.

of trouble and unrest. No doubt, if the unsatisfactory situation prevails, it will flare up one day. This factor also contributed as a fuel to the fire of history. Generally, civilians rightly believe that the man in the armed forces eat well. But conditions of the war often create exceptional circumstances in which shortages and deprivations are thrust upon men at war. However, the exception for other forces was the rule for the RIN. Generally, the ratings consumed unpalatable food during war. The situation worsened subsequently. This was in contrast to the other armed forces which participated in the common war against Nazism and Fascism.

Almost all the ratings used superlatives to describe and explain the food situation in the RIN before the Enquiry Commission. Confirming the ratings' view the summary of the Report of the RIN commission of Enquiry tells us that the rice and *atta* (wheat flour) supplied to the RIN were unfit for human consumption.¹⁰ One witness remarked, stones, worms, ants, I think these 'vitamins' (as they are called by naval doctors) are not very palatable.¹¹ Witness after witness came before the Commission and narrated their tale of woe about bad food.¹² Meat provided was stingy, lean and bony and according to many ratings, even rotten. Vegetables contained no variety and those usually supplied were cabbage, brinjal and pumpkin with potatoes which were usually 'pulpy.'¹³ In addition, the ratings did not receive free rum, beer and cigarette rations.

During the war everyone looked for windfall gains. The system of processing supplies for the RIN broke down. Till 1941, from when food supplies became hard to obtain, the system of capacity with private contractors continued. After first April 1943, Royal Indian Army Supply Corps (RIASC),

¹⁰ . *Summary of the Report of the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny Commission of Enquiry*, September 1946 (Hereafter *SR*), Sl. No. 18, RIN Mutiny Papers, NAI, p.128.

¹¹ . *CER.*, p.232.

¹² . *SR.*, p.159.

¹³ . Many participants from Malabar had bad memories of food in the navy. Most of them recollected that they joined the navy mainly due to the food scarcity in their native place. But in the navy they faced the bad quality of food. Interviews with a group of participants from Kasaragod, Kannur, Kozhikode and Malappuram districts of Kerala. See Appendix C, Biographical Sketch.

Bengal was authorised to handle supplies to the RIN. Then the RIN had to get its supply in bulk from the RIASC and then made its own arrangement for distribution to the several ships or shore establishments. This task was entrusted to the Base Victualling Officer whose duties were:

- a. To demand and draw from the RIASC the requisite stocks.
- b. To deal with any complaints made by ships or establishments regarding victualling stores.
- c. To liase with the local RIASC officers and make himself thoroughly acquainted with all local supply conditions, procedures etc.
- d. To make timely action to ensure that the RIASC officer concerned is informed of any circumstances that are likely to affect the stock situation and
- e. To ensure that stocks are turned over within warranty period or before deterioration takes place.¹⁴

The efficiency of their all military system as procurement depended upon the availability of supplies and the degree of vigilances, exercised by the RIN appointed examining officers. Wartime division of food supplies to the more important armed forces and centers of conflict made it difficult to obtain good supplies for the RIN. All examining authorities were complete and presumably therefore, failed to discharge their duties in a conscientious spirit. RIN officers in the mercenary spirit mentioned earlier neglected their duties regarding the procurement and examination of supplies and their opportunistic corruption was attested by various ratings. Good quality rations were sold by the quarter mastering staff in the flourishing war time black market and the officers of the RIASC, for obvious reasons, were either negligent or inefficient.

But above all, bureaucratization and official disregard to the food situation infuriated the ratings. The minutes of the inter-services Standing Rations Committee set up in July 1944 to investigate and examine the question of supplies, display a lack of interest in the subject. On certain important

¹⁴ . *CER.*, pp.163-164.

occasions the NHQ representative was absent from the meetings of the committee. Besides, the Enquiry Commission opined that, the RIN officers in ships and establishments were apathetic or indifferent to the complaints of ratings regarding food.¹⁵

In June 1942 there was a mutiny of the RIN personnel in the UK on board of HMIS Konkan at Tobermory complaining about food, in particular about the quality of *atta* supplied. There were several complaints:

- a. The insufficiency of the scale of rations while the ratings were serving in cold climate.
- b. The low quality of *atta* supplied and
- c. The bad cooking.¹⁶

The ratings were punished. But when the *atta* was tested, it was found old, musty and infested with weevil and chapattis prepared with it tasted bitter. The Board of Enquiry which went into the matter recommended:

- a. An increase in the rations for the ratings while serving in cold climate.
- b. Proper training to be given to the cooks before appointment to the ships.¹⁷

The war crisis had completely driven the rural life into acute poverty, agony and distress. Thousands of people faced scarcity of food, malnutrition and famine. From Malabar, a large number of people were recruited to navy. They considered it as the last hope. But the situation in the navy was against their expectations. Most of the recruits complained about the bad quality of food available in the navy.¹⁸

Generally ratings were discontent about their life in the navy. The food supplied was of inferior quality and the authorities did not pay any heed to the complaints lodged before them. The RIN officers generally did not take much

¹⁵ . SR., p.167.

¹⁶ . CER., p.21.

¹⁷ . CER., p.190.

¹⁸ . Interviews with a number of people who were recruited in the navy during the period from 1939-45 from Malabar.

interest in making use of the best work available. The rice was full of stones and dirt, wheat flour contained worms. Inferior quality vegetables were supplied. There wasn't any variety in vegetables supplied for weeks and months together. The quality of cooking was bad. Spices supplied were always insufficient. There were series of complaints regarding bad food.

The salary discrepancy between the RIN and Royal Navy (RN), other armed forces was often explained as an economic and not racial one by most of the RIN officials. It was usually maintained that Indians required less amount of money because of their standard of living was lower than that of the Europeans. These requirements failed to improve the ratings. On their view Admiral Godfrey in the witness box before the Enquiry Commission said:

I do not think that the Indian ratings are impressed at all by the economic arguments. It was obvious it is now a demand felt throughout the world - Australia, India, Great Britain - 'equal pay for equal service.' RIN hours of work under certain conditions are slightly longer than the RN. The Burma and Ceylon navies are better paid than the RIN. My personal view is that they are less efficient than the RIN.¹⁹

During the war RIN and RN ratings intermingled on ships and store establishments and many Indian ratings found that they were ill paid despite being superior, technically and educationally, to the RN ratings and even many of the Reserve officers. As Malhotra had pointed out, "Many of the ratings from the RN did not have university education and were also less efficient in their work than the ratings especially in technical units."²⁰ The official arguments on their discriminatory practice were obviously unconvincing for the ratings. One witness asked to the Enquiry Commission:

Why are the officers in the RIN drawing more than the officers in the RN and why the economic argument does not affect their case?

¹⁹ . CER., pp.348-349.

²⁰ . CER., p.344.

The financial conditions in India and England, for the officers in both the cases being differed.²¹

Another witness emphatically stated. “The question of economic differences does not arise so long as India does not attain Independence and he went on to avert that the wages and salaries paid in the RIN had not kept pace with the prices and with the salaries paid in the merchant navy.”²²

The main service which also threw light on one of the important elements of racial discrimination in the RIN both fest and analysed by the ratings, arose due to the discrepancy in the pay between RN and RIN personnel despite their having to do equal work side by side. Admiral Godfrey and Commodore Lawrence opined that the RIN men compared favourably with the RN men on a variety of matters and especially the communications ratings of the RIN, who began the revolt in 1946, were highly efficient throughout the war.²³ These ratings also played an important role in the Burma campaign against the Japanese. Due to these factors according to the Enquiry Commission, the rating argued this way:

We are as efficient as the RN ratings..... why then, are we paid about the salary of the RN ratings? Why should our officers draw higher salaries than the RN officers particularly when some of them are less qualified than us? The difference between the CPO’s salary and the Sub-Lt.’s salary in the RN is very little, while the salary of the PO in the RIN is about one quarter of the salary of a Sub-Lt. The Sub-Lt. may have only one year service but draws Rs.455. While the PO may have 16 years service to his credit when he reaches an amount of Rs.110 to Rs.120.²⁴

In the year 1938, the government started a Mechanical Training Establishment for RIN in Bombay. Highly qualified young men from all over the country enrolled in the scheme. By the middle of 1942, there were nearly

²¹ . *CER.*, p.345.

²² . *CER.*, p.351; See Appendix A, Table 8, for Pay Rates.

²³ . *CER.*, p.352.

²⁴ . *CER.*, pp.350-52; Salary Rates are presented in Appendix A, Table 8.

150 apprentices. Of whom some had finished their training. On March 3, 1942, rates of pay and bad treatment compelled them to strike. All of them were arrested, tried and imprisoned, from three months to 15 months, after which they were discharged from the service 'with disgrace.'

The keenly and universally felt injustice regarding pay in the RIN found its way to the Central Legislative Assembly at the time of the finance bill of 1944-45. F.E. James, confronting the House and raising the invaluable question of stability in the navy, wondered why the pensions of naval ratings remained it low. He continued:

Why is it that they have not been changed since the last war? Why is it that the pensions of the naval ratings are in all cases no greater than half and in some cases as little as one fourth of the pensions of the Indian Air force? How is that a government with such great resources at its command? The House knows that the CPO is the back bone of any ship. He is equal in any social position, in intelligence, in training of any Yemadar or Subedar. Yet he is not treated on the same terms.²⁵

The discontent around pay had a longish history as early as June 1942; a mutiny occurred on board of the ship HMIS Konkan in the UK. The Board of enquiry observed that 'as a result of contact with RN personnel and civilians in Britain, a few English speaking ratings considered that their pay should be equivalent to the RN.'²⁶ Throughout the war this feeling became generalised in the RIN and by 1946 it was bottled up enough to provide material for an explosion. As a remedy for discontent the pay in the RIN was revised in 1942 and 1944 but the gains were nullified by soaring inflation. In any case, the increases made were of no consequence as far as the satisfaction of the ratings was concerned. Belatedly in December 1944 official approval was granted for increased disability and family pension for the RIN ratings but the important matter of service pension was left to the post-war period. However, the ratings

²⁵ . *CER.*, pp.361-362.

²⁶ . *CER.*, p.353.

of the RIN were not only concerned about pay, which was obviously linked to their acquired social status, domestic hopes and personal aspirations, but were highly agitated over the fact that the RN personnel received various additional allowances with their pay whereas, the RIN ratings did not. For instance, the officers were given house rent allowance whereas; the ratings and POs were crammed into crowded barracks.

Indianisation and Promotion

Four interconnected matters rose in relation to questions of Indianisation and promotion in the RIN. The GOI demobilised a large number of Indian officers (1500) during the last phase of the war and later announced that only 66 officers would ultimately remain along with 40 British regular officers.²⁷ Secondly, the GOI announced that after 400 (later reduced to 200) British officers would be obtained on loan from the RN to supervise a smaller post-war RIN. This was visualised by the majority of ratings as a retrograde step and an act of betrayal on part of the authorities. More so, since these steps contrasted acutely with what went on in the army during the war. Indianisation of the army was being transformed from fiction to fact: from a thousand the number of Indian officers rose to nearly 16,000.²⁸ The ratings were aware of these changes. Thirdly, the ratings experienced frustration because of the RIN policy of not allowing promotion to officer ranks from the lower deck. The end of war brought hope of Indianisation and promotion, as rewards of victory to most Indians in the RIN, but the above mentioned government policy generated a sense of extreme alienation in the service. Fourthly, the Indian ratings and officers alike felt discontent due to the system of unmerited promotions and appointments in the RIN.

Royal Indian Naval Reserve (RINR) and the Royal Indian Naval Voluntary Reserve (RINVR) were formed shortly before the outbreak of the war, and were meant for professional seamen and were those quite unfamiliar with the sea respectively. Initially it was decided to recruit 40 officers in the

²⁷ . CER., p.377; For details, see Bisheshwar Prasad (ed.), *Expansion of the Armed Forces and Defence Organisation 1939-45*, New Delhi, 1956, pp.185-86.

²⁸ . Bisheshwar Prasad (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, pp.181-82.

Naval Reserve and 60 officers in the Voluntary Reserve and to grant them permanent commissions. Entry into the Reserves was open both to Indians and Europeans but European officers were to be accepted only when no suitable Indian candidate was available for the existing vacancies. Apart from the Reserves, the rapid expansion of the RIN was achieved by the loan of officers from the RN.²⁹ Evidence shows that the RINVR were distressed by the proclamation which stated that only 66 out of 1500 RINVR would be given permanent commissions in the RIN after the war. They argued that when able and experienced officers were available in the RIN, was there any need to men from the RN to staff a smaller post-war RIN. Furthermore, there existed a general feeling among Indians that the British Senior officers discriminated against Indians with regard to promotion and many a time junior British officers were preferred to senior and far more experienced Indian officers.³⁰ The announcement by the government in these circumstances created bitter resentment in the service amongst the Indians.³¹

Lt. Ishaq Sobani was the only Indian naval officer who took part in the mutiny. Before the Enquiry Commission, he stated that, for every single Indian promoted, ten British received promotions in the RIN. Among the latter were names of officers who had actually at one time, been recommended for discharge on the ground of unsuitability.³² Further Indian officers who joined up at the outbreak of the war with a Board of Trade Master's ticket remained there till the end of the war. This matter was raised in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1940 when it was pointed out that Indian engineering officers holding first class Board of trade certificates were working as lower deck officers, whereas British officers with no Board of trade certificates worked as senior engineers on sister ships. Such discrimination is best illustrated through the observation of Sobani:

²⁹ . *Ibid.*, p. 185; The first Indian to be appointed an officer in the RIN was D.N.Dikshit who entered as a Sub-Lieutenant in the Engineering branch in January 1928, *Ibid.*, pp.177-178.

³⁰ . Evidence of Lt. Col. Haz Nawas, *CER.*, p.378.

³¹ . *CER.*

³² . *CER.*, p.381.

At the time of recruitment, they painted a glorious picture of permanent commissions and elaborate blue prints of indianisation were dangled before the eyes and we were lured away from the middle of universities to join this racket and now that the war has been won. We are not qualified now 300 British officers were to be second from the RN as a result of this job hunting policy of theirs. To quote an instance, Dikshit, RINVR, B.Sc. in Electric Engineering from Glasgow University, the only Indian qualified Radar officer flown to India specialised duties during the trying days of 1943 has been rejected and thus being compelled to leave the country to resume his old job with Marcow limited asked that what qualification they are seeking we are at a loss to understand.³³

Sobani ended his testimony by questioning the entire promotion policy: “why? Who decided in favour of the British? Gentleman, are not these sufficient reasons for any man to revolt, and then we are asked why we did not take strong action in suppressing the mutiny. What did they expect the Indian officers to do?”³⁴

Another officer exclaimed:

The authorities have unwillingly made bare their real intentions by making invidious statements about Reserve officers being unsuitable and inefficient. Further they had no right to do so because most of them were having comfortable jobs in Delhi and other shore establishments. Some of them have never been to sea and most of them have been to sea for two years at the most. Of course they were styled as experienced men.³⁵

Touching the heart of the matter, Captain H.S.Gulati, RIASC stated:

³³ . Sobani’s Evidence, *CER.*, p.381.

³⁴ . *CER.*, P.382.

³⁵ . Lt. E.C.Paul’s Evidence, *CER.*, p.383.

Very few promotions to commissioned ranks from the trained technical lower deck staff were one of the causes of discontent in the service. Indian POs and CPOs were as good as their British counter parts but those British officers who were transferred to the RIN were mostly from lower decks, made officers for the specific purpose of transferring them to the Indian Navy.³⁶

The announcement that a limited number of officers from the RINVR would be retained in the RIN after the war had an adverse effect on the ratings. This farcical indianisation practically sealed their promotional avenues. An unhealthy competition seems to have arisen among some officers for gaining the favour of their seniors to get permanent. Consequently, to display efficiency, many officers acted unnecessarily strict and put the names of more ratings into complaint reports. This seems to have left the ratings deserted by the RIN with nobody to take their side.³⁷ Enquiry Commission stated that “our observations may convey the impression that we are solely occupied with the case of officer’s promotion. That however is neither our intention nor our case.”³⁸ Here it must be noted that Indianisation was desired in the RIN by the entire Indian component of that service. Upward mobility from the lower decks would have created numerous opportunities for ratings to become POs and CPOs. Similarly, the latter would have risen to warrant and commissioned ranks. Almost all Indians of the RIN (as also other services) therefore favoured sweeping Indianisation of the service. This feeling was further reinforced by the nationalist consciousness which was heightened during the post-war years. The colonial government’s failure on this score consequently neutralized Indian officers of the RIN during the revolt. Simultaneously it made the CPOs and POs, by and large, throw in their lot with the rebels of 1946.

For instance, the Naval Central Strike Committee (NCSC) was led by Khan and Madan Singh, both of whom spoke fluent English and were petty officers. B.C.Dutt, a member of the NCSC himself asserted that: “The senior

³⁶ . *CER.*, p.386.

³⁷ . Lt. N.J.Cooper’s view, *CER.*, p.387.

³⁸ . *CER.*, p.387.

ratings, the CPOs and the POs who could have restrained the ratings and probably scotched the strike, assumed neutral postures. Most of them had varying degrees of sympathy for the ratings fight. Quite a few of them openly joined us.”³⁹

The RIN as observed before was only the force in which promotion from lower decks was disallowed. According to the Enquiry Commission, “Before 1942, no scheme for promotion from lower decks to commissioned ranks existed. The only avenues being open to the numerous CPOs and POs were the warrant rank. Warrant officers were a few even in 1945.”⁴⁰ In August 1942 a scheme was announced for the promotion of selected ratings of the seamen, stoker, communication and engineering branches to regular commissions in the RIN. But it failed to materialise. In any case, its success would not have meant much. Firstly, the number of commission offered for each section was one commission and secondly, the scheme left out certain branches such as writers, electrical artificers, ordinance artificers, shipwrights etc. In effect, no commissions were granted till 1944 when this scheme was formally cancelled. In July 1944 a new scheme applicable to all ratings was introduced. It is not known that how many commissions it opened to the ratings but certainly it failed or was not significant enough to make a tangible difference. However, the reasons for its formulations make clear the nature of the needs felt in the upper echelons of the RIN. On the circular sent to all COs by the NHQ, the following was stated: The introduction of this measure was governed by the following factors:

- a. It is evident that a considerable potential of officer personnel exists among the ratings of the RIN today.
- b. The RIN is the only Indian service which does not provide for the grant of commissions from the lower decks or ranks.

³⁹ . B.C.Dutt, ‘Revolt of the Ratings of the Royal Indian Navy’ in Nishith Ranjan Ray, et. al. (ed.), *Challenge: A Saga of India’s Struggle for Freedom*, 1984, p.595.

⁴⁰ . See Appendix A, Table 4, Expansion of Warrant officers.

- c. That on account of (1) and (2) above there is discontent among the ratings of the RIN.
- d. The grant of commissions to ratings of the RIN will stimulate morale within the service. It will also have a beneficial effect upon the recruitment of ratings.⁴¹

Under the scheme mentioned above, a total of 81 ratings appeared before preliminary selection board. Of these, only 16 passed through all the stages and were ultimately promoted.⁴² At the end of the war, this scheme was abolished for no new officers were required by the RIN.

Ratings usually condemned the policy of promotion and importation of officers followed in the RIN. One of the ratings voiced his frustration thus:

To get promotion, such things as ability being considerate to inferiors and efficiency of work are disregarded. The man who can do 'musca polish' (a naval term for carrying favour) to the superiors is an efficient, able and good disciplined man.... I am obliged to say that honest labour never brings true reward. Secondly, another proverb I should say that out of sight out of mind.⁴³

For many ratings the RIN was a means to an end. They joined it to achieve upward mobility in society and promotion was one of the means they could gain it. The ratings tolerated the conditions of service with the hope that war would be followed by the indianisation of the RIN. The RIN policies were however, 'most unjust to people' who had spent all their life in the RIN in the hope that they would get the promotions they deserved.⁴⁴

Racial Discrimination and Ill - Treatment of Ratings

Most acute of all the grievances of the Indian rating was his complaint against racial discrimination and ill-treatment by the officers. Most of the

⁴¹ . CER., p.390.

⁴² . CER., p.391.

⁴³ . CER., p.388.

⁴⁴ . CER., p.393.

Indian ratings were educated lads - matriculates, intermediate students etc. Soon after joining the navy they found that while many British ratings were intellectually less equipped than them, but the latter often treated them contemptuously and insultingly. They faced discrimination in travelling, accommodation and salary.

There were many instances of such discrimination faced by the ratings during the time of travelling. A rating named V.K.R.Chandra who had been a telegraphist reported before the Enquiry Commission that in 1944 he was travelling in the second class from Bombay to Colombo along with a number of RN ratings. But at Talaimannar, the Railway Transport Officer, a British, refused to let him continue his journey in the second class; the reason given was: 'Indians are not allowed to travel in the second classes.'⁴⁵ There were numerous examples for such treatment.

- a. In Bahrain in the Persian Gulf, RIN ratings were herded together in crowded barracks without even a single chair to furnish their room. In contrast, RN ratings were given tables, chairs etc. and more spacious accommodation.
- b. In July 1945 on board, the SS State Empire and S S Ruys (a Dutch ship) going on Bombay to Cairo, when a film was put on the screened, no RIN rating was allowed to attend.

The racial hatred practiced by the authorities created many disturbances and mutinies. In September 1942, Indian ratings of HMIS Orissa, East London, South Africa started clashes with the Manager, Clarendon Hotel in South Africa against racial discrimination. Seventeen ratings were arrested and thirteen were disgraced. Three ratings were tried by court martial for joining the mutiny. The accused were sentenced to imprisonment ranging from three years to seven years.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ . CER., p.253.

⁴⁶ . CER., p.22.

Indian ratings' religious feelings were neglected. It led to many disturbances in the RIN.⁴⁷ On July 30 and 31, 1944, ratings of HMIS Shivaji started a food strike. They complained that their religious feelings were neglected. Seventeen Muslim ratings refused to eat on the grounds that they believed their meat had been contaminated by pork while being served. On July 30, two ratings fell ill and stated that they had heard that the mutton had been contaminated and that therefore they would not eat it. On July 31, twenty six ratings, 22 Muslims and four Hindus refused to take food. On March 16, 1945, three leading seamen of HMIS Himalaya, Karachi requested permission to leave the establishment for noon prayers on Fridays. But the request was refused. The three ratings were tried by court martial and dismissed.⁴⁸

Generally the treatment of officers towards the ratings was very sharp. Though they had high opinion about themselves, they looked down upon the ratings. They viewed the ratings with contempt who do not deserve anything decent. The attitude of European officers towards the ratings was doubly much malicious. They looked at everyone with contempt and ridiculed everything Indian. Most of the European officers had not sufficient qualifications and their choice of language used to be very indecent. For example, "Once in 1943, while one European officer was going on his rounds one of the ratings had made some noise, for which, the officer abused all the ratings using very filthy words."⁴⁹ The only claim they had was their white skin. It was usual for them to degrade everything Indian and humiliate Indians in every way. While giving evidence before the Enquiry Commission, stoker Ahmed Khan said that some of the officers, both Indian and European, treated the ratings like 'dogs.' Lt. Sutherland had called him a bastard when he complained the bad food.⁵⁰ One of the participants of the mutiny remembers that the officers were mostly Europeans and they would use filthy language against ratings and gave severe punishments to them.⁵¹

⁴⁷ . For details, see Chapter 3, Section 1, Early Mutinies.

⁴⁸ . *CER.*, p.26.

⁴⁹ . *CER.*, p.340.

⁵⁰ . *CER.*, p.341.

Lt. MacRae had given evidence before the Enquiry Commission said:

There is no doubt that the basic malady within the service was the deep, all embracing and overwhelming lack of contact between the officers and ratings in the RIN. Due to the lack of interaction with subordinates, the officers did not know many of the ratings personally and generally were indifferent to their welfare. Many of them could not appreciate the ratings' genuine grievances and had no patience to listen to them. Hence their requests and complaints often went unheeded and this naturally produced in them a feeling of resentment and helplessness.⁵²

The Commission admitted that the ratings were often subjected to harsh and inhuman treatment by the European officers. The breakdown of the divisional system and the feeling of frustration produced in the minds of the ratings due to lack of sympathy on the part of the officers, to deal with their legitimate grievances aggravated the discontent. The racial factor also contributed to bring about disharmony and friction between European and Indian officers and this led to the lowering of the morale in the service in general.⁵³

Most of the ratings generally believed that a large number of British officers were anti-Indian in their outlook and viewed Indians as inferior beings. The harsh and vulgar treatment which most of the ratings had subjected at times at the hands of British officers and their use of abusive language or expression like 'black bastard' which has had a direct reference to Indian or Asiatic origin, has undoubtedly stirred up very bitter feelings in the minds of majority of ratings.⁵⁴

The Commission admitted that the feeling of racial discrimination was not confined to the ratings alone; it is fully shared by the Indian officers who

⁵¹ . Interview, E.Narayana Kitavu, Interview, P.Krishna Pillai, a participant, at his residence in Kokkivalavu on 9 May, 2013.

⁵² . *CER.*, p 502.

⁵³ . *CER.*, pp.346-47.

⁵⁴ . Interview, K.Sugathan, son of late. Kandiyil Balakrishnan, a participant of the mutiny, at his residence in Cherukulam on 15 January, 2013. For details, see Appendix C, Biographical Sketch.

are even most bitter than the ratings on that matter. They felt that they were frequently slighted and insulted; they were not taken into confidence in important matters and were not treated fairly in the matter of appointments and promotions. The feeling of racial discrimination thus aroused among the Indian ratings and officers was one of the deadliest poisons which had corrupted the service and its volume is so great that alone might have caused the mutiny. It certainly contributed very largely to giving an anti-British trend to the mutiny.⁵⁵

Demobilisation

In June 1943, a scheme for the gradual replacement of Hostilities only ratings (HO ratings)⁵⁶ who were 40,000 strong had been sanctioned. But no progress had been made till May 1945. By August 1945, 50% of these had been released and the rest were also discharged later.⁵⁷ HO ratings expansion proved an unsatisfactory method of filling the ranks of the RIN. Conditions in the merchant service were so favourable that the men who volunteered for the RIN were of a low standard.⁵⁸ The war time strength of the RIN reached the maximum figure of 30,000 men and officers towards the middle of the year 1946.⁵⁹ The ratings numbered 27,651 and the officers' strength was in the neighborhood of 2700. The RIN had expanded about 20 times during the period of the war. The war with Japan came to a sudden end in the month of August 1945 and the time arrived to reduce expanded navy to the limits of a peace time force.

The process of demobilisation was therefore bound to start to achieve this result. It is at this stage that those who were about to be demobilized would expect of fulfillment of the promises made at the time of recruitment and contained in the resettlement scheme and the many advertisements of post-war

⁵⁵ . *CER.*, pp.504-505.

⁵⁶ . The HO ratings were enrolled in the beginning of the war in 1939. These men were refused to engage at coastal rates of pay and would serve only on deep sea rates plus a war bonus, Bisheshwar Prasad, *Op. Cit.*, pp.122-123.

⁵⁷ . *Ibid.*, pp.123-24.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.124.

⁵⁹ . For expansion of the recruitment of the navy, see Appendix A, Table B.

jobs. It was obviously the duty of the administration to send these men home as contented and satisfied or at least in a mood not antagonistic to the services of which they had been members.⁶⁰

On November 16, 1945 about two months after the start of the process of demobilisation, an anonymous letter was received in the NHQ which ran as follows:

It is the RIN release centre, HMIS Kakauri. Here we are living in the accommodation designed for few fifties. The conditions of this establishment are most horrifying as it would be observed by any observer. Sleeping and messing arrangement for the thousands are more dreadful than those endured by the victims of the Bengal famine. One wonders, if he was in the enemy concentration camp, he would have met better treatment than received here from Kakauri and its responsible authorities. Here hundreds of refined and educated youths left to the mercies of the illiterate Petty Officer who makes the lot of these lads most miserable one. The whole thing has poisoned the minds of these young faithful youths to contempt and hatred for their long some way, respected matters.⁶¹

This letter purports to indicate the feelings of a number of ratings who had spent some time in one of the demobilization centers, HMIS Kakauri and it is obvious that the views of the people in such a state of mind were bound to affect a number of others inside and outside the service and thus may cause discontent and resentment.

Lt. Commander Mukherjee who gave evidence before the Commission stated in his memorandum that the trouble at this stage was caused by a totally unplanned and utterly clueless system of demobilisation and that soon after V.E.Day and before the V.J.Day. It was decided to get rid of the HO ratings and these men were slung out without an *anna* (a smaller denomination of money. One rupee was 16 *anna*) of gratuity or railway fare back home and

⁶⁰ . CER., p.394.

⁶¹ . CER., p.395.

were asked to refund or pay the cost of kit, which in most cases they never had received.⁶²

Captain Learmont, CO of HMIS Kakauri demobilisation center referred one complaint that had come to his notice:

A man came to him for demobilization a day before the Captain appeared before the Commission. That man had an excellent record and a clean conduct sheet. He had joined as stoker II class three years ago. He was still being demobilised as stoker II class although he had passed his stoker course. No opportunity was given to him for stoker I certificate owing to the fault of a divisional officer. Such a person would obviously go out of service.⁶³

Lt. MacRae in a note submitted to the Commission stated:

As a welfare officer and as closely connected with the RIN Benevolent Association, I have come across countless cases where ratings invalided from the service have been for periods of anything up to 10 months without receiving an *anna* of disability pensions. For example, Lal Din, a seaman rating of HMIS Rajaputana whose leg was badly injured in a gunnery accident. He arrived in Delhi on discharge after 18 months in hospital without a penny of his back pay with no service documents, no pension, with nothing to show how his disability had been incurred or to prove that he was wearing only a cotton singlet and pants although it was December and he was travelling to his home in Jammu.⁶⁴

It is clear that the demobilisation procedures were highly unsatisfactory. A.P.Nair, a telegraphist who gave evidence before the Commission stated that:

The present demobilization as a fact caused too much alarm among us. Most of the boys deserted their home before completing their

⁶² . CER., p.396.

⁶³ . CER., p.402.

⁶⁴ . CER., pp.403-404.

studies. Now they have changed their student life as sailors. Now they are demobed rapidly and left aside without job. Most of them do not like to go back home as they were not able to save anything during their service because of the pay and other conditions as a whole most of us disappointed since long. We are nowhere neither in service or outside the service. What should we do? These discontents in the long run caused a mass feeling among all of us and we were at a stage to do something possible.⁶⁵

Many participants remembered that the thought of demobilization had started haunting them during their service period itself. They had horrible memories of demobilization camp at Kakauri in Bombay.⁶⁶ There was another class of ratings inside the service who were also discontented. These were the persons who had rightly or wrongly requested for discharge on compassionate grounds and had claimed priority for their release. Their cases had to be examined by the NHQs which took time. The examination process had been delayed making such ratings discontented.

Many of the ratings who were to be demobilised thought that their careers had been ruined and all the promises held out to them at the time of recruitment were never meant to be fulfilled. This caused despair and frustration in their minds. The delay in settling release benefits and difficulties in settling accounts of men transferred from the army were also a source of discontent. For variety of reasons the discontent grew within the service between the months of November 1945 and February 1946 and this was one of the potent causes of the mutiny.

Ineffective Resettlement scheme

The most burning grievance of all is the complete failure of the authorities to evolve any effective scheme of resettlement. The ordinary RIN

⁶⁵ . *CER.*, p.242.

⁶⁶ . Interviews with a number of participants from Malabar. See Appendix C, for Biographical Sketch.

rating was fully conscious that when he was demobilised, it is of no use in relying on the Navy to get employed again, despite all its colourful and generous promises about resettlement. Commodore J.W.Jefford, Chief of Personnel, RIN in his report submitted to the Enquiry Commission said that:

There is no doubt in mind that the average ratings firmly believed that he was going to be found a post-war job by the service. Government and the navy cannot be held blameless for this. Much of the recruiting advertising was literally on the lines of ‘join the navy and secure for yourself a post-war job.’⁶⁷

He, in the witness box referred to a number of complaints received from the NHQ on the failure of resettlement promises.⁶⁸ The Board of Enquiry of HMIS Firoz observed as follows on the matter, “In addition to those complaints is vitally important matter of post-war settlement..., it is sure that the men feel that what little is being done for them is futile and greater efforts are essential.”⁶⁹ A.J.Nayagam, signalman stated as follows: “Adequate arrangements should be made to resettle released personnel and the failure to make these adequate arrangements was one of the causes of the discontent.”⁷⁰ A.J.Sigamany in his memorandum said: “Adequate arrangements should be made to resettle released personnel and the failure to make these adequate arrangements was one of the causes of the discontent.”⁷¹ Lt. Balwant Singh observed as follows:

The state of insecurity about their future career after demobilisation coupled with inadequate facilities for resettlement in civil life has filled them with a sense of frustration. They feel that now that the job is done, the lofty promises about post-war resettlement made to

⁶⁷ . CER., p.425.

⁶⁸ . CER., p.426.

⁶⁹ . CER., p.429.

⁷⁰ ..CER., p.431.

⁷¹ . CER., pp.431-32.

them at the time of recruitment have been thrown to the winds and that they have been betrayed.⁷²

The frustration and disillusionment caused by the failure of the resettlement schemes was a potent cause of discontent which contributed towards the mutiny of 1946. The end of the war saw demobilisation and those who had joined the armed forces were a disillusioned lot. They found that reality was much better than rhetoric of war time propaganda. Their anger and distress found expression in the RIN mutiny of February 1946.

Political Ideology

During the Second World War, the ratings served in many parts including the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, Burma and the Arakan coast.⁷³ Many had lived in the UK for some time, living with ratings of the RN and visiting their homes in England. RIN also had contact with the personnel of the navies of Australia, New Zealand, China, Ceylon and Burma. Indian officers and ratings of the RIN, as a result of these contacts considered themselves competent. While serving alongside such other navies they had seen better standard of living, which some had themselves enjoyed with actually serving in the ships of some of those navies. In the free countries they had visited, they had seen conditions which they aspired and which they considered they were entitled, especially as they also were fighting alongside the various Allies for the cause of freedom. Yet in some places, especially in South Africa, member of RIN both as regards in public places and canteens, met with colour bar prejudice which naturally caused considerable resentment and heightened their desire for freedom.⁷⁴

By their travel and service abroad, the RIN certainly had become politically and nationally conscious. Those who had been serving in India and those now returning from overseas became increasingly aware of the crescendo of the political campaign in India with its call for the withdrawal of the British

⁷² . CER.,p.433.

⁷³ . CER. p.437.

⁷⁴ . CER., p.38.

from India, and talk even of forcibly ejecting British who, some Indian politician proclaimed were effete and could be so ejected.⁷⁵

The political situation in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Egypt, Palestine, Persia, South Africa, Indonesia, Malaya, Siam and Indo-China was every day news in the world press and radio. The Indians, who were very much politically conscious, studied all these developments very keenly. They drew encouragement from and sympathized with the efforts of the other nations to achieve independence and Indian political leaders demanded that Indian troops should not be used to suppress any nationalistic movement.⁷⁶ The use of Indian troops overseas after the surrender of the Japanese was hotly criticized and it was feared that Indian forces in Indonesia would be used to help the Dutch to crush nationalist movements there. During the mutiny, one of the demands raised by the ratings was the withdrawal of Indian forces from Indonesia.⁷⁷

At the end of the Second World War, the loyalty of the Indian men and officers in the Indian army was subjected to great strain. There were many indications at the end of the war that the armed forces of India had been affected by the spirit of nationalism. It was no longer isolated from the current of nationalism. There were increasing contacts between the Indian elements of the Indian armed forces and the nationalist leaders. Abdul Kalam Azad mentioned in his memoirs about the various occasions when the members of the Indian army, navy and police forces expressed their support and loyalty to the Congress disregarding the attitude of senior British officers. In one such occasion in 1945 Azad wrote:

When I went to Karachi a group of naval officers came to see me. They expressed their admiration for the Congress policy and assured me that if the Congress issued necessary orders, they would come over to us. If there was a conflict between Congress and the

⁷⁵ . CER., p.39.

⁷⁶ . CER.

⁷⁷ . A Group of Victimized Ratings, *The RIN Strike*, (1954), Reprint, New Delhi 1981, p.143.

government, they would join side with the Congress and not with the government. Hundreds of naval officers in Bombay expressed the same feelings.⁷⁸

Later these contacts with the national leaders became regular. A Biographer of Gandhiji wrote in early 1946 that:

There was hardly a day, when a group of Indian military men did not contact him. They met him during his morning walks; they were at his evening prayer gatherings. 'We are soldiers', they said apologetically and added, but we are soldiers of Indian freedom.⁷⁹

The same feeling was expressed by the Indian officer representing the Indian army in the Indian Central Assembly, Col. Himmat Singhji. Referring to the attitude of Indian soldiers, he said: 'I can tell you here today that every officer and man is just as anxious for the freedom of this country as you in this House or outside.'⁸⁰ Many participants clearly asserted that National movement had influenced the ratings. They used to go as a group to attend speeches by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in the Choupathi beach in Bombay.⁸¹

The British Indian authorities were concerned about the effect of the glorification of the INA by the nationalists on the morale of the Indian section in the Indian army. On November 26, 1945 the C-in-C Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck reported to Viceroy, Lord Wavell:

I do not think any senior British officer today knows what is the real feeling among the Indian ranks regarding the INA.... A growing feeling of sympathy for INA and an increasing tendency to

⁷⁸ . Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, Calcutta, 1959, p.126.

⁷⁹ . D.G.Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi*, Bombay, 1953, pp.98-99.

⁸⁰ . Cited in *The Times of India*, Bombay, 11 February, 1946, p.6, Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai (Hereafter MSA).

⁸¹ . Interview, Mamiyil Unneerikutty, a participant of the mutiny, at his residence in Olavanna on 11 May, 2013.

disregard the brutalities committed by some of its members as well as the forswearing by all of them of original allegiance.⁸²

In the words of Auchinleck, it would be unwise to try the Indian army too highly in the suppression of their own people and as time went on the loyalty of even the Indian officials, the Indian army and police might become problematic.⁸³ Philip Mason, the Secretary to GOI in the war department, said that, "No one can doubt the stature of man, his intellectual scope and the passion with which he held his convictions."⁸⁴ The Viceroy Lord Wavell wrote to the Secretary of State for India that, "Bose had acquired a hold over a substantial number of men in the Indian army and the consequences were quite incalculable."⁸⁵

The report on the morale of the ratings pointed out at the end of December 1945:

Ratings are politically conscious, with their overseas experiences in countries such as United Kingdom, the Mediterranean shores South Africa, Malaya and the far east. They have developed a broader outlook and a higher standard of living. Such ratings wondered that why the government was considering them as second rate citizens and denying them many of the facilities they were entitled for. They were furious about the unequal treatment given to them regarding pay, conditions of service and other amenities compared to the British and American soldiers. They were definitely patriotic and looked forward to the day of independence. Some ratings were influenced by INA propaganda and were sympathetic to INA.⁸⁶

A naval officer, who visited Indian officers and ratings in Bombay and Karachi during December 1945 and February 1946, confirmed the existing pro-

⁸² . Auchinleck to Wavell, 16 January 1946, Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power 1942- 47*, Vol.VI, London, 1976, p.808.

⁸³ . *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ . *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ . *Ibid.*, p.812.

⁸⁶ . *CER.*, p.312.

INA feelings among the ratings. Another report of the same period was prepared by an officer on his visit to Bombay naval establishments mentioned, “All ratings and officers are sympathetic to independence movement in the country; Muslim ratings are keenly interested in Pakistan, Hindu ratings are pro-Congress, opinion about INA is divided but the majority is in favour of trials being abandoned.”⁸⁷

B.C.Dutt informs that it was the INA factor which inspired him and his group to organise the Talwar men. A rating from Malaya, Salil Khan brought to Talwar, ‘strange tales and photographs of the INA.’ After the war as ratings were integrated at Bombay and other demobilisation centers they became more open to news and to the post-war youth, Subhash Chandra Bose had already become a legend.⁸⁸ The official reports cleared that the British were extremely nervous about the INA spirit spreading to the Indian army. In a letter to Wavell, dated on January 16, B.Glancy, the Governor of Punjab reported that at Lahore the Indian army personnel in uniform attended the meetings held in honour of the INA accused.⁸⁹ Besides, the report on the morale of the ratings pointed out at the end of December 1945 that the ratings were politically conscious, keenly aware of relative lack of amenities for themselves and their families as compared to those provided in foreign navies. Some ratings were influenced by the INA propaganda and were sympathetic to the INA.⁹⁰

On January 1, 1946, the C-in-C of the army issued a confidential note to all the three wings of the Indian armed forces warning them that the ‘the months ahead.... will inevitably a period of strain and upheaval.’⁹¹ According to a secret survey made by Francis Taker, GOC of the Eastern Command:

Ninety percent of the Indian army officers were opposed to the government’s policy towards INA. This is to be alarming for the

⁸⁷ . CER.

⁸⁸ . B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny of the Innocents*, Bombay, 1971, p.75.

⁸⁹ . B.Glancy to Wavell, 16 January 1946, Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, p.807.

⁹⁰ . ‘The Gazette of India, Extra ordinary’, 21 January, 1947, New Delhi, cited in K.K.Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, Meerut, 1969, p.226.

⁹¹ . *The INA Files*, Janmabhumi Press, Bombay.

future.... threatening to tumble down the whole edifice of the Indian army. The net result was that the mighty British were thoroughly demoralised at the stark prospect of ‘chaos in the country’ at large and probably of mutiny and dissension in the army culminating in its dissolution.⁹²

He continued that many Indian officers held precisely the same view as the British officers. To the graduates of the Indian Military Academy because of their little contact with the British outside the Academy, the INA members were patriots and much to be praised. The war time recruits, because of their political consciousness were of the view that the accused INA officers were patriots and to be treated leniently.⁹³ Obviously he concluded that disaffection against the Raj was growing rapidly among the armed forces. Many participants stressed that the trial of INA members had greatly angered them.⁹⁴

As Jawaharlal Nehru has written:

The Indian soldier today is different from the Indian soldier of the last war. He had seen many theatres of war and his contacts with the soldiers of free countries have opened his eyes to the forces of freedom operating in other countries. The wall of isolation which hitherto kept him away from the people of the country has disappeared. He has seen many changes in foreign countries and these changes have profoundly affected and influenced his outlook. Though he is still a member of the fighting services under the aegis of the British government in India, his patriotism has been roused. This has been fully demonstrated in the Indian National Army episode.⁹⁵

⁹² . Francis Taker, *While Memory Serves*, London, 1950, p.48.

⁹³ . *Ibid.*, p.81.

⁹⁴ . Many participants in their interviews revealed their anger at the conduct of trials for INA. Interview, P. Krishna Pillai; Interview, T.Raghavan Nair, a participant of the mutiny, at his residence in Pokkunnu on 12 May, 2006. For details, see Appendix C, Biographical Sketch.

⁹⁵ . Sarveppalli Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. XV, 1952, p.2.

The Gandhian mass movements almost paralysed the British administration in 1921 again in 1930 and for the last time in 1942. But the British authority ultimately survived each crisis, because of the loyalty of the Indian army to the British crown on each occasion. Finally it was the revolutionary legend of Subhash Chandra Bose and his INA and its decisive impact which knocked down for good the traditional loyalty of the Indian army to the British crown. The British power under the seismically changed revolutionary circumstances had either to face the terrible situation of imminent bloodbath, more tremendous in effect than the rebellion of 1857 or to quit India peacefully and they preferred the last course.⁹⁶

The naval officers were also certain about a political dimension of the mutiny. Rear Admiral Rattray, the Flag officer of Bombay, when examined before the Enquiry Commission on the May 22, 1946 began his statement with these words:

In my opinion the background of the mutiny was the grievances put forward by the ratings. But the overriding factor was the political tension in India prevailing from the end of 1945 onwards subversive element got to work both inside and outside the service to undermine the discipline of the ratings.⁹⁷

The Enquiry Commission concurred with this.⁹⁸ The communication ratings being educated were naturally more politically sensitized than others. Some of the ratings who had gone to Singapore, Malaya and Burma must have come into contact with revolutionary ideas. A decisive section of the communication ratings were *Malayalees*. Some of the *Malayalees* who participated in the mutiny were B.Hussain, M.V.Kunhiraman, Gopalakrishna Menockie, E.Narayana Kitavu and P.Krishna Pillai.

War time emergencies also had created problems. There was a recruitment drive. Madras stood second in recruitments. Taking the total

⁹⁶ . Samar Guha, *The Mahatma and the Netaji*, Calcutta, 1986, p.34.

⁹⁷ . *CER.*, p.436.

⁹⁸ . *CER.*, p.437.

percentage of recruitment till the end of the war, Madras had 18.6% and Punjab 24.9%. The share of Bombay fell. South India's share rose but did not displace that of North India.⁹⁹ These figures contradict the statement of FOCRIN Godfrey. To quote:

With the comparative slow expansion of the service between 1939 and 1941 there is no doubt that the army had a clear field for recruitment and secured the cream of the population; this was particularly the case in North India. To obtain the numbers required in later years, it became necessary to open up recruitment on an India wide scale. Large number of ratings from Bengal and Southern India were enrolled.¹⁰⁰

The statement made by Admiral Godfrey before the Enquiry commission was prejudiced towards a section of people whom he called '*Madraseses.*' The statement was thus, "*Madrasee* ratings serving in the navy are mostly literates. They are solidly behind the Congress and the cause of the mutiny is having been influenced by the then prevailing political condition in the country."¹⁰¹ Thus Godfrey associated literacy with pro-Congress feelings. But opinions of and assessments by naval officers were not uniform. Faced earlier with protest demonstrations of *Pathans*, officers said that they were illiterates and bound to display disobedience.¹⁰²

We can assess the political complexion of the mutiny in the following examples: It had been clearly established that anti-British slogans were shouted by the mutineers. They hoisted the flags of Congress, Muslim League and Communist Party. The sailors discarded their caps because they were regarded them as emblems of slavery. An 'Azad Hind Gate' was improvised in Talwar. Besides they went to meet Aruna Asaf Ali and other political leaders. The political aspect was more pronounced in some of the establishments in Bombay and Karachi than elsewhere. But political slogans were shouted everywhere.

⁹⁹ . For details, see Appendix A, Table 6, for Region wise percentage of Recruitment.

¹⁰⁰ . *CER.*, pp.11-12.

¹⁰¹ . *CER.*, p.437.

¹⁰² . *CER.*, p.22.

Many factors contributed to an increased political awareness of the mutineers. The communication ratings being educated were naturally more politically minded than others. Such factors seem to have contributed to the spread of subversive propaganda in the navy. We can identify the following as contributory factors:

- a. Free access of ratings to political meetings in towns like Bombay and Karachi. Many of the ratings remember that they had attended the speeches of Gandhi and Nehru in the Choupathy Beach.
- b. Inflammatory articles in the press.
- c. Discussions about INA trials and Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) strikes
- d. Distribution of subversive leaflets among the ratings.¹⁰³ (This may be due to the influence of the Communist Party. Many Communist literatures were circulated among the ratings).

Even the Enquiry Commission admitted that the political situation in the country, the propaganda carried on to achieve independence, the general strike fever the world over, the INA trials and the political consciousness raised by them, the strikes in other services, newspaper articles and speeches of a number of politicians, all contributed to the final upsurge. The mutiny when it spread thus came to assume an outwardly political complexion. This is clear from the demands of the mutineers, which included political ones.¹⁰⁴ The Commission pointed out that the mutiny was not organized by an outside agency and it was not pre-planned. But politics and political influence had a great effect in unsettling men's loyalty and preparing the ground for the mutiny and in the prolongation and spread of the mutiny after it had started.¹⁰⁵

Policies taken by the navy regarding pay, service conditions and the fate of the ratings after the war were the major causes for the outbreak of mutiny. An armed service which had been exceptionally useful for the British during the war was continually ill-treated during their service time and afterwards.

¹⁰³ . This is elaborated in Chapter 5, Section 1.

¹⁰⁴ . *CER.*, pp.436-38.

¹⁰⁵ . *CER.*, p.461.

Departure from the sweet promises given at the time of recruitment and the uncivil expulsion at the end of the war were incomprehensible for the ratings. The ratings had suffered much in the deck and barracks. Harmonious relationship between the officers and the men was lacking in the navy. Racial superiority and arrogance were the hallmark of most of the white officers. Unfortunately, reflections on the well-being of the subordinates and empathy towards them were absent among them. Lack of sensitivity towards the sentiments of the ratings regarding their social and religious customs was another contributory factor. Absence of mutual trust was a serious impediment that prevented the ratings from seeking the restitution of their grievances from their superiors. Demobilisation and ineffective resettlement schemes increased the resentment of ratings making them potential causes of mutiny. Overall political situation in India also was a contributing factor. It might be true that the deterioration of socio-economic conditions at home after 1941 and the Quit India movement of 1942 were factors that conditioned the ratings' consciousness of themselves as Indians first and sailors second. The INA factor played an important role in hastening the spirit of mutiny.

Chapter 3

MUTINIES AND CIVILIAN EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY

Our strike has been a historic event in the life of our nation. For the first time the blood of the men in the services and the people flowed together in a common cause. We in the services will never forget this. We also know that you our brothers and sisters will not forget. Long live our great people.¹

This was the last message of the Naval Central Strike Committee (NCSC) to the nation. However, before the 'Last Mutiny', there were minor ones testifying to the fact that all was not well with the Royal Indian Navy. In this chapter, we shall first take these for discussion. This would be followed by a description of the 'February uprising' in Bombay. The third section takes up for discussion the civilian expressions of solidarity with the revolt. We shall conclude the chapter by noting the spread of the mutiny to Karachi, Calcutta and other places.

Section 1

Early Mutinies

There are two meaning of the word 'strike', one civil and the other military. The first is an established one, and the latter, an importation from the United States. A successful military strike, calls for many estimable qualities such as technical skill, courage, discipline, endurance and loyal team work.² The civil strike is a formal method of bargaining for higher wages or better working conditions. The term 'mutiny' implies collective insubordination or a combination of two or more persons resisting or inducing others to resisting a lawful military authority. One person cannot be charged generally with mutiny. Mutiny is staged in groups. If a person does not bring himself within these

¹ . A Group of Victimised Ratings, *The RIN Strike* (1954), Reprint, New Delhi, 1981, p.127.

² . *The Army Quarterly*, Vol. LII, No.1, April, 946.

terms, then his offence, however, much it resembles mutiny, must be dealt with as insubordination only.³

From an early period, defence forces have faced mutinies. In 1764 Bengal sepoys mutinied for higher pay and European officers in 1766 had combined together in protest against withdrawal of *batta* (a kind of bonus, in addition to regular pay) which they considered their due. A fresh crop of mutinies broke out - In 1806 there was a mutiny in the Madras army and in 1809 European officers of the Madras army were once guilty of the mutinous conduct against government. In 1824 Bengal troops mutinied at Barackpore and in 1857 the Sepoy Mutiny against the Raj.⁴

Though the February mutiny was the most important, it was preceded by minor instances of 'insubordination' in the navy. There were nine such instances of collective protest in the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) called 'mutinies' by officials, on ships at sea as well as shore establishments.⁵ These instances of collective disobedience on the part of ratings were in some ways minor replicas of the 1946 revolt.

On March 3, 1942, apprentices in the Mechanical training establishment in Bombay struck work, as they did not receive any increase in the pay but suffered deductions from the pay. Seven apprentices were court martialled and convicted.⁶ In June 1942, seventeen ordinary seamen refused to work and went on a hunger strike in HMIS Konkan which was anchored at Tobermory in UK. All of them were sentenced to 90 days of detention.⁷ In September 1942, seven greasers refused to carry out the duty of messengers and 15 men went to the Commanding Officer (CO) with complaints against their Chief Boatswain's mate in HMIS Khyber in UK. They were removed from the ship and returned

³ . *Manual of Military Law*, 1922, Command of the Army Council, London, 1929.

⁴ . *The Army in India and its evolution*, Government Publication, Calcutta, 1924, p.14.

⁵ . *Report of the RIN Mutiny Commission of Enquiry* (Hereafter *CER*), Sl.No.6, RIN Mutiny Papers, NAI, p.3.

⁶ . *CER.*, p.20.

⁷ . *CER.*, pp.20-22.

to India for discharge from service and the Chief Boatswain's mate was transferred to another ship.⁸

In June 1944, *Pathan* recruits numbering a hundred refused to sweep mess decks and demanded the building of a mosque in HMIS Akbar in Bombay. They were all discharged.⁹ On July 30, 1944, on board HMIS Hamlawar, a Sub-Lt. was assaulted by Muslim ratings because they felt that he had insulted their religion. Thirteen ratings were sentenced to various forms of imprisonment and the Sub. Lt. made to apologise publicly at the divisions and his three months seniority was forfeited.¹⁰ In these earlier mutinies, religion played a prominent part. Most of the earlier rebels belonged to the area of northern Pakistan, many had been young *Pathans* dedicated to their prayers and opposed to menial jobs on ship.¹¹

Commanding Officers, as is borne out by the evidences in the enquiry report, were alarmed at the state of indiscipline in the navy. They also admitted that possibilities of redressal of the grievances of the ratings were little. Undoubtedly these previous mutinies though isolated and involving limited number of people did have a bearing on the mutiny that broke out in February. We should also note that the harsh punishment that mutineers received did not serve as a deterrent.

Section 2

Chronology of the Event

The RIN Mutiny of 1946 was the culmination of events which began in November 1945. The first occasion came on December 1, 1945 'Navy day' which the authorities wanted to celebrate with flags and buntings. Some representative civilians were to be invited - which was rather a new thing in the annals of the Indian navy. Some of the ratings in HMIS Talwar, though it was a

⁸. CER., p.23.

⁹. CER., p.24.

¹⁰. CER., pp.25-26.

¹¹. For details, see Appendix A, Table 9, for Religious wise composition of Ratings.

very limited group, conspired among themselves to spoil the whole thing. During the night the ship was unguarded amply. Sentries at different places were keeping watch. The situation has been described by B.C.Dutt. In a strongly worded remembrance, he writes:

By dawn Talwar, meant to be an exhibit before the admiring Bombay public was in shambles, the parade ground was littered with burnt flags and buntings; brooms and buckets were prominently displayed from masthead. Highly militant political slogans were scrawled all over the barrack areas, 'Quit India', 'Down with the imperialists', 'Revolt now', 'Kill the British' and 'Kill the white Bastards.'¹²

The Enquiry Commission admitted that some of them were purely anti-British such as 'Kill the white dogs.'¹³

The conspirators felt elated at this success. The ratings who were not in full support with the rebels, but who could guess who had done this, congratulated them. Their ranks grew in number but it was done very carefully. The 'Navy day' action proved that there existed in the Talwar, a group that was sufficiently motivated politically to engage in such a risky venture. Some ratings in the Talwar had got together and formed what they called the 'Azad Hindi group.'¹⁴ The security personnel in the Talwar succeeded in identifying the likely instigators of the Navy day incident but could not take action because there was no proof against them. Given the temper of the political environment in the country at that time, the authorities decided to ignore the matter for the moment.¹⁵ But they speeded up the process of demobilisation. The Azad Hindi group also lay low for some time; there was no greater interest in their organisation among the ratings in general.¹⁶

¹² . B C Dutt, *Mutiny of the Innocents*, Bombay, 1971, p.97.

¹³ . NL 9930, *The Report of the Board of Enquiry into the Causes of the Mutiny in HMIS Talwar* (Hereafter NL 9930), Sl. No. 26, RIN Mutiny Papers, NAI, p.50.

¹⁴ . Subrata Banerjee, 'RIN Mutiny' in Ravi Dayal (ed.), *We Fought Together for Freedom*, New Delhi, 1995, p.216.

¹⁵ . NL 9930., pp.49-50.

¹⁶ . N P Nair, *1946- le Navika Lahala* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1998, pp. 44-45.

Then after the popular upsurges in relation with Subhash Bose day celebrations lasting from January 23-25, 1946, events moved rapidly towards the revolt. During those days students and workers intent on celebrating the birthday of Subhash Chandra Bose confronted the police in Bombay. The ensuing clashes left 22 persons dead and more than 300 injured.¹⁷

The next occasion came on February 2, 1946 when the Commander-in-chief (C-in-C), General Claude Auchinleck was to visit Talwar. The authorities took special care so as not have a repetition of the Navy day. More sentries were posted; flashlights were specially arranged; all the light on the corridors were kept alight. The conspirators tried to win over the sentries but failed. But seditious leaflets were pasted on barrack walls; slogans like 'Quit India' and 'Jai Hind' were written.¹⁸ These were detected at 5 am and all were removed. B.C.Dutt, a leading telegraphist of HMIS Talwar was arrested on charges of slogan writing and distributing subversive literature. After court martial, he was demoted and discharged. His colleagues greeted him as a hero. In the words of B.C.Dutt, "The authorities held me in solitary confinement for 17 days. During this time, they held intensive enquiry to locate my associates. Finally they decided to dismiss me from the service with disgrace."¹⁹

Another incident took place in the meantime. One rating, R.K.Singh, was more in favour of open defiance than conspiratorial methods so long followed by the ratings. He decided upon open defiance. He submitted his resignation, for which he was court-martialed. At the trial he refused to defend himself and threw his cap on the ground in front of the CO and kicked it, signifying his utter contempt for the crown and the services. Singh got three months prison sentence but his open revolt created a stir among all the ratings and in a way helped all the conspirators.²⁰

¹⁷ . Disturbances in Bombay, Subhash Chandra Bose Day 23-25-01-1946, Home Dept, Political, 1946, File No.5/13/46, NAI.

¹⁸ . *Subrata Banerjee, Op. Cit, p. 217.*

¹⁹ . B C Dutt 'Revolt of the Ratings of the Royal Indian Navy' in Nishith Ranjan Ray, et.al. (ed.), *Challenge: A Saga of India's Struggle for Freedom*, New Delhi, 1984, p.591.

²⁰ . *CER.*, pp.40-41; *Victimised Ratings, Op. Cit.*, p.132.

On February 8, Commander King, the CO of Talwar abused some ratings leading to arise in anti-British feelings. Fourteen ratings made individual complaints in writings against Commander King's language.²¹ This was to avoid charges of indiscipline that could arise from a joint complaint. The complaints were heard by Lt. Commander Snow, Executive Officer and referred to the CO on February 10. Seven days passed and nothing happened. There was no immediate response. CO King took up the complaints in the normal way for hearing requests, which happened to be on February 16. He accused the ratings of making false complaints and gave them 24 hours to think it over.²² When the incident became news, the authorities denied that King used such foul language. But King himself later admitted before the Enquiry Commission that he did use such a language. Ratings were boiling with rage over King's language. Thus the strike was a sequel to the alleged insulting behaviour of the Commander towards the ratings whom he was stated to have stigmatised as 'sons of coolies' and 'sons of bitches.'²³ The Enquiry Commission admitted that the King's incident was the immediate cause of the mutiny.²⁴

HMIS Talwar was the communication ratings Training school (a shore establishment in Bombay). Communication ratings were drawn from the educated classes and there was a considerable number among them who had passed their intermediate or had even taken a degree in arts and science. A very large number of them were matriculates.²⁵

On the night of February 17, a large number of ratings decided on a major action. The idea sprung from the example of Mahatma Gandhi's famous *Dandi yatra* – withdrawal of tax on salt - salt being an essential commodity in everyone's daily life. This appeared a well guided example for action. They decided to take, poor quality and bad food which was a general discontent, as

²¹ . *NL 9930.*, p.51.

²² . *CER.*, p.42.

²³ . *Free Press Journal, Bombay*, 19 February, 1946, MSA; N P Nair, *Op. Cit.*, p.46.

²⁴ . *CER.*, p.51.

²⁵ . *CER.*, p.49.

an issue. They refused food in protest. The uprising thus began with a strike action by Talwar ratings who rallied round the slogan 'No food No work.' Thus the mutiny first started as a hunger strike. In Dutt's words we get an outline of that activity which made this strike possible. Explaining the backdrop of the revolt, Dutt remembers well those days:

After we were brought to HMIS Talwar, which was the base for the communication ratings, I tried to organise an underground movement with the object of throwing the British out of the sub-continent. I found many likeminded anti-British ratings in Talwar.²⁶

Dutt and his group influenced the ratings of Talwar and he was released on February 16 - the ratings struck work on the February 18. The Talwar ratings rebelled by boycotting breakfast. The communication ratings flashed this news to other ships and shore establishments and won their sympathy. When the mutiny started, Talwar was completely under the control of the ratings with officers generally restricted to the area of gateway and Chief Petty Officers (CPOs) and Petty Officers (POs) to their barracks. The ratings had free exit from the establishments.²⁷ On February 19, Tuesday, the seamen ratings broke out of Castle barracks with anti-British and anti-American feelings rhyming high.²⁸ After starting the protest, the Talwar ratings felt the need for support in other RIN establishments. Dutt accepts that at this stage rumours were deliberately used by the Talwar ratings to draw out the seamen from the barracks. Hence the next morning they approached the Castle barracks with the following passage:

British tommies are shooting down and bayoneting your brothers on the Talwar. You spent the best years of your lives fighting the war of your foreign masters; now you are being rewarded with the blood of your brothers. Come on, don't stand there gaping like a bunch of idiots, to the rescue, on to freedom.²⁹

²⁶ . B.C.Dutt, 'Revolt...*Op. Cit.*, p.591.

²⁷ . *CER*.

²⁸ . *Navasakthi*, Bombay, 20 February, 1946, MSA.

²⁹ . B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny...Op. Cit.*, pp.121-22; *Navasakthi*, 20 February, 1946.

The ratings came out in the streets. They seized naval Lorries and began to roam the city, with Congress and Muslim league flags on display.³⁰ A meeting was held in *Azad maidan* and they marched in processions shouting slogans like 'Release INA' and 'Political Prisoners', 'Withdraw Indian Army from Indonesia' etc. They paraded the streets and they did not wear their uniform caps. Some of them asked people to remove English caps which they were wearing.³¹ Obviously they viewed the wearing of such caps as a symbol of slavery. Throwing the cap, a part of the uniform, was one way of expressing protest.³²

The ratings took out huge processions in the city carrying hockey sticks, and other weapons. Some of them were armed with guns and fire axes.³³ *The National Herald* reported that about 3000 strikers armed with hockey sticks and fire arms staged a demonstration along Hornby Road from Victoria Terminus to Flora Fountain.³⁴ They took charge of Flora fountain area which is Bombay's main traffic center.³⁵ The demonstrators stopped the traffic on the busiest areas of Bombay - Flora Fountain, Hornby Road and Victoria Terminus. The ratings of some other ships also joined them.³⁶ Among the ships affected were HMIS Oudh, HMIS Lahore, HMIS Firoz, HMIS Neelam, HMIS Akbar, HMIS Maratha, HMIS Punjab, HMIS Kathiawar, HMIS Dalhousie and HMIS Hamla. As seamen rushed out of their establishments, they stoned shops owned by foreigners, pulled down and burnt the American flags flying over the United States Information library.³⁷ All the ships in the harbour discarded the union Jacks and in a little over 48 hours the British lost all control over a

³⁰ . Bipan Chandra, et. al., *India's Struggle for Independence* (1988), Reprint, New Delhi, 1992, p.480.

³¹ .CER., p.55.

³² . For Similar displays of protest, See K.GopalanKutty, *Kongan Pata,Onam,Thoppi: Charithrathile Atayalappetuthalukal* (Mal.), Kottayam, 2012, p.53, Chapter on Thoppi (Cap).

³³ . *Navasakthi*, 20 February, 1946.

³⁴ . *The National Herald*, Lucknow, 20 February, 1946.

³⁵ . *The Tribune*, Lahore, 20 February, 1946, Microfilm, NMML.

³⁶ . A C Guha, *India's Struggle: Quarter of a Century*, New Delhi, 1982, p.732.

³⁷ . *The Blitz, Bombay*, 21 February, 1946, Extracts from Newspapers, NAI.

complete unit of their Indian armed forces. Some of the ratings behaved violently and caused destruction to the ruling elite, forcibly closing the shops and destroying the glasses and showcases. Some of them blocked transportation.³⁸ The official reports admitted that it caused considerable alarm among the European community.³⁹ Malayali participation in the revolt was remarkable. Mamiyil Unneerikutty from Olavanna, Calicut recollects that when the mutiny started, he was in HMIS Punjab, the ratings of Punjab welcomed the news with delight and held a meeting and decided to start the strike. Then they went out of the barracks and joined the ratings of Talwar.⁴⁰

On the same day at 2.30 p.m, J.Colville, Governor of Bombay, Bristow, Governor's Advisor, Admiral Rattray, Flag officer, Bombay, General Beard, Area Commander and Butler, Police Commissioner met at the government house to assess the situation. It was accepted by these officials that the mutiny was non-violent and on a considerable scale.⁴¹ The Admiral admitted that he was unable to cope with the situation with his own sources.⁴²

The news of the strike in Bombay was broadcast on the All India Radio and was also published in all the leading newspapers. This news reached places like Calcutta (Kolkatta), Karachi, and Madras (Chennai) where other units of RIN were located. In those units also whispers of a sympathetic strike started. Besides, the ratings used the RT (Radio Telephony) and WT (Wireless Telephony) equipments in HMIS Talwar to communicate with other ships and establishments.⁴³ By dusk on February 19 the naval strike spread to all the 11 shore establishments in Bombay and the 22 ships in its harbour involving nearly 22,000 ratings in them.⁴⁴ The mutiny was significantly marked by the

³⁸ . Interview, Odakkal Muhammed, a participant, at his residence in Kondotty on 2 November, 2013; *The Blitz*, 21 February, 1946.

³⁹ . Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power 1942-47*, Vol.VI, London, 1976, p.1080; *NL 9930.*, p.56.

⁴⁰ . Interview, Mamiyil Unneerikutty. See Appendix C, Biographical Sketch.

⁴¹ . Sir J.Colville to Wavell, 27-2-46 in Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, pp.1079-85; *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 21 February, 1946, Microfilm, NMML.

⁴² . Sir. J.Colville to Wavell, 27-2-46 in Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, p.1080.

⁴³ . *NL 9930.*, p.50.

⁴⁴ . See Appendix C, Table 2, Name of Ships involved in the Mutiny.

removal of the Union jack from the ships which was replaced by the tri-colour, League and the Red flags. An Indian officer of the RIN writes, “They have clearly understood that their own problems are closely tied up with the freedom of our country that is why they have lowered the Union Jack on their ships and hoisted the national flag instead. However, momentary their success may be, they have shown to the world their desire to fly the National flag and to serve under it.”⁴⁵ A meeting was held in *Azad maidan* by the mutineers and they marched in processions shouting slogans like ‘Release political prisoners’, ‘Withdraw Indian army from Indonesia’ etc. The official reports admitted that the mutiny was non-violent in the first days.⁴⁶

Bombay was the RIN’s principal base with big installations, barracks and some 20 ships in the harbour. The mutiny involved the whole navy (RIN): 78 ships of various descriptions stationed in Bombay, Karachi, Calcutta, Madras, Cochin, Vishakhapatnam, Mandapam and Andaman and almost all naval shore establishments in the country joined the mutiny.⁴⁷ Soon massive sympathy was aroused. By the next day the RIN was in the grip of unprecedented naval revolt and only ten ships and two shore establishments remained unaffected. The official reports stated that the immediate causes of the mutiny in other ships and establishments were sympathy with Talwar ratings, inflammatory articles in the press and incitement by ratings from other establishments.⁴⁸

By dusk on February 19, the rebels decided to organise their protest. They formed a 14 member Naval Central Strike Committee (NCSC) and signalman M.S. Khan and PO telegraphist Madan Singh were unanimously elected President and Vice-President respectively. Both were under 25 years of age. They were politically inexperienced but were completely free of the communal virus of the Indian public life of the time.⁴⁹ The committee formally renamed the RIN as ‘Indian National Navy.’ It formulated a set of demands:

⁴⁵ . Cited in *Free Press Journal*, 21 February, 1946.

⁴⁶ . *CER.*, p.52.

⁴⁷ . *CER.*, p.56 ; See Appendix D, Table 2, Name of Ships involved in the Mutiny.

⁴⁸ . *NL 9930.*, p.55.

⁴⁹ . B C Dutt, ‘Revolt...*Op. Cit.*, p.595.

- a. The release of all Indian political prisoners.
- b. Unconditional release of all INA personnel.
- c. Withdrawal of all Indian troops from Indonesia and Egypt.
- d. British nationals to quit India
- e. Release of all detenus (naval ratings)
- f. Speedy demobilisation of the RIN ratings and officers.
- g. Equal status with the British navy regarding pay, family allowances and other facilities.
- h. Best class of Indian food.
- i. No return of clothing kit after discharge from service.
- j. Better treatment of officers towards subordinates.
- k. Installation of Indian officers and supervisors.⁵⁰

On February 20, the mutiny spread further, affecting the loyalty of some thousands of ratings. The WRIN of Talwar also struck work.⁵¹ The immediate provocation of the strike came from the offensive behaviour of the CO of Talwar.⁵² He was replaced by another British officer Captain Inigo Jones on the 20th, but ratings were not satisfied. They demanded an Indian officer to be in charge. The military were asked to guard the naval units. Talwar was put under the charge of Maratha Regiment. The authorities appealed to the ratings to return to their units; loudspeaker vans went around Bombay, repeating this appeal.⁵³ Some ratings returned to their barracks. There were cases of attacks on individual Europeans and destruction of public property. These acts of

⁵⁰ . *CER.*, p.55 ; Biswanath Bose, *RIN Mutiny:1946*, New Delhi,1988, p.182.

⁵¹ . In February, 1944 the Women's Royal Indian Naval Service (WRINS) came into being. They had distinct uniforms and were subjected to naval discipline. A number of them were employed in operation rooms and signal centers. They not only handled encoding, decoding and cipher but also worked as telephone operators and performed stints in the war room. The first batch was to be sent for training to HMIS Talwar in 1944, See Bishweshvar Prasad, *Op.Cit* ; D.J.Hastings, *Op.Cit*.

⁵² . *The Bombay Chronicle*, Bombay, 20 February, 1946, MSA.

⁵³ . Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, p.1081.

destruction and looting of articles were mostly done by the anti-social elements who had gathered round the ratings.⁵⁴

Ratings paraded the streets shouting slogans. An important center was Church Gate station. Hundreds of ratings from HMIS Valsura and other naval establishments in the suburbs of Bombay arrived by local trains at Church Gate Station.⁵⁵ *The Hindu* reported that within fifteen minutes, nearly 2000 ratings assembled in, carrying Congress tri-colour flags and shouting slogans.⁵⁶

In the afternoon the ratings held a meeting at Oval ground near the Bombay University. M.S. Khan appealed the people to follow discipline and non-violence. They formed a 'peace patrol corps' for the purpose of ensuring peaceful conduct on the part of the strikers.⁵⁷ It is on behalf of the NCSC; one of the members owed an apology to United States of America for the unhappy incident that happened on the previous of day.⁵⁸ It strongly appealed to the comrades wherever they may be - in establishment or ship – to maintain complete calm and solidarity and refused to be stampeded into any kind of violent action on their part.⁵⁹ However, the men hesitated, on the brink of peaceful strike and determined mutiny, obeying orders to return to their respective ships or barracks on the afternoon of February 20, only to find themselves surrounded by army guards. The NCSC instructed the sailors to observe fast until the withdrawal of troops which surrounded the Castle barracks.⁶⁰

The same afternoon also saw remarkable scenes of fraternization, with crowds bringing food for the ratings to the Gate Way of India and shopkeepers inviting them to take whatever they needed.⁶¹ Sumit Sarkar writes, the pattern

⁵⁴ . A C Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p.732.

⁵⁵ . *The Hindu*, Madras, 21 February, 1946. Indian Council of World Affairs Library, Sapru House, New Delhi.

⁵⁶ . *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ . *The Statesman*, New Delhi, 21 February, 1946, Microfilm, NMML.

⁵⁸ . *Mathrubhumi* , Calicut, 22 February, 1946.

⁵⁹ . *Free Press Journal*, 21 February, 1946.

⁶⁰ . *The Bombay Chronicle*, 21 February, 1946.

⁶¹ . Interview, M V Kunhircaman of Kanhangad.

of events in fact unconsciously echoed the course of the mutiny of the Black Sea fleet during the first Russian revolution of 1905.⁶²

The RIN rebels expected that the Congress and League would uphold their cause as just in the national liberation struggle. After forming a NCSC and adopting a resolution declaring that, “Henceforth the ratings of the RIN will take orders only from national leaders.”⁶³ They expected the national leaders to respond positively. But the political leadership did not respond with warmth to the call given by the ratings. By now the efforts of the ratings to gain the support of the political parties had failed, although some elements of the Congress Socialist party and other left Congress men, the *Free Press Journal* and the Communist Party of India did their best to give whatever assistance they could to the naval mutineers.

The Flag Officer Commanding the RIN (FOCRIN), Vice-Admiral Godfrey arrived in Bombay on February 20. In a conference of naval officers it was decided to provide Indian food to the ratings according to the menu submitted to them.⁶⁴ Vice-Admiral Godfrey made a broadcast appeal assuring due consideration of their grievances including demobilisation. In his speech, there was also a threat of strict measures to suppress indiscipline.⁶⁵ He also justified the posting of military personnel at the gates of Talwar and of Castle barracks. His broadcast speech stated that the overwhelming forces at the disposal of the Government of India (GOI) at this time will be used to their utmost even if it means the destruction of the navy of which it has been so proud. Calling for an unconditional surrender, he threatened the ratings with dire consequences if they refused to obey his orders.⁶⁶ He offered that there would be no collective punishment. No vindictive action or indiscriminate retribution but ring leaders and others would be individually tried and those

⁶² . Sumit Sarkar, “Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945-47”, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, April 1982, pp. 677-689; That too had begun over inedible food and fraternized crowds had been shot down in a scene immortalized later on the ‘Odessa steps’ sequence of Eisenstein’s film classic ‘Battleship Potemkin’ (1925).

⁶³ . Victimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*, p.59.

⁶⁴ . *CER.*, P.52; *The Hindu*, 21 February, 1946; *Mathrubhumi*, 21 February, 1946.

⁶⁵ . Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, p.1082.

⁶⁶ . *Ibid.*

who were found guilty would be punished.⁶⁷ At the same time he sent a message that he was ready to have talks with the Strike Committee. In response, the President of the Strike Committee issued instruction for a ceasefire. A messenger arrived at the Castle barracks conveying the information that the FOCRIN was himself coming to talk things over the ratings. The strike leaders waited in vain and returned with the information that the authorities were discussing the situation with India's national leaders.

On February 21, the NCSC gave a call to action stations and shifted command to HMIS Narbada, the flagship of the RIN. All ships manned guns, raised steam and became ready to defend their comrades on shore. The call of the naval mutineers was well expressed through the Urdu song composed by the poet Josh Malihabadi popularly sung by the ratings:

Kaam Hai Mera Taghayyur,
Nam Hai Mera Shabab.
Mera Naara Inquilab
O-Inquilab O-Inquilab⁶⁸

(My job is to change, my name is youth, and my slogan is Revolution. Revolution! Revolution!)

Newspapers reported that the ratings raided armoury in the barracks and when British troops opened fire on them, they returned the fire using artillery and grenades.⁶⁹ *The National Herald* reported that a kind of regular warfare was in progress, when Indian ratings took possession of the armoury in the Castle barracks containing a large quantity of ammunition.⁷⁰ The military guards tried to prevent ratings coming out from the Castle barracks. It resulted

⁶⁷ . *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ . Cited in Keka Dutta Ray, *Political Upsurges in Post-war India*, New Delhi, 1992, p.23; T.P.Gopalakrishnan Nair, *Indiayku Swathathathryam Netiya 1946-2-15 Muthal 23 vare Natanna RIN Lahala*(Mal.),Mangalathukonam, ND, p.39.

⁶⁹ . *The Indian Express*, Madras, 22 February, 1946, p.1.

⁷⁰ . *The National Herald*, 22 February, 1946.

in open firing between ratings and military. In this encounter one naval officer and one rating was killed.⁷¹

T.Raghavan Nair who was in the Castle barracks in Bombay now recollects the days of the mutiny. He remembers that British Tommies fired towards the barracks and Krishnan, a Malayali was killed.⁷² Then fighting continued in the Castle barracks when ratings tried to break out of their encirclement, with the ships providing artillery support and bombers threatening to destroy the Navy.⁷³ Meanwhile General Lockhard assumed full command in Bombay and Admiral Godfrey gave a command on air:

A state of open rioting prevails in which ratings appear to have completely lost control of their senses. I make it quite plain that the GOI will never give into violence. To continue the struggle is the height of folly when you take into account the overwhelming forces at the disposal of the government at this time which will be used to their uttermost even if it means the destruction of the navy of which we have been so proud.⁷⁴

On Friday 22nd, Command of HMIS Talwar was handed over to Commander Karmarkar.⁷⁵ On that day curfew was declared. Processions and assembly of five persons or more were banned. Towards nightfall the city presented the appearance of a battle field. Section 144 was declared. In spite of the curfew order and the ban on meetings and processions, meetings were held in different parts of the city.⁷⁶ Widespread rioting took place in the whole of Bombay. British troops and police opened fire. 300 Killed, 500 injured, traffic

⁷¹ . *People's Age*, 22 February, 1946, p.1.

⁷² . Interview, T.Raghavan Nair at his residence in Pokkunnun on 12 May, 2006; T.P Gopalakrishnan Nair, *Op. Cit.*, p.24

⁷³ . Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, p.1081 ; *The Bombay Chronicle*, 22 February, 1946; *NL 9930.*, p.56; T.P.Gopalakrishnan Nair, *Op. Cit.*, p.25.

⁷⁴ . Cited in *The Bombay Chronicle*, 22 February, 1946.

⁷⁵ . *NL 9930.*, p.57.

⁷⁶ . Subrata Banerjee, *The RIN strike*, New Delhi, 1991, P.65; *Free Press Journal*, 23 February, 1946.

paralysed and mills were closed.⁷⁷ The whole city was in a state of great disturbance.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a member of the Congress Working Committee, had been approached by the ratings on the February 21, 1946 when the firing started at Castle barracks. He however declined to interfere. He was of the view that the ratings ought not to have taken up arms and condemned their act of indiscipline in staging a mutiny.⁷⁸ He expressed the opinion that there ought to be discipline in the armed forces. The happenings in the city of Bombay were condemned by him as acts of encouragement to anarchy and *goondaism*. The official reports happily reported that strikes and acts of indiscipline and defiance of the authority of the day were considered to be out of place at the moment by the Sardar.⁷⁹

However, in the Friday evening came a message from Sardar Patel asking the ratings to down arms and to go through the formality of surrender which has been asked for.⁸⁰ He sent the following message:

The strikers should lay down all arms and ammunitions and should go through the formality of surrender and the Congress would do its level best to see that there is no victimisation and the legitimate demands of naval ratings are met as soon as possible.⁸¹

He promised protection against victimisation. Most of the newspapers gave wide coverage to his statement. This promise was promptly forgotten as soon as the surrender was affected. Then a messenger brought Jinnah's message which appealed particularly to the Muslims among the ratings:

I offer my services unreservedly for the cause of the RIN men to see that justice is done to them. I appeal to the men of the RIN to call

⁷⁷. *The National Herald*, 23 February, 1946.

⁷⁸ . *The Bombay Chronicle*, 22 February, 1946; See Durgadas (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-50*, Vols. I-X, Ahmedabad, 1971-74.

⁷⁹. *NL 9930.*, p.57.

⁸⁰. B C Dutt, *Revolt....Op. Cit.*, p.601.

⁸¹. *NL 9930.*, p.57; *The Bombay Chronicle*, 23 February, 1946.

off the strike; particularly I call upon the Muslims to stop and to create no further trouble until we are in a position to handle this very serious situation.⁸²

Jinnah's statement was calculated to split our ranks, writes B.C.Dutt.⁸³ The ratings had in fact hailed from widely different regions and religions. They were completely free of communal virus that had infected the Indian public life at that time. But generally the rebels were dismayed at the communal approach implicit in Jinnah's support, for they had presented a united front through the four battling days. That slogans, calling for national unity; 'Hindus and Muslims unite' and 'Inquilab Zindabad' resounded in the streets of Bombay. The ratings marching the streets with flags of Congress and League tied together were really a strange sight for the people of Bombay. The RIN Mutiny thus showed what Aruna Asaf Ali later correctly remarked that it was far easier to 'unite the Hindus and Muslims at the barricade than at the constitutional front.'⁸⁴

B.C.Dutt provides a dreamy picture of surrender:

No one slept. Khan gave an extempore report to his talks with the leaders and the authorities ended with the personal appeal for surrender. Promises made almost simultaneously by Patel and Jinnah were visualised as a sign of Congress - League unity by Khan who jumping up exclaimed; they did not even fight for the defence of INA personnel, we have won.⁸⁵

When the Congress and the League both promised help to the ratings after surrender, Khan thought that some measures of success had been achieved by the ratings as far as the forging of national unity was concerned. Khan requested the NCSC to accept the advice rendered by a respected leader. The

⁸². Cited in *The Hindu*, 22 February, 1946.

⁸³. B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny...Op. Cit.*, p.185.

⁸⁴ . Cited in *Free Press Journal*, 2 March 1946; Also G.N.S.Raghavan, *Aruna Asaf Ali: A Compassionate Radical*, New Delhi,1999, Section for a Unity at the Barricades, pp.80-83.

⁸⁵. B.C. Dutt, 'Revolt....Op. Cit.', p. 601; T.P.Gopalakrishnan Nair, *Op. Cit.*, p.44.

majority of the members however refused to accept it.⁸⁶ His eyes were filled with tears. Members seemed stunned by the picture Khan portrayed to them. There were a few minutes of silence. Then pandemonium broke out. All were on their feet. No one listened to anyone. The general mood was, “To hell with the leaders, the people are with us; they are fighting the tommies in the streets; Let us join them; just once more, for the sake of the country, for our sake.”⁸⁷ The vote of surrender was taken in the morning and with the hoisting of black flags around 6 am. Only six members opposed the decision to surrender.⁸⁸ On 23 Saturday, the uprising passed into history.

Most of the newspapers reported that on February 23, 1946, all the RIN ships under the control of the ratings on strike surrendered unconditionally in accordance with the advice rendered by the national leaders.⁸⁹ A signal from the NCSC that the ships are ready to surrender was received at naval headquarters at Bombay in 6.13 a.m. on February 23. After which the ships surrendered one by one in accordance with the terms laid down by the FOCSRIN. The Indian naval ratings who had barricaded themselves inside Castle barracks also surrendered simultaneously. Thus the naval ratings’ strike was called off. It is officially stated from New Delhi that the ratings in Bombay had surrendered unconditionally. The surrender had been accepted.⁹⁰ All RIN ships and establishments in Bombay flying black flags signified their willingness to surrender.

A group of Victimised ratings described that everywhere the ratings were disappointed with the decision to surrender. They listened quietly to the report of their representatives and quietly walked away. They had to abide by the decisions taken by their leaders.⁹¹ M.P.G. Menon, one of the members of the NCSC remarked that:

⁸⁶. T.P.Gopalakrishnan Nair, *Op. Cit.*, p.45.

⁸⁷. Victimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*, p. 72; B C Dutt, *Mutiny...Op. Cit.*, pp.180-185.

⁸⁸. Victimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*, p.73.

⁸⁹. *The Indian Express*, 24 February, 1946, p.1.

⁹⁰. *CER.*, p.60.

⁹¹. Victimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*, pp.73-74.

The ratings did not surrender because of a defeat in the battle. Their morale was unbroken; their ranks remained intact; their zeal was uncurbed to the very end. The surrender was not an act of defeat but voluntary because of the advice of leaders like Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru.⁹²

At the same time information was received that the ratings intended to continue the mutiny in spite of FOCRIN's call upon them to surrender. However, later in the evening, reports indicated that the men were disposed to consider unconditional surrender but were apprehensive as to what unconditional surrender meant. It was therefore decided to send Admiral Rattray who volunteered for the job to visit all ships and shore establishments, to explain what unconditional surrender meant. He was given a written statement by the GOC-in-C showing his interpretation of the term. He was also instructed to give the men all assurance that there would be no vindictive treatment of individuals. But before the final decision could be taken, they wished to communicate the representatives from the ships. General Lockhart gave permission for the ship's representatives to be allowed to go through the dock gates and to go to HMIS Talwar to meet and then return to their ships.⁹³

Soon after the surrender signal was hoisted by the RIN ships under the control of the strikers, Rear Admiral Rattray and Lt. Chaudhury went on board the ships and addressed the ratings. Thus the mutiny came to an end. One naval establishment had refused to surrender. It was HMIS Akbar at Thana.⁹⁴ Up to 24th Sunday, they continued their sit-in-strike. Then they were arrested and released. On February 26, twenty three ratings were picked out as ring leaders and they were taken to unknown destinations.⁹⁵

⁹². *Forum*, Tellicherry, 23 February, 1947.

⁹³. *CER.*, p.60.

⁹⁴ . Ratings of HMIS Akbar started the strike on 20 February. When the strike started, they discarded their caps and went to the detention cell where ratings were undergoing punishment for indiscipline and released them. One rating then set fire to the cell but the flames were extinguished by the other ratings before any damage could be done, *The Times of India*, Bombay, 24 February, 1946.

⁹⁵. *Victimised Ratings, Op. Cit.*, p.75.

The mutiny was not confined to the docks. It was marked by civilian participation.

Section 3

Civilian Participation in Bombay

The civilian participation of Bombay began itself on Tuesday, February 19. People had seen the rounds that were taken by the ratings shouting slogans. The crowd targeted Europeans who were chased out from the fort area. On 20th Wednesday, there were rumours about the armed revolt opening out. On Thursday a massive crowd gathered at the Gate Way of India. They brought food for the rebels. The rebels reminiscenced that the sea-face round the Gate Way of India look like fair with men, women and children of all classes of religion crowding the place.⁹⁶ The Maratha guards who had been placed there to keep the people away did not interfere. One of the participants reported the crowd action in the following words:

It was a colourful sight. Everywhere, from all sides they came with baskets of food in their hands. There was everything one could ask for- fruits, milk, bread, vegetables and what not. They were the rations of the poor workers, the struggling poor middle class families, even of well-to-do Indians. The British wanted to starve their heroic brothers in the navy into submission.⁹⁷

Motor boats came from the ships and were filled with baskets of food; the ratings were greeted by the people with revolutionary slogans. They were embraced by the crowds. The Hindu, Muslim and Irani shopkeepers took the navy boys into their shops and asked them to take what they wanted.⁹⁸ The crowd was delighted to see the rebel ships defiantly flying the Congress, League and Red flags. The army cordoned off the RIN barracks and crowd

⁹⁶ . Interview with a group of Participants from Malabar. See Appendix C, Biographical Sketch; Vctimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*, p.55.

⁹⁷ . Vctimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*

⁹⁸ . *Ibid*; Interview, Odakkal Muhammed.

heard the firing which added to speculation of popular fear. The Fortnightly Reports of the same period pinpointing the collective mentality of the moment pointed out:

People did not realise how little damage was in fact being done and imagined that a major engagement was taking place.... Signs of disaffection in the armed forces generally have spread the idea that revolutionary changes are imminent and that the forces of order are seriously weakened.⁹⁹

A massive demonstration in support of the ratings was organised. It began at the Museum and moved through the Fort areas. On lookers and bystanders joined in swelling the processional ranks. Congress, League and Communist flags were carried together; symbolising national unity against the British and slogans of all shades was raised in common. Even as ratings came to Appollo Bunder in launches, conversed with the crowds and away laden with food packets. The CPI held about 50 public meetings in the city which called upon the people to observe a complete *hartal* (lit., standstill. A cessation of business and other activities in protest), the next day to support the ratings and save them from destruction.¹⁰⁰ Simultaneously the Congress High Command of Bombay headed by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel issued an appeal against holding the *hartal*.¹⁰¹ It made clear that it would not support any disruption of normalcy in Bombay. Both appeals, CPI for *hartal* and Congress against, received wide publicity and were printed in almost all newspapers. *Free Press Journal* reported that in spite of the appeals of Patel and S.K.Patil, Secretary of Bombay Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) to maintain peace and order; the Bombay public expressed their sympathy in spontaneous demonstrations all over the city. The only effect was that, it left the demonstrators in a critical stage without leadership.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ . Home-Political, Poll (I), File No.18/02/1946, Fortnightly Reports (Hereafter FR) of Bombay for the Second Half of February, 1946, NAI.

¹⁰⁰. *People's Age*, 22 February, 1946.

¹⁰¹. Cited in *The Bombay Chronicle*, 22 February, 1946.

¹⁰². *Free Press Journal*, 23 February, 1946.

In the evening crowd looted jewelry shops at Zaveri Bazar and government grain shops and petrol pump on Princess Street. The police fired twice but on both occasions police parties were hemmed in by violent mobs and on Babu Khote Road, two British soldiers were singled out for attack.¹⁰³ Street lights were smashed along Giragoan Road and Kalabadevi Road. Trams and buses were set alight and ‘hooligans’ rejoiced around bonfires. Thus the urban uprising had begun.¹⁰⁴

On February 22, all mills and business closed down and workers and students observed a complete *hartal*.¹⁰⁵ The Congress appeal was repudiated as Communists and CSP cadres with students organised successful demonstrations and public meetings almost all over Bombay. The assembled crowds however took the matter into their own hands and violence began, to range from Colaba to the extremities of Mahim. By nightfall three battalions of British troops were called to rescue the harried city from an unprecedented orgy of arson and looting. Newspapers decried the establishment of *goondaraj* (rule of the unruly), as crowds pillaged 19 government grain shops, three branches of the Imperial bank of India, one branch of the Lloyds bank, two jewelry showrooms, and several post offices, liquor and cloth shops.

Through out morning and afternoon, the posh Fort area was the storm center. Numerous commercial firms and business houses were attacked there forcing the government to declare a half holiday. Patrolling police parties particularly in the northern industrial area of the city were singled out for attack by mobs, which often numbered many hundreds and by midday train and bus services were completely paralysed as their workers either joined the crowds or formed separate groups and selected for attack European pedestrians and vehicles carrying Europeans.¹⁰⁶ The demonstrations stemmed from a procession which began at the Museum and circulated through the Fort area shouting slogans. The police fired twice before midnight, first was the Metro Cinema

¹⁰³. *The Indian Express*, 22 February, 1946.

¹⁰⁴ . Anirudh Deshpande, *The Royal Indian Naval Uprising and Popular Protest*, M.Phil Dissertation, CHS, JNU, New Delhi, 1987.

¹⁰⁵. *People's Age*, 23 February, 1946.

¹⁰⁶. *Ibid*.

and later at Ramwadi.¹⁰⁷ Overnight demonstrations of ‘turbulent crowds’ sympathising with the RIN ratings, deteriorated first into attacks on buses and trains, then extended to government and municipal property later concentrated on Europeans and finally singled out all persons in western attire. The conflagration of 22nd Friday was the direct result of the developments described below. At 10 a.m a peaceful procession, shouting and carrying League and Congress flags appeared on Sir. Pherozechah Mehta Road. It was joined by crowd from all sides. Just then a speeding army lorry crushed two persons to death and popular anger exploded. The insurgents, shouting and yelling, pressed forward apparently intending to move towards the naval Head Quarters.¹⁰⁸ Military vehicles anywhere in sight were burnt and nearby shops and post offices were broken open and ransacked and their contents were lit as bonfires.

Serious violence simultaneously broke out in the mill area. It originated in Parel and spread to Lal Baug where the police picket was attacked by a crowd reported to be 30,000 strong.¹⁰⁹ The whole day was marked by student processions which were joined invariably by massive crowds. Almost everywhere police chowkies were attacked and set aflame and in one area a whole patrol was stripped and paraded. In another, a police inspector tied to a tree, narrowly escaped being burnt alive due to the timely intervention of a dada interfered to as a ‘hooligan leader’ by the report.¹¹⁰ Goldsmith shops at Zaveri Bazar and Vithalwadi were looted at night, presumably by people who knew the shops well. In a significant action, the Ernad rationing office situated in the Salvation Army building on Sankli Street Bykulla was burnt by crowds who ‘asked the members of the staff to leave the premises which they did.’¹¹¹ In all 28 grain shops were looted and destroyed on Thursday night and Friday in all instances. The rioters carried away bags of grains and sugar and destroyed

¹⁰⁷. *The Times of India*, 22 February, 1946.

¹⁰⁸. *The Statesman*, 23 February, 1946.

¹⁰⁹. *The Times*, London, 24 February, 1946, Microfilm, NMML, New Delhi.

¹¹⁰. *People’s Age*, 23 February, 1946.

¹¹¹. *Ibid.*

barrels of coconut oil and vegetables.¹¹² About 900 bags of grain were looted that day and accompanying the widespread plunder and arson was a continuous chase by the hooligans in several parts of the city, during the day of people putting on hats and ties. In most cases hats and ties were seized and burnt.¹¹³

On February 22, the British army was called in and almost immediately began to use the tactics which it had employed in 1942. As a result by the end of the day 97 persons lay dead in Bombay the majority of them in the working class areas.¹¹⁴ Newspapers headlined reports 'Bloodbath in Bombay' which stated the condition of the city.¹¹⁵ Among them was Kamal Dhonde of the CPI and Treasurer of the Parel Mahila Sangh.¹¹⁶ The scores of the injured included Kusum Ranadive, the Secretary of the Parel Mahila Sangh who was shot in the leg.¹¹⁷

On February 23, Saturday the complexion of the crowd activity changed in response to certain new developments. As police was replaced by British Essex, Leicestershire and two boarder regiments, the government offensive developed teeth. Armoured carriers and lorries began to maneuver the boarder upon streets and consequently the crowd became defensively confined to the working class areas. As the army moved in with mobile armed columns spraying all and sundry with machine gun fire the crowds withdrew into the smaller lanes of the working class areas. To prevent the army from entering these areas around the maze, barricades were put up. And it was on these that the crowd took its last stand. The two tanks square near Duncan Road was completely barricaded and a scene of pitched battle.¹¹⁸

The area between Kamattipura and Madanpura made up of a mixed religious population was predominantly a working class and middle class

¹¹². *Ibid.*

¹¹³. *The Indian Express*, 23 February, 1946.

¹¹⁴. *Ibid* ; *The Hindu*, 23 February, 1946.

¹¹⁵. *The Pioneer*, Calcutta, 25 February, 1946, Afsal Ganj Public Library, Hyderabad.

¹¹⁶. *The National Herald*, 23 February, 1946.

¹¹⁷. *The Hindustan Times*, 23 February, 1946.

¹¹⁸. *The Blitz*, 23 February, 1946, MSA.

stronghold.¹¹⁹ Barricades appeared on these areas on Friday night and organised resistance developed throughout Saturday. These barricades thrown across narrow lanes were made of uprooted telegraph and street light poles, fencing, general debris and bamboos lashed together. As the armed lorries came to a halt before these structures shrill whistles by sentinels sent the denizens into the cover of their houses.¹²⁰ The soldiers then bombarded with a steady barrage of missiles comprising bricks and soda water bottles. All lights had already been smashed and in the darkness the troops faced considerable confusion and could launch successful assaults only at daybreak.

Behind these barricades stood an unfriend army but willing of common man which gave battle to forces far superior in armament and external support. The result of these unequal contests was terrible. On Saturday alone around 200 civilians were killed in an action in which the police did the scouting and the British soldiers the firing. It is significant to remember in these contexts that the Indian army, the loyalty of which Wavell consistently claimed, was not used against the citizens of Bombay. The newspapers again pictured the Saturday events as day of bloodbath.¹²¹ The violence spread to the entire city from Crawford market upto Khar Road, a suburb of Bombay. At Dadar, an angry mob set fire to the Kohinoor textile mills. Another angry crowd made an effort to loot the branch of the Imperial Bank of India situated on Abdur Rahman Street. The official reports admitted that serious disturbances continued in Northern part of Bombay. Violent mobs attacked and attempted to burn Matunga station and two coaches of train burnt near Dadar station. Numerous grain and other shops looted. All mills closed and tram traffic stopped in mill area. Main road to Bandra barricaded in several places.¹²² Throughout the day the military and police resorted to repeated firings. The situation was grave as indicated by the three following official announcements:

¹¹⁹. Anirudh Deshpande, *Op. Cit.*, p.106.

¹²⁰. *The Blitz*, 23 February, 1946.

¹²¹. *The Hindu*, 24 February, 1946.

¹²². Home-Political, Poll (I), File No.5/21/46, NAI.

'To shoot at sight those barricading, calling in of reinforcements of troops and the extension of curfew hours from 7.30 p.m to 6.30 a.m.'¹²³

Let us now examine the popular response. The working classes of Bombay gave such an excellent account of themselves. During the two days 64 grain shops were looted and an estimated 5,00,000 lbs of grain and 1,25,000 lbs of sugar was carried away by the attackers. War time scarcity and price boom combined with the recent ration cuts, the insecurity created by post-war scarcity and official broadcasts about it played the casual role behind this pillaging. Twenty eight grain shops were deprived of their contents by Friday night and on Saturday alone 36 were plundered and burnt. According to official estimates, places looted included 9 banks, over 30 private shops, 64 government grain and cloth shops and 10 post offices. The private shops pillaged comprise jewelers.¹²⁴ Over 1,00,000 textile workers out of a total of 1,25,000 resumed work.¹²⁵

On that day for instance, at Kamattipura mobs placed road blocks and barricades on different lanes and bylanes with a view to prevent police and military Lorries reaching the area. After blocking the roads, gangs of men went about looting shops of Marwari money lenders and provision shops.¹²⁶ This vigorous expropriation distinct from taxation popularise was an effect of usual tension between the grain dealer- money lender and the working classes of various areas. By expropriating them the heterogeneous crowds were destroying this dependence.¹²⁷

By burning these shops with the furniture the crowd inflicted hurt upon their owners and by destroying the record books inside these places. They made sure that no records of local indebtedness survived. The motive everywhere was social, the act real and the result a temporary sigh of relief. These shops-scenes of long lines public irritation and immoral speculation

¹²³. *The Hindu*, 24 February, 1946.

¹²⁴. *The Times of India*, 25 & 27 February, 1946.

¹²⁵. *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, 27 February, 1946, Microfilm, NMML.

¹²⁶. *The Times of India*, 25 February, 1946.

¹²⁷. Anirudh Deshpande, *Op. Cit.*, p.110.

throughout the war were the most obvious targets of post-war popular fury. The Bombay Municipality demanded an enquiry regarding the Bombay disturbances which caused loss of seven lakhs to the Municipality.¹²⁸

The assault on banks and jewelry shops was the other side of the coin. Inflation and dearth for money which became scarce at the popular levels led the insurgents towards banks, jewelry shops and commercial establishments. More complex, however was the utter contempt with which the crowds treated the police. The memory of Subhash Bose day certainly played a role behind this but for more important was the casual element lying in the relationship of the police and working classes during the inter-war and war years. Between 1918 and 1945 the police by its virtue of manifold interference in the everyday life of labour districts stood before the workers as the most exemplary organisation of repression in society.¹²⁹ Like the poverty they were a part of, to the workers, the policeman was an omnipresent stifling experience. He was everywhere at the brothel, the tea shops, near the grain shops, during the strike, during the union meetings, in the court and outside the mill - almost everywhere during peace or struggle, the policemen presented themselves and were resented. Besides the bribes and extortions which kept the police force busy in a lucrative port, its role in suppressing the Quit India upsurge made it odious to the Bombay populace.

The crowd upsurge in Bombay as the pillaging of shops, suggests, had an internal dynamic to it. This comprised the broad social and economic issues of everyday proletarian life.¹³⁰ But these factors rose only after the crowds were sufficiently stimulated to as is said, take matters into their own hands. The stimulus of the popular upsurge came from the political situation created by the RIN revolt. The upsurge had an explicit political aim which vanished with the RIN surrender on February 23. On the same day fighting took place on the barricades indicating that the crowds from the defence of RIN rebels had

¹²⁸. *The Times of India*, 26 February, 1946.

¹²⁹ . For an account of the everyday life tensions of the Bombay working class also see Radhakumar, "City Lives: Workers Housing and Rent in Bombay 1911-47", *EPW*, July 25, 1987.

¹³⁰. Deshpande, *Op. Cit.*, p.111.

passed on to their own defence. The whole action showed that the crowds had assimilated the ideas and slogans of the middle class nationalist leaders. But they gave these ideas a peculiar twist which made them correspond to the class interests of the members of the crowd. Historiographically the study of such crowd and other upsurges, which made up our nationalist mass movement a practical reality, is important for they suggest a synchronous transformation of the meaning of nationalism. Historically the Bombay upsurge combined with the RIN revolt signified to the British end of their power in India. It indicated the erosion of Raj power in a process which had gained considerable grounds since 1942. The uprising was crushed but the passing of the event was not without political implications.

A perusal of crowd actions in Bombay dispels the characterisation of crowds as bodies formed of the sediment of society, guided by the blood longing and other carnal lusts. The zones most active in Bombay were proletarian and resistance offered to the army was organised, indicating the activation of latent day to day organisation of the working classes. The protest was general and the assemblies of people were equally generally transformed into crowds with shared collective mentalities. Thousands participated, yet crimes such as casual home breaking, rape, arbitrary murder etc were absent from crowd actions. It seems the criminal elements who did participate in the upsurge were sub-ordinate to the collective mentality of the crowds. On Friday the crowds were in general, composed of students, CPI and some CSP cadres and almost all bystanders including middleclass and working class people actively participated in the strike. On Saturday as the street battles intensified the working class wards were the most active and seems students had receded to the background. It is probable that in Kamattipura, one of the barricaded areas of prostitutes and vast sections of a sprawling Bombay sub-proletariat played an important role.¹³¹

To such expressions of popular protest, the students too contributed. The Bombay Students Union (BSU) took the lead of the solidarity movements but

¹³¹ . For details of such crowd behaviour, see George Rude, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England 1730-1848*, New York, 1987.

was later joined by the Muslim Students Federation to observe a *hartal* in sympathy with the ratings and against the firing on Castle barracks. They came out with a leaflet giving facts on the naval ratings. The General Secretary of the BSU, Susheela Madimann appealed to the students to play a leading part in building up the agitation in support of the naval rating. The messages to the students ran thus:

To express our firm solidarity with our brothers in the Indian Navy, BSU calls up on all city students to observe complete strike on February 22 and to hold meetings and demonstrations. Let thousands of Bombay students unitedly pledge their full support to naval comrades.¹³²

The BSU appealed to the MSF and the Students Congress to join hands, with us on this common issue and help in making the student's *hartal* and demonstrations a grand success.¹³³ The students of G.S.N. Medical College, Wilson's College and St.Xavier's College marched in processions to collect money in order to buy food for the RIN ratings. They encountered police *lathis* (staff or stick used as a weapon) and fought back with bare fists only to be dispersed after a vicious battle with the police. Such a site was the Ruia College in North Bombay where a procession of 500 students were *lathi* charged.¹³⁴ Strong disapproval of *hartals* by students was expressed by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. He said that the Communist section of the students under the inspiration of the Communist Party was trying to stage a *hartal*. This would naturally result in reviving trouble which has just begun to subside. So he appealed to the students to desist from staging any demonstration which would present the early restoration of normal conditions.¹³⁵ This has to be seen in the context of the nationalist leaders' anxiety to maintain peace and order.

Section 4

¹³². *People's Age*, 22 February, 1946.

¹³³. *Free Press Journal*, 22 February, 1946.

¹³⁴. *The Bombay Chronicle*, 23 February, 1946.

¹³⁵. *People's Age*, 27 February, 1946.

Mutiny in Other Naval Bases

The RIN strike was not confined to Bombay alone. Within a day or two of the strike breaking out in Bombay it had spread to practically every shore establishment and ship of the RIN in India and abroad. This was not just due to the vast sea coast we had, but also due to the national situation and the consequent political propaganda. However, it would be wrong to assume detailed planning and organisation and elements of spontaneity could be discerned in these mutinies.

Karachi

The news of the RIN mutiny at Bombay first reached Karachi on the afternoon of February 19. There were two RIN ships in the harbour – HMIS Hindustan and HMIS Travancore.¹³⁶ There were altogether five shore establishments in Karachi - HMIS Monze (Local naval defence base), HMIS Himalaya (Gunnery school), HMIS Bahadur and Dilawar, (the Boys training schools) and HMIS Chamak (Radar training school). All these establishments were situated in an island called Manora. At far south of Karachi city was the Keemari Jetty. Manora was separated from the city by a small inlet of the Arabian Sea.

In Karachi, months before the uprising occurred, there was a ‘Sailors Organisation’ of ratings mostly from Bengal and Travancore-Cochin.¹³⁷ A number of youths affiliated to the All India Students Federation during their student days, took their lead in forming this association whose main task included raising money for the INA relief fund. Most of the ratings were radar trainees except a few who were radio mechanics.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ . It was given by the Maharaja of Travancore. Soon after the declaration of war, the Maharaja of Travancore built a minesweeper and Trawler-HMIS Travancore costing of 6 ½ lakhs presented to the RIN, *Travancore Administration Report* (Hereafter *TAR*), 1942-43, p.9, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram (Hereafter *KSA*).

¹³⁷ . Anil Roy, ‘Royal Indian Navy and the Navy Mutiny (1946)’ in Nishith Ranjan Ray, et.al., *Op. Cit.*, p.605; He was a participant of the mutiny.

¹³⁸ . *Ibid.*, p.605.

The news of the strike in HMIS Talwar reached the ratings in the shore establishments of Karachi through newspapers and was received with tremendous excitement and astonishment.¹³⁹ However, the geographical location of Manora where these establishments were situated instilled in the authorities some confidence for they did not show any sign of apprehension. According to another version the CO of Chamak, Lt. Commander Chatterjee upon hearing the news from Bombay called a meeting of all the ratings and told them that they had nothing to do with the ‘Talwar strike.’¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless the restive ratings of the Sailors Association called the meeting of the ratings on the beach at Manora in the afternoon. This general body then decided unanimously to launch a mutiny and concluded that action against the British would commence on the 21st Thursday.¹⁴¹ The programme of protest they chalked out was as follows:

Gathering at Keemari jetty, procession and demonstration through Karachi, invitation to dock workers of Keemari to join the protest shouting slogans denouncing the British imperialists and urging the Congress and Muslim League to unite, complete abstention from work and finally the attainment of Karachi wide unity of ratings.¹⁴²

On Wednesday 20th, Indian sailors on Board HMIS Hindustan, an old sloop anchored off Keemari Jetty, rose in revolt.¹⁴³ They struck work due to the insulting behaviour of the Captain and executive officers. A dozen rebels disembarked and entered the city and refused to return till the indicted officers were transferred. Then ratings of HMIS Chamak also joined.¹⁴⁴ A slogan, ‘Not mutiny, but Unity among the Indian sailors’ was inscribed in HMIS Chamak.¹⁴⁵ During the day ratings from HMIS Himalaya also joined. Later on other ships

¹³⁹ . *Ibid.*, p.606.

¹⁴⁰ . NL 9915, *Discharge of Ratings involved in the ratings of Hindustan*, Sl.No.14, RIN Mutiny Papers, p.14.

¹⁴¹ . Anil Roy, *Op. Cit.*, p.607.

¹⁴² . *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ . *CER.*, p.124.

¹⁴⁴ . *The Bombay Chronicle*, 21 February, 1946.

¹⁴⁵ . *The Tribune*, 22 February, 1946; *The Bombay Chronicle*, 21 February, 1946.

too joined.¹⁴⁶ These men together visited hotels in Keemari asking the owners to down shutters amidst raising slogans ‘Jai Hind’ and ‘Inquilab Zindabad.’ Then with cries of ‘Hindustan Azad’ and ‘Jai Hind’, around 150 ratings marched towards the railway station, proclaiming on the way that they were marching upon Delhi. Thus they publicised their inspiration and intention. In the dense and harbour areas they infused excitement among crowds which already possessed perceptions of the ‘INA’ and ‘Delhi Chalo.’ News of the incidents spread rapidly in such circumstances.

The news from Hindustan led to another meeting of the Sailors Association which decided to forge a Karachi-wide unity of ratings and write slogans on the walls and posters. ‘Hindustan Zindabad’, ‘Down with British imperialism’, ‘Shed blood to get freedom’, ‘We shall live as a free nation’ and ‘Tyrants your days are over’ were decided by the meeting as slogans needed for the hour. The next morning the usually calm atmosphere of Manora was rent with slogans shouted by hundreds of young sailors. In batches ratings gathered and demonstrated their spirit. All through the streets the shouting of slogans continued. The small inhabitants of Manora never saw a scene like that before. Anil Roy recollects:

They cheered us by clapping. Some even joined us..... we were now at the Manora Jetty. The most heartening job was done by the local boatmen who not only made a number of trips to ferry the ratings but refused to take any money from us. Their only request was ‘Zalimoko mar Dalo’ (kill the tyrants).¹⁴⁷

When the ratings landed at Keemari, they were faced with the option of breaking through a well-armed enemy cordon composed of British troops. In the meantime incidents swiftly occurred on sea. A batch of ratings crossing to the Keemari from the Himalaya Jetty on Manora in local and motor launches

¹⁴⁶ . Interview, P.M.Karunakara Menon, a participant of the mutiny, at his residence in Manjeri on 12 March, 2013; He was a wireless telegraphist in HMIS Monze and took part in the mutiny. He got two months imprisonment and later dismissed from service ‘with disgrace.’

¹⁴⁷. Anil Roy, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 609-10.

ran into a British patrol boat. The British ordered the ratings to go back and when the order was not heeded, opened fire, killing two ratings.

In these moments the state was well prepared for an emergency. A strong military and police cordon was placed across the bridge connecting Keemari with Karachi and all boats were brought across to the Karachi side of the harbour. Midnight conferences were held between the local naval and army authorities. Finally the plan of assault was made out. Men of the 23 and 159 Regiments of the Royal Artillery were called out. Twenty five Pounder and 75 mm guns were placed in strategic points all round the wharf. Mortars were also brought up. The whole area was cordoned off by British troops. The wharf was completely surrounded. The armoury of the Himalaya was emptied and all arms and ammunitions were carried to an unknown place.¹⁴⁸

The government authorities moved according to the warning received from Bombay where a close contact of the ratings with civilians had already brought about an undesirable state of affairs for them. According to Governor Francis Mudie:

If Bombay had not blown up a day or two earlier we would have been taken completely by surprise and I have no doubt that the ratings would have marched through Karachi and that due allowance being made for the difference in size and turbulence of the two cities, the events in Bombay might have been reflected here.¹⁴⁹

Anyway, since it was impossible to break through the army cordon, hundreds of ratings armed with hockey-sticks demonstrated by shouting revolutionary slogans throughout the afternoon.¹⁵⁰ At this stage they were joined by the dock workers imbued with similar enthusiasm. Meanwhile on the other side of the cordon, an assembly of civilians watched the proceedings keenly. Towards evening the rebels decided to return to their establishments for

¹⁴⁸. Victimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁴⁹ . Home-Political, Poll (I), File No. 5/14/46, Mutiny in the Sindh.

¹⁵⁰ . Anirudh Deshpande, "Sailors and the Crowd, Popular Protest in Karachi, 1946" in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol.XXVI, No, 1, January-March 1989, pp.1-27.

deciding fresh programmes. Finally they fixed a rendezvous with the enthusiastic dock waters, exchanged 'Lal salam' with them, and returned to Manora. That night at Manora, meetings were held, speeches and Urdu couplets were recited. Late in the night the ratings kept up a relay chanting of slogans. Around 11 at night on February 21, ratings from Himalaya brought disturbing news to Chamak, the authorities had issued an ultimatum to the ratings of Hindustan to surrender by 10 a.m next morning. The military police opened fire on the strikers of HMIS Hindustan who retaliated with the naval guns and other weapons at their disposal. Nine persons were injured and one killed.¹⁵¹ The strikers had given an ultimatum that they will open fire on the military if their demands are not considered by 6 p.m.¹⁵²

The military high command had calculated well. They knew that during the ebb tide before the noon, the Hindustan would sink to a lower and strategically disadvantageous position. Therefore they asked 'Hindustan' to surrender by 10 a.m on February 22. In answer the ratings manned the ship's guns.¹⁵³ But they were no match for the well-placed enemy who concentrated a heavy fire upon a single helpless target. Thus after a brief spell of heavy, largely one sided firing the Indians surrendered. During this small battle, which perhaps was a unique event in the history of the naval forces of the Raj, the rebels for the fear of hitting civilians, could not make use of the fire power at their disposal.

In the meantime ratings from Manora were trying to cross over the Keemari. Very few of them managed because the British army had scared away all the boatmen threatening to kill anybody who would come within a mile of Hindustan. Some brave boatmen did appear and ferried a number of ratings to Keemari and at this moment everyone heard the firing between the Hindustan and the British troops. Three or four shells were fired in quick succession.

¹⁵¹ . *The National Herald*, 22 February, 1946.

¹⁵² . *Ibid.*, 23 February, 1946.

¹⁵³ . *The Tribune*, 23 February, 1946.

When the ratings returned to Manora, they found it occupied by British troops of the Black Watch regiment. It was February 22, 1946; the next day Roy, Kurian, Musa and Harjitdar in far away cremation burial grounds performed the last rites of their comrades killed in action. Roy calculated the number of dead as 14 and admitted that he did not know how many of them wounded and died later.¹⁵⁴ Official reports gave varying figures of the dead and wounded. One claimed eight killed and 37 wounded. Another claimed 12 killed and 30 injured. The Governor himself claimed that five ratings were killed 36 wounded.

At Manora on February 23, ratings observed a complete hunger strike in protest against the presence of British troops. Soon thereafter many ratings including the leaders were arrested and transported to the Malir camp situated in Malir Township outside Karachi.¹⁵⁵ On the same day the Bombay rebels also surrendered and so passed into history a memorable event of the Indian struggle against imperialism.

After the mutiny, a Board of Enquiry was appointed. Thirty ratings were tried and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, the maximum term being 90 days.¹⁵⁶ An interesting thing was that one of the ratings sentenced thirty days imprisonment for possessing the portraits of Subhash Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and Captain Lakshmi.¹⁵⁷

Calcutta

In Calcutta the strike lasted for seven days continuing even after the surrender at Bombay. There was only one ship in the port of Calcutta at that time. It was HMIS Hooghly, the shore establishment where the strike first began.¹⁵⁸ It was on the morning of February 19, about 200 ratings first started

¹⁵⁴. Anil Roy, *Op. Cit.*, p.615.

¹⁵⁵. *NL 9933, Mutineers Remanded in Custody at Malir*, Sl.No.29, RIN Mutiny Papers.

¹⁵⁶ . For details of the Court of Enquiry, See *NL 9914, Discharge of Ratings involved in the Mutiny in HMIS Hindustan*, Sl. No.13; *NL9915, Discharge of Ratings involved in the Mutiny in HMIS Travancore*, Sl.No.15; *NL9916, Discharge of Ratings involved in the Mutiny in HMIS Bahadur*, Sl.No.15, RIN Mutiny Papers etc.

¹⁵⁷ . *The National Herald*, 3 May, 1946.

¹⁵⁸ . *CER.*, p.160; *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, 20 February, 1946.

the strike at Calcutta.¹⁵⁹ Immediately they decided to come out too. After the hurried activities in the morning, discussions arguments and decisions were made. A Strike Committee was promptly elected and contact established with the ships in the port. They demanded the release of the ratings arrested in Bombay, non-victimisation of strikers, equal travelling facilities with RN ratings and speedy demobilisation.¹⁶⁰

The next day passed in getting all the ratings together. Even the WRINS took part in the strike. Those women did a wonderful job by going around persuading people to join the strike and maintain solidarity.¹⁶¹ Indeed they played a most heroic role during those days.

On 22nd Friday morning a mass meeting of more than 500 ratings was held. This was to protest against the threatening statement issued by the FOCRIN in the previous day. Speaker after speaker rose to give expression to their condemnation of this senseless threat and demanded its withdrawal as a pre-condition to surrender talks.

As in Bombay feelings ran high and the ratings instinctively felt that they were fighting for not only for their own demands but also giving expression to their urge for the freedom of their country. One rating said to a press man:

The pent up discontent of the ratings against the British atrocities that are being perpetrated all over India, had found expression at last in these strikes at Bombay, Karachi, Calcutta, Madras, and elsewhere. Our fight is not merely a fight for bread. It is a fight for freedom.¹⁶²

The news of the surrender at Bombay and Karachi reached Calcutta on the evening of the 23rd Saturday. It was communicated to the strikers but they were determined to continue their own strike. On February 24, 10 a.m, the

¹⁵⁹ . *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, 21 February, 1946.

¹⁶⁰ . *The National Herald*, 21 February, 1946.

¹⁶¹ . *Victimised Ratings, Op. Cit.*, p.92.

¹⁶² Cited in *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, 23 February, 1946.

ratings assembled again. After a few speeches expressing their determination to continue the struggle till their demands were fulfilled, they passed the following resolution;

- a. We shall continue our strike till the fulfillment of our demands.
- b. The FOCRIN and the so called senior officers of the British government have threatened to destroy the Indian navy. May we ask them to whom does the navy belong? This is the Indian navy. It is a national force. The present government has no right to pass a sentence on it. When a national government is established the navy will become its responsibility. It must be clearly understood that we surrendered our lives to the hands of the government when we joined the services for the defence of our country. To live on the same level as other races is our birthright. We are prepared to sacrifice our lives for the realization of this right.
- c. We wish to remind the GOI again that these threats will only spread the discontent throughout the armed forces.
- d. We express our deepest regard towards the civilians who gave their lives at Bombay and thank the people for their support.
- e. We appeal to our colleagues and the people to continue the struggle.¹⁶³

A deputation of ratings met Muhammed Ali Jinnah in the afternoon and apprised him of their grievances. He advised them to call off the strike and assuring them that he would take up the matter with the authorities concerned with a view to bringing on a peaceful and honourable settlement.¹⁶⁴ On February 25, armed soldiers surrounded the camp near Behala. The whole area was bristling with military. Hundreds of soldiers with fixed bayonets were all round the camp. Lorried infantry constantly patrolled the area with their rifles and machine guns at ready. The ratings were virtually imprisoned in the camp. For another day the situation remained unchanged. This stage of siege

¹⁶³. *The Indian Express*, 23 February, 1946; *Victimised Ratings, Op. Cit.*, pp.93-94.

¹⁶⁴. *The Dawn*, New Delhi, 25 February, 1946, Extracts from Newspapers, NAI.

continued. Finally isolated from each other vastly outnumbered and unarmed, the ratings could not continue the struggle any longer and late on the February 26, they surrendered.¹⁶⁵ Later the ratings were arrested and court martialled.¹⁶⁶

Jamnagar

The naval strike spread even to establishments in the states. HMIS Valsura is a shore establishment at Jamnagar in Kathiawar. It was the torpedo training school of the RIN. There were some 326 ratings there, quite a number of whom were educated and had some amount of technical training.¹⁶⁷

The news of the strike at Bombay came through newspapers on February 19. The immediate reactions were that something should be done. But, when they got down to discuss the details, great difficulties arose. A large number of ratings were politically conscious and had definite party leanings.¹⁶⁸ For two days interminable discussions continued.

Finally on the afternoon of February 21, a deputation of the ratings appealed to the CO to send a message to the Talwar expressing the sympathy of the ratings of the Valsura with their struggle. The CO refused. Shortly after that evening they heard Godfrey's threatening broadcast over the wireless. The tone of the speech and the threat of the destruction of the navy angered the ratings. What annoyed them most however, was the direct reference to HMIS Valsura as having remained loyal. The ratings immediately decided to go on strike. Next morning they refused to go to work but remained peacefully in the barracks. They however, pulled down the white ensign and hoisted the Congress, League and Red flags.

The authorities posted military and police guards round the white camp, preventing the ratings from going out or coming in. It provoked the men into further action, and on the February 23, they declared a hunger strike. They had been continually demanding of the CO that he should broadcast their message

¹⁶⁵. *Ibid.*, 27 February, 1946.

¹⁶⁶. See NL 9903, *Board of Enquiry in HMIS Hooghly*, Sl.No.3, RIN Mutiny Papers.

¹⁶⁷. *Victimised Ratings, Op. Cit.*, p.95.

¹⁶⁸. *Ibid.*

of sympathy to all ships and establishments.¹⁶⁹ With the hunger strike the situation became serious and the CO agreed to the demands of the ratings. Soon, came the news of the intervention of Sardar Patel. The ratings were enraged. In a moment, all political differences were forgotten. The joint struggle for the last two days had dispelled mutual suspensions and brought them together. Unanimously they declared formally to withdraw their allegiance to the Congress and the League who had not come out to support their struggle. The Congress and League flags were pulled down and only the Red flag was kept flying. After all they said, the Communist party is the only political organisation which has stood by us from the beginning.¹⁷⁰ Three hours later came the news of the surrender.

Victimisation followed and seven men were arrested as ring leaders. The ratings were tortured to get them to mention the names of their leaders. They maintained that they were all leaders. Finally the authorities had to choose some themselves. They knew that unless they got the help of the ratings they could not make out a case against many people. So they picked up three as the leaders of the strike and sent them up for court martial.¹⁷¹

New Delhi

HMIS India, at New Delhi was a very small establishment, containing mainly signal and other ratings connected with the Naval Head Quarter (NHQ). On February 20, the ratings struck work and peacefully demonstrated their solidarity with their brothers all over India.¹⁷²

Overseas

Indian ratings overseas also responded spontaneously to the call of their brothers at home. At Aden, on February 20, forty eight ratings left the station and went on a hunger strike in sympathy with their fellow ratings at Bombay.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹. CER., p.118.

¹⁷⁰. Victimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*, p.96.

¹⁷¹. NL 9901, *Board of Enquiry in HMIS Valsura*, Sl.No.1, RIN Mutiny Papers.

¹⁷². CER., p. 106; Victimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*, p 97.

¹⁷³. CER., p.113; Victimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*, p.97.

It was a silent and disciplined protest. Later they were court martialled and punished.¹⁷⁴

In the Andamans, seven ships of the 37 Minesweeping Flottilla were affected - Rohilkhand, Deccan, Bengal, Carnatic, Bihar, Kistna and Baluchistan.¹⁷⁵ On February 21, news of Bombay firing was received through radio. It considerably disturbed the ratings. At that time conference of officers had held at HMIS Rohilkhand. On 22nd Friday, the ratings ceased duty and started a demonstration to sympathise the ratings of Bombay. Later they also faced court martial and other punishments.¹⁷⁶

At Bahrain, on February 22, the ratings started a peaceful strike by refusing their normal duty to show their sympathy to the RIN Mutineers in India.¹⁷⁷

The total number of ships affected all over India and abroad was 78 and the number of shore establishments was 20. Indeed for two days, the strike was practically complete affecting over 20,000 ratings and a number of Indian officers as well.

Soon the Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) men went on sympathetic strikes in the Marine Drive, Andheri and Sion areas of Bombay and in Poona, Calcutta, Jessore and Ambala units. Within a week of the RIN mutiny, more than 300 military sepoy's stationed at Jabalpure struck work and paraded through out the streets with all the three flags-Congress, League and Red - prominently displayed. On March 8, the workers and citizens of Delhi observed a protest strike and *hartal* against the Victory celebrations. On March 18, the Gurkha Regiments of Dehradun revolted in protest against insulting remarks by officers. Delhi policeman went on hunger strike for wage increase and the military was used to arrest them. Policemen of Allahabad went on hunger strike in protest against ration cut on March 19. On April 3, ten thousand Bihar

¹⁷⁴. NL 9902, Board of Enquiry in Aden, Sl.No.2, RIN Mutiny Papers.

¹⁷⁵. CER., p.116.

¹⁷⁶. Home-Political, Poll (I), File No. 5/18/1946, RIN Mutiny at Port Blair.

¹⁷⁷. Home-Political, Poll (I), File No. 5/16/1946, RIN Mutiny at Baharain.

policemen went on strike.¹⁷⁸ In Malabar, Malabar Special Police (MSP) struck work. This strike wave of armed forces and police produced repercussions among the working classes.

These show that resentment among armed forces was quite widespread. That they were fearless in expressing their resentment should be seen in the context. In addition In July the postal employees went on strike. At that time the railway employees also threatened to go on strike.

The naval uprising was unique in nature and character in so much as it was totally non-violent. The NCSC was very keen on following the footsteps of Gandhiji. They went on a hunger strike and also boycotted their duties. They even went to the extent of formulating a monitoring body-‘Peace Patrol Corps’- to ensure peace was kept at all costs.

The February revolt revealed two things. Firstly it demonstrated the willingness and ability of the armed forces to conduct a struggle against imperialism. Secondly it broke down the barrier between the armed forces and the other exploited sections of the society. It was a struggle in which the workers, students and lower middle class people joined together and fought together against imperialism.

The February uprising started as an inoffensive strike on the Talwar on February 18, Monday, ultimately ended with an unprecedented bloodbath in the streets of Bombay by February 23, Saturday. The mutiny had three phases. In the first phase, the ratings of HMIS Talwar started the strike. Within days ratings of other establishments participated. The second stage of these upsurges, people of Bombay joined, was marked by a virulent anti-British mood and resulted in the virtual paralysis of the city. From 21st onwards it was transformed into a popular uprising of great intensity. It spread to other naval establishments in India. The third phase was characterized by a display of solidarity by people in other parts of the country. Students and workers declared their whole-hearted support. Students boycotted their classes, *hartals* and processions were organised to express sympathy with the ratings and

¹⁷⁸. *The Bombay Chronicle*, 4 April, 1946.

condemn repression. Thus the naval uprising assumed the character of popular protest which became its legacy. The RIN revolt was the final battle Hindus and Muslims fought together, against the British.

The post-mutiny period witnessed strike waves in all parts of country. Jawaharlal Nehru well expressed the mood of the country, “The whole country is in the throes of a serious discontent and in a mood of revolt. We are sitting on the edge of volcano which may erupt at any moment. A spark may set it ablaze.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ . Sarveppalli Gopal (ed.), *Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. XV, New Delhi, 1982, p.21.

Chapter 4

ROYAL INDIAN NAVY MUTINY IN SOUTH INDIA

The history of all revolutions shows that a revolution is not an event. It is a phase, a social process.¹

Jayaprakash Narayan, being a radical nationalist, saw that the 'event' was marked by continuities and made this comment. This chapter focuses on the Royal Indian Navy mutiny in South India and surveys its impact. A regional focus as the one attempted, it is hoped, will help the relative veracity of all India models. It deals with the significant aspects of the RIN Mutiny in South India mainly in the important ports - Madras, Vishakhapatnam and Cochin. Apart from these, the impact of the mutiny in the district of Malabar is also taken up to bring out the political dimension of the mutiny. Such micro-level studies are imperative for comprehensive accounts of the mutiny at the national level. Without such micro-level studies the debate on the overall significance of the mutiny becomes too vague.

Section 1

Madras

How the Second World War (1939-45) impacted the working class in Madras can first be taken up. They are economic and political in nature which prevailed for a short period and helped shape the popular mentality. We will also analyse here the RIN mutiny in the Madras port, how it affected the public in general and led to changes in the political scenario. The study also deals with the 'hooliganism' which followed the mutiny as covered by the media.

Madras was an important port city of South India. The English having a valuable trade on the Coromondal coast were desirous of obtaining a territory which they could fortify. After several ineffectual attempts to obtain such lands from the Mughals, they at length succeeded in buying a piece from a Hindu

¹. Jayaprakash Narayan, *Towards Struggle*, Bombay, 1946, p.20.

prince in the South in 1639.² Here Francis Day built embrasure factory and christened it fort St.George.³ In 1653 Madras was raised to the rank of a Presidency.⁴ Madras by virtue of its sea board was essentially the maritime presidency of British India and it was the capital city of the Madras presidency under the British rule. It was also the seat of the government of Fort St. George and the principal emporium of trade.⁵ Madras acquired no special importance till the eighteenth century. Its growth was in tune with the growth of British power elsewhere. There was a lot of expansion in communication systems, education, institutions etc. The city began to shape as an urban center with population census taken for the first time in 1871 which was assessed to be 3.97 lakhs. Over the years, the demographic profile of the city changed. In 1881, the population was 4, 05,845 which increased to 8, 81,455 in 1941. This increase must have also been due to migration of people from rural areas in search of better prospects.⁶ By the twentieth century, Madras had become a metropolis, the capital city of a large presidency and an important port - both from the commercial and military point of view.

Any war is a war in the field of economy. Any invasion is an invasion in the field of economy and any colonisation is colonisation in the field of economy. This economy is adversely affected in situations where other mobilisations precede. The Second World War was instrumental in the formation of a specific collective consciousness both in the RIN as well as among the Madras working classes. The most obvious economic impact of war on Madras city was a steep rise in prices of commodities. The price of paddy and rice continued to advance, the rise being more marked in the case of paddy. Following the war there was scarcity of food grains and rapid rise in the prices

² . William Wilson Hunter, *History of India*, Vol.VII, New Delhi, 1987, p.20.

³ . *Ibid.*

⁴ . K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, "Historical Notes on the City of Madras", *Madras Corporation Chronicle*, Vol.1, No.1, Madras, 1957, pp.67-69 ; Madras comprised of maritime districts of Ganjam, Vishakhapatnam, Godavari, Kistna, Nellore, Chingleput, Madras, South Arcot, Tanjore, Madura, Tinneveli, Malabar and South Canara with 148 ports.

⁵ . T.E.Marshall, *A Handbook of Directions to the Ports in the Presidency of Madras and Ceylon*, Madras, 1883, p.24.

⁶ . See Appendix B, Table 1, for demographic details of Madras city.

of foodstuffs and other essential commodities. The sea borne trade with United Kingdom and the neutral countries in Coir products came to a standstill.⁷

The five principal products were rice, wheat, oil seeds, sugar cane and cotton. Rice accounts for 277.66 crores or 51.72% of the total value of the agricultural products of India. While wheat accounts for only 47.47 crores or 9%, oil seeds for 40.94 crores or 8%, sugar cane for 37.33 crores or 7% and cotton for 22.23 crores or 4% of the total value. Cultivation of paddy did not receive the protection it deserved from GOI. On the other hand wheat and sugarcane received protection. Wheat was produced largely in Punjab; sugar cane was mostly in the United Province and Bihar. So far as paddy was concerned Bengal and Madras were the only provinces which grew. The area under paddy cultivation in 1937-38 was 72,277,000 acres, of which, in Madras, 9,943,000 acres and in Burma 1,270,000 acres.⁸ The average of the areas under paddy in the Madras province during the five years ending 1937-38 has represented 13.4% of the total area under paddy in India. The area sown with paddy up to the September 25, 1939 was estimated at 54,69,000 acres. When compared with the area of 63,77,000 acres estimated for the corresponding period of last year. It revealed a decrease of 14.2%.⁹

The output of rice was 2,67,37,000 tons in India, 4,057,250 tons in Madras, 1,470,000 in Burma while the population was 365 million, 48 million and 16 million respectively. In the year 1938-39, India imported 1,281,697 tons of rice from outside of which Madras took 468, 743 tons. The rice food requirement for Madras may be taken as 5,000,000 tons.¹⁰

In the years before the war, there were normally five million tons of rice and three and half million tons of millets available for consumption. Eight and half tons in all - of which about three quarters of a million tons or 7,50,000 tons, 4,00,000 tons of rice and 3,50,000 tons of other cereals including wheat

⁷ . *Travancore Administration Report* (Hereafter *TAR*), 1930-40, p.117, KSA.

⁸ . *Malabar District Gazette* (Hereafter *MDG*), 1939, 320, RAK.

⁹ . *MDG*, 1939.

¹⁰ . *Madras Legislative Council Debate*, Official Report, (Hereafter *MLCD*), Vol. IX, No.3, August 1939, Madras, p.142, RAK.

was accounted for by imports.¹¹ The first two years of the war did not affect the food position in this province materially. But as soon as Japan came into the war in December 1941, imports rapidly dwindled and soon stopped altogether. Further early in 1942 rice was exported to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and some of neighbouring countries so that in 1942-43, this province had become a net exporter of rice to the extent of over 20,000 tons instead of a net importer to the extent of 4,00,000 tons. This export was rendered possible owing to an unusually good harvest in 1940-41.

In the year 1943, the food situation became critical all over the country, the GOI appointed a Food Grains Policy Committee to arrange for an equitable distribution of food among the provinces.¹² Under this scheme, 2,75,840 tons of millets and wheat allotted to Madras. But Madras did not get any rice under this scheme except in 1944-45, when she was allotted 48,741 tons of rice. In 1942, rice export from Madras was completely banned, except under special permits. From 1943, inter-district movement of rice within the presidency was also stopped. Grain merchants in the presidency were all licensed by the government in 1943.¹³ In the same year, following the instructions of the Food Grains Policy Committee, the Madras government launched a 'Grow More Food Campaign' in the presidency.¹⁴ This campaign was intended to achieve a substantial increase in food production through a multi-dimensional effort, such as increasing the area of farming, re-converting the lands under commercial crops into grain farms, intensive cultivation, new irrigation projects and improved varieties of seeds, double crop cultivation, grant of loans to ryots for purchase of seeds and manure etc.¹⁵ None of these measures, however, proved successful in meeting the food crisis.

By 1944 the food situation became acute and rationing was informally introduced, providing a pound of rice per adult in the towns and a quota of six

¹¹ . Home-Political, Internal, Poll (I) FR of Madras for the Second Half of April 1944, File No.18/4 /44, NAI.

¹² . *Civil Supplies Department Files* (Hereafter *CSD*), 1943, Bundle No.8, Sl. No.4, RAK.

¹³ . *CSD*, 1943, Bundle No.8, Sl. No.5.

¹⁴ . *Ibid.*

¹⁵ . *Madras Administration Report* (Hereafter *MAR*), 1941, 314, RAK.

ounces (a measure) per adult in the countryside.¹⁶ The quota for the towns was gradually reduced and rest diverted to the villages. Statutory rationing was introduced in the Madras city in the first week of November 1943 and was extended to other urban areas of the province by the end of June 1944. District-wide rationing was finally introduced in October 1944. But these measures immediately proved inefficient and corrupt. The outbreak of Plague in Coimbatore and Malabar districts added to the misery. In Vishakhapatnam, the epidemic of smallpox spread.

Ration cut became very common during the war period. Most of the News papers reported the worst food position in the province. They called for the greatest economy of consumption by all and it necessitated stern measures of rationing and enforcement which the government proposed to take. C.H.Masterman, advisor to the Governor in charge of the food department also admitted that the food position was bad.¹⁷

The years of the war were years of hard toil for workers and other toiling masses. The gravest problem was the problem of high cost of living and scarcity of food grains. The cost of living index for Madras rose from 104 to 105 on account of the increased cost of firewood. It remained at 105 for some little time as has now gone up to 106 mainly on account of a rise in the price of rice and paddy.¹⁸ In 1944 it rose from 190 to 193.¹⁹

Textile production had got a new face of military uniform and manufacturing of ordinary textile for the community was disturbed. There was a general scarcity of mill cloths in the province owing to shortage of stocks in Sholapur. In October 1945, the GOI introduced quota system for the supply of mill cloth in the urban areas in the presidency. Under this system, the people in the urban areas were allowed to buy mill cloth from the government authorized

¹⁶ . *MLCD*, Vol. X, No.3, 1946, 1946, p.61.

¹⁷ . Cited in *The Hindu*, Madras, 20 February 1944.

¹⁸ . Home-Political, Internal, Poll (I), FR of Madras for the First Half of April 1940, File No. 18/4/40.

¹⁹ . Home-Political, Internal, Poll (I) , FR of Madras for the Second Half of January 1944, File No. 18/1/44.

stores, at the rate of ten yards per person per year.²⁰ Large number of licenses was provided to private individuals as wholesale and retail shops in the textile. They were given security in the form of savings bonds. It may be to collect more funds for the war purposes. It increased hoarding and black marketing. There were many complaints about these malpractices. In quite a number of cases, the Textile Control Officer had taken action against some of the shop keepers.²¹ In rationing, cloth was distributed. But it was very rough and unavailable to common people. Many auto-biographical works of that period dealt with the endless formation of lines in front of ration shops for grains and clothing materials.²²

On the other side, government's drive for funds continued with great vigour all over the presidency. On January 1941, the Governor reported happily that the presidency's contribution to the war fund had reached a magnificent total of rupees seventy lakh.²³ Eight months later the Viceroy himself came down to Madras to intensify the war fund campaign. Addressing a meeting of the Madras Provincial War Fund Committee at Madras on July 30, 1941 the Viceroy said that the Madras presidency had subscribed Rs.2,81,00,000 (two crores and eighty one lakhs) to the defence loans out of the total target of Rs.69 crores for the whole country.²⁴ Madras led other provinces in voluntary contributions, he said, and added that in the actual production of war supplies also, Madras played a substantial part. As for the recruitment of soldiers, he said that the number of soldiers who were recruited in the first nine months of the war was ten times more than the normal annual recruitment in the presidency.²⁵ One of the devices of war fund committee to increase the rate of recruitment was to offer a commission of Rs.2 to those who brought a successful recruit to the army recruiting centre. The skilled workers were

²⁰ . *MAR*, 1944 ; Madras Legislative Assembly Debates (Hereafter *MLAD*), Vol. 10, No.1-6, May 1946, p.61, RAK.

²¹ . *CSD*, 1944, Bundle No.9, Sl. No.4.

²² . P.K.R.Varier, *Oru Surgeonte Ormmakkuripukal*, Kottayam, 2010, p.77.

²³ . *The Hindu*, 2 January 1941.

²⁴ . *The Hindu*, 2 August 1941.

²⁵ . *MAR*, 1941.

bound by an order of the government to serve in the war industries. They tried to tap all the colonial resources for the victory of the war. These measures increased the economic distress of the people.

The end of the war however brought no relief. In February 1946 Wavell admitted that famine like conditions prevailed all over India in the years 1945-1946 and by February 1946 the GOI resorted to new ration cuts.²⁶ The scale of ration in 1943 was one pound; it was reduced to 12 *ounces* on February 17, 1946.²⁷

Unrest among the working class was prevalent and it has been accentuated by the sharp rise in prices of foodstuffs. Working class of India had to wage struggles for protecting its existing standard of living. So they embarked on a series of strikes in Bombay, Kanpur, Calcutta, Bangalore, Jamshedpur, Dhanbad, Jharia, Nagpur and Madras i.e. in all parts of India.²⁸ Throughout the war the working classes of India, particularly in Madras, fought a daily struggle against inflation. The Fortnightly reports from 1939 to 1945 mention a continuous stream of working class agitation in Madras on the issues of inflation, dearness allowances, bonus and wage increase.²⁹ The reports gave an extensive account of various strikes; workers in all spheres struck work. This included tailors, coolies and porters. Workers of Kaleswara weaving mills at Coimbatore, tailors working in the Ambure branch of the associated agencies (military contractors), workers of Buckingham & Carnatic Mills, tannery workers of Vaniambadi, workers of Brunton & Company, workers of Madras Glass factory, workers of Hindustan Dehydrated meat factory, workers of Parry and companies dehydration factory at Mettupalayam, coolies in the Madras harbour, workers of Public work shop in the Madras city, cashewnut factory workers of Quilon and suburbs and the Harrison & Crisfield limited, Quilon struck work.³⁰

²⁶ . Penderel Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, New Delhi, 1973, p.150.

²⁷ . *MAR*, 1946.

²⁸ . For details, see Appendix B, Table 2, Working Class Struggles during the Second World War.

²⁹ . Public (General), FR of Madras, File No.18/10/1939 to 18/2/1946, NAI.

³⁰ . *Ibid.*

There was simmering discontent among labour and agitation for increased wages and dearness allowance continued.³¹ Tormented with poverty and penury, the working class was receptive to any ideology that could provide those means to get away from these acute economic distresses. Thus the spirit of socialism and revolution inculcated by the leftist leaders had a wide appeal among the workers.³²

In 1942 Madras city as well as the province remained one of the storm centers of the Quit India Movement. It experienced an unprecedented popular upsurge during 1942.³³ Altogether 26,000 Congressmen were behind bars by the first week of November 1942. A spontaneous mass movement paralysed the city. As Nehru wrote later: “For the first time since the great revolt of 1857, vast numbers rose to challenge the fabric of the British rule in India.”³⁴ Popular resentment broke out. In the Madras city, *hartals* and strikes took place frequently. Hundreds of students and workers observed hartal. North Arcot, Chingleput, Ramanathapuram, Rajapalayam, Karaikudi etc were the other centers of protest.³⁵ The Madras government initiated strategies to suppress the movement. Issuing a special notification in its Fort St. George Gazette Extraordinary on August 11, it informed the public that all those who extended their support to the Congress Party’s campaigns were liable to be prosecuted. Under the Defence of India Rules, it placed a ban on all public meetings and processions in the presidency.³⁶

The immediate political issue which spurred mass nationalism in India, after the Second World War was the Indian National Army (INA) trials. Most of the released INA personnel first arrived in Madras city. Demonstrations in

³¹ . Sunil Kumar Sen, *Working Class Movements in India*, Bombay, 1994, p.70.

³² . Travancore Police Secret Bulletin, 15 September, 1943, KSA.

³³ . Home-Political, Internal, Poll(I)FR of Madras,1942-43, File No.18/1/42 to18/12/43; M.Gopalakrishnan (ed.),*Gazetters of India*; Tamil Nadu State, Kanchipuram and Tiruvallur Districts (Erstwhile Chingleput District), Vol.I, Govt. of Tamilnadu, 2000, p.147.

³⁴ . Jawaharlal Nehru, *Towards Freedom*, New York, 1941, p.389.

³⁵ . B.S.Baliga, *Studies in Madras Administration*, Govt. of Madras, 1960, p.20-23.

³⁶ . Cited in S.Krishnaswamy, *The Role of Madras Legislature in the Freedom Struggle*, ICHR, New Delhi,1989, p.327.

support of the INA were generally banned and the Commissioner of Police issued orders of prohibition under section 41 of the City Police Act in respect of meetings and processions in support of the INA.³⁷ On November 24, the released men were given sent off at the Egmore railway station by the Madras Nationalist Youth Federation. INA slogans were raised and the police arrested six persons.³⁸ On December 7, 1945, the 30 released INA men marched in the city and attended a meeting held by the Congress.³⁹ They wore khaki military uniform without unit letters or badges but had small tri-coloured Congress flags pinned to their right arms. Some of them had round badges on their breasts with the letters of 'INA' written in green on a white background.

Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) organised INA Relief committee. They held many meetings and demonstrations against INA trial. A mammoth meeting was held in the city at which Asaf Ali delivered a speech.⁴⁰ The Madras Second Circle Congress Committee passed a resolution urging the government to drop the INA trials and to release the INA prisoners.⁴¹ The Secretaries of the Madras Town Congress Committee had appealed to the public not to assemble in numbers in the streets and to remain calm and thus preserve law and order in the city.

Madura played an important role against INA trial. A complete *hartal* was observed on November 6 to protest against the trial of INA personnel.⁴² All shops and hotels were closed. Student participation in the struggle was very remarkable. Since morning students of all Municipal elementary schools and high schools in the town came out of their classes. Gradually people also joined with the demonstrations. The crowds became restive and violent. A beat point on Ramnad road was set on fire and telephone and telegraph wires were cut by the mob. The personal assistant to Inspector of Law and Order was injured in

³⁷ . Public (General), 12 November, 1945, G.O.No. 2932/45-1, TSA.

³⁸ . Public (General), 24 November, 1945, G.O.No. 2932/45-1.

³⁹ . Under Secretary's Safe Files (Hereafter USSF), 6 February, 1946, File No.3A, TSA.

⁴⁰ . Public (General), 22 December, 1945, G.O.No. S.3121 A-1/45.

⁴¹ . Public (General), 8 December, 1945, G.O.No. 2932/45-1.

⁴² . *The Indian Express*, Madras, 7 November, 1945.

stone throwing. The police opened fired in fifteen rounds. In the police firing, three persons died and one was injured.⁴³ Later crowd gathered in front of Meenakshi and Mahalakshmi mills and asked the workers to suspend work and come out of the mills. To avoid the troubles both the mills were closed later. The official version was that a mob of 4000 resorted to violence, pulled down and set fire to the traffic umbrella, ARP tanks, destroyed municipal electric lamps, cut telephone wires and pelted stones at police parties. The mob became more and more violent. As the situation became critical police opened fire and as a result of which two were killed and three others injured. Orders under section 144, Criminal procedure code were promulgated and a curfew order was enforced and the Town Sub-Magistrate prohibited the assembly of persons, meetings and processions in the town.⁴⁴ The crowd was reported to have indulged in pelting stones against the police. Some police men and officers sustained injuries.

It was total hartal in the Madras Presidency. Almost all shops in the towns remained closed. In Travancore the Communists and labourers celebrated Subash Chandra Bose Day on January 23.⁴⁵ The labourers of Quilon and Alapppy also observed *hartal* for a day.

The protests against INA trials, post-war inflation, deteriorating economic conditions and the ration cuts together provided the background for the RIN revolt. There were no ships in the port and the whole naval base that day in Madras. The news of the strike on HMIS Talwar in Bombay reached the ratings in the HMIS Adayar of Madras through local newspapers on February 19, Tuesday and was received with great enthusiasm and delight.⁴⁶ The strike at HMIS Adayar, in sympathy, lasted just for a day and affected the functioning of the Shore establishment.

⁴³ . *The Hindu*, 7 November, 1945.

⁴⁴ . Public (General), 23 March, 1946, G.O.No.246/46; *Report on the Administration of the Police of the Madras province* (Hereafter *RAPM*) 1945, TSA.

⁴⁵ . Extracts from provincial FR of Madras for the Second Half of January 1946, TSA.

⁴⁶ . Home-Political, Internal, Poll (I), FR of Madras for the Second Half of February 1946, File No. 18/2/1946.

The strike was discussed by the Commanding Officer (CO) and his staff very casually and they were of the opinion that there would be no trouble in Adayar.⁴⁷ The follow-up story in newspapers on February 20 was also treated very lightly by the officials. However, instructions went out to keep the eyes and ears open.⁴⁸

Upon hearing the news of the impending strike, Sub. Lt. G.B.Singh found out that the ratings were very unhappy and had several grievances including the poor quality of the food.⁴⁹ The ratings, however, were not satisfied with the assurance that their grievances will be submitted to the higher authorities. On February 21, the restive ratings of No.2 (Seamen) & No.3 (Communication & Miscellaneous) barracks assembled in the mess hall under the leadership of Anjaneyalu, a leading telegraphist. They hoisted the Congress tri-colour in the barracks.⁵⁰ The ratings numbering 140 belonging to the shore establishment struck work on February 21, staged a demonstration before the naval office and took out a procession through the streets of Madras.⁵¹ The procession shouting slogans of 'Jai Hind', 'Bombay Strike' and 'Release INA men' was to express solidarity with the ratings of Bombay and Karachi.⁵²

The strikers passed through China Bazar, Central Station and reached the GEC building on Mount Road where Lt. K.Payne, the Port Signal Communication Officer stopped them and advised them to return to the barracks.⁵³ He then ordered the communication ratings to fall in separately.⁵⁴ This order was not obeyed and Payne was struck across the face with a belt by

⁴⁷ . NL 9905, *Report of the Board of Enquiry into the Mutiny in HMIS Adayar* (Hereafter NL 9905), Sl. No.5, RIN Mutiny Papers.

⁴⁸ . NL 9905.

⁴⁹ . *Andhrapatrika*, Hyderabad, 22 February, 1946.

⁵⁰ . T.P.Gopalakrishnan Nair, *Indiayku Swathathathryam Netiya 1946-2-15 Muthal 23 vare Natanna RIN Lahala* (Mal.), Mangalathukonam, ND, p.32.

⁵¹ . A Group of Victimized Ratings, *The RIN Strike*, PPH, New Delhi (1954), 1981, p. 94; *The Indian Express*, 22 February, 1946.

⁵² . *The Statesman*, New Delhi, 23 February, 1946; B .C Dutt, *Mutiny of the innocents*, Bombay, 1971, p. 97.

⁵³ . *The Deccan Chronicle*, Hyderabad, 23 February, 1946, Afsal Ganj Public Library, Hyderabad.

⁵⁴ . NL 9905; *The Deccan Chronicle*, 23 February 1946.

M S Mani, signalman. Later he was arrested and imprisoned.⁵⁵ The Board of Enquiry into the mutiny in HMIS Adayar highly commended the courageous action of Payne in that he voluntarily made a bold attempt and succeeded in bringing the ratings back to the barracks.⁵⁶

Later the ratings marched back to the barracks. All the ratings returned to duty at 11p.m. Later an unsigned petition was delivered to the CO, Adayar. This petition was a replica of the grievances submitted by the Bombay ratings which was reported in the newspapers. A Board of Enquiry was convened on March 1, 1946 with Commander HMS Chaudhari as President and Lt. Comdr. L.B.Brockmanmax, and Lt. M.A.Alavi as members.⁵⁷

The Board came to the conclusion that service grievances, political awareness, the widening gap between officers and men, unresolved grievances and lack of confidence in higher authorities were the main reasons for the revolt. However, the reason for the present revolt was sympathy and support to the Bombay ratings and the influence of the media.⁵⁸

On February 24, 150 airmen of the RIAF (Royal Indian Air Force) stationed at the Transit camp near Red Hills Lake in Madras went on strike in sympathy with the RIN ratings. The strikers peacefully stayed off from parade and assembled in the recreation room. Later they met Wing Commander Hardings and submitted a memorandum of grievances. They demanded reduced hours of work and equal treatment with the RAF (Royal Air Force) and pleaded for better travelling facilities.⁵⁹

The civilians of Madras became involved in the RIN demonstrations. The reports in the newspapers from February 19 onwards were avidly read by the civilians in Madras. On 21st, they watched the Madras ratings driving trucks, shouting slogans, marching around the city and chasing all Europeans

⁵⁵ . *The National Herald*, Lucknow, 23 February, 1946.

⁵⁶ . *NL 9938, Board of Enquiry into the Mutiny in HMIS Adayar* (Hereafter *NL 9938*), Sl. No.34, RIN Mutiny Papers, pp.1-5.

⁵⁷ . *NL 9905*.

⁵⁸ . *NL 9905*, p.14.

⁵⁹ . *The Hindu*, 25 February, 1946.

out of sight. The stimulation of popular involvement began on that day and general tension mounted in the city.

Initially the popular protest was spontaneous. But on 24th Sunday, students and workers stepped in and it gained a wider legitimacy and a semblance of organisation. Communist Party conducted a procession from Memorial Hall to Napier Park which was led by P.Balachandra Menon, T.R.Ganesan and T.Sundaram. In the evening, the CPI and Madras Trade Union Congress held meeting at the Napier Park which was attended by about one thousand people. The leaders explained the significance of the strike of the RIN men and the subsequent events. They also demanded that there should be no victimization of the men of the RIN and that all British troops should be withdrawn from Bombay. Finally the gathering dissolved with a resolution calling a complete *hartal* in the next day. Leaflets were circulated with the signatures of T.R.Ganesan, Secretary of the Madras branch of CPI and others calling upon the public to observe *hartal* to express sympathy with the demands of the RIN personnel and against the repressive policy of the government.⁶⁰ At this stage the local CPI leadership was taking a radical step and their speeches were violent.

On February 25, Madras observed *hartal* in sympathy with RIN strike and to condemn police firing in Bombay. The Tramway and motor transport workers, printing press workers and labourers in various workshops abstained from work.⁶¹ Madras Electric Supply Workers Union, the Madras Press Labour Union, the Spencer & Company Labour Union, the South Indian Railway Labour Union, the Corporation workers Union and Automobile Workers Union participated in the strike. Hotels, restaurants and shops in most of the localities remained closed. Processions were started in the morning. In all about three lakhs of people participated. All mills and business were closed down. Processions of workers organised by their respective organizations went through important thoroughfares peacefully.⁶² The city was paralysed.⁶³ In the evening a public meeting was held at People's park which was addressed by

⁶⁰ . *Ibid.*, 26 February, 1946.

⁶¹ . *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, 26 February, 1946.

Ashok Mehta. According to him, “The *hartal* was a manifestation of the people’s innate desire for achieving India’s freedom.”⁶⁴ The newspapers reported that on February 25, Madras made history.⁶⁵

For the first time in the history of the Great Indian Peninsular (GIP) railways, the administrative staff also struck work in sympathy with RIN ratings. The strike originated in the Chief Accountant’s Office and spread to all other departments. More than 3000 clerks participated in the strike. Members of the clerical staff employed in the General office of the M & S.M. Railway Park town struck work and adopted a resolution protesting against the police firing in Bombay and other places and expressing sympathy with the RIN.⁶⁶ Workers of the GIP and BBCJ workshops went on strike and joined with the other labourers and mill workers.⁶⁷ About 30,000 press workers demonstrated in front of *the Hindu* and later on at *the Indian Express* offices.⁶⁸ Thousands of factory workers also went on strike. By midday train and bus services were completely paralysed.⁶⁹ Police resorted to *lathi* charges several times to disperse crowds. Armed police wearing steel helmets were stationed at strategic points in the city to deal with any contingency.

Numerous processions of workers were taken out. A procession of bus and tram-way workers proceeded to Perambur workshop with Congress, Muslim League and Communist flags. Mill and Railway workers of Perambur started agitation.⁷⁰ The assembled crowds became restive and violence began from Perambur to Fort railway station. A military motor cycle was set on fire

⁶² . *The Hindu*, 26 February, 1946; Interview, Murugesan, *In Retrospect*, Vol. IV, South India.

⁶³ . *Janasakthi*, Madras, 26 February, 1946.

⁶⁴ . History of Freedom Movement Files (Hereafter HFM Files), 107, Extracts from *The Indian Express*, p.201,TSA ; *Janasakthi*, 26 February, 1946.

⁶⁵ . *The Hindu*, 26 February, 1946.

⁶⁶ . *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ . *Free Press Journal*, Bombay, 22 February, 1946.

⁶⁸ . *The Indian Express*, 23 February, 1946.

⁶⁹ . *The Hindu*, 23 February, 1946.

⁷⁰ . *Ibid.*, 24 February, 1946.

by the mob. Police resorted to *lathi* charges and 25 persons were injured. The police took several people in to custody.

The Buckingham & Carnatic Mill workers started strike and observed *hartal*. A procession of labourers went from Napier Park to other places to persuade the workers to join the *hartal*. They shouted slogans expressing sympathy with the men of the RIN and protested against government's policy of repression. About 600 beach engineering workers of the Binny & Company struck work. Most of the printing presses in George Town area kept closed and the workers took out a procession through Broadway. All outdoor workmen of the City Corporation except the conservancy staff and workers had to stay away from work. It included 300 workers employed in the corporation workshop. A large group of workers went to the Napier Park, the pumping stations in Conran Smith Nagar and Perambur barracks and tried to stop work.⁷¹ Similarly 150 workers of medical stores marched in procession along the Poonamalle High Road.⁷²

An important incident related to the *hartal* was Byers' shooting case. On February 25, High court Judge Byers proceeding in a car was attacked with stone and windows of his car were smashed and servants injured. He opened fire with pistol killing one boy and two others sustained gunshot injuries.⁷³ Byers' evidence was that he fired from driving seat in self-defence against a threatening crowd.⁷⁴ Later he was put under trial, but was released on the defence contention of firing on self-defence.⁷⁵

Strikes in Madras city continued with some stone throwing and acts of hooliganism, including attack on one police station. But the crowd was dispersed by lathi charge. *The Hindu* reported the complete *hartal* in the forenoon, followed by 'acts of hooliganism' in the coming days. Government buildings like railway stations, post offices and military lorries as well as

⁷¹ . *Ibid.*, 26 February, 1946.

⁷² . *Ibid.*

⁷³ . *The National Herald*, 26 February, 1946.

⁷⁴ . Home-Political, Poll (I) File No.5/5/1946; *The Hindu*, 27 February, 1946.

⁷⁵ . *Ananda Vikatan Weekly*, Madras, 3 March, 1946, Ananda Vikatan's Office, Madras.

private cars and vehicles carrying Europeans were stoned by the crowd.⁷⁶ Serious violence broke out in the Marina Beach. At about 3.30 p.m a big procession of people shouting slogans condemning Bombay firing came along the Marina Beach from the south towards the Aquarium opposite the Presidency College. The crowd set on fire the sheds adjoining the new swimming pool on the Marina Beach and attacked cars carrying Europeans and military personnel.⁷⁷ The police picket was attacked. Military lorries and cars occupied by the Europeans were attacked.⁷⁸ One military lorry and one motor cycle were set on fire. Meanwhile fire service units which arrived on the scene to put out the fire were not allowed to do their work. Military vehicles anywhere in sight were burned and nearby shops and post offices were broken open and ransacked; their contents were lit as bonfires. News papers decried the establishment of *goondaraj* or 'hooliganism' as crowds pillaged. For nearly two hours the hooligans interfered with traffic proceedings along the Marina Beach. Lastly police took control of the area and 40 people were taken into custody. In the evening the situation became more critical. Near the Fort railway station, a group of youngsters started stone throwing at the passing cars. But they allowed the cars carrying Indians and European ladies to pass peacefully.

Hooliganism continued on February 26 also, mainly in the form of stone throwing. Police opened fire once more on the crowd. Five persons were admitted to hospital with gunshot wounds. Local electric train services were suspended owing to damage to signals but resumed in the evening. In the morning the Central Station was the scene of some commotion. Numerous commercial and business houses were attacked. They were dispersed and chased by the police after *lathi* charge. One European military officer and three others sustained injuries as a result of stone throwing. The general post office in North Beach Road was the scene of another demonstration. The crowd made an attempt to gain entrance into but prevented by the police. About 850

⁷⁶ . *The Hindu*, 25 February, 1946.

⁷⁷ . *Mathrubhumi*, Calicut, 26 February, 1946.

⁷⁸ . Home-Political, Poll (I), FR of Madras for the Second Half February, 1946, File No.8/2/46.

tramway workers observed voluntary *hartal* and marched in procession through the Central Station and China Bazar Road. In front of the High Court they were addressed by V.S.Somasundaram, General Secretary of Madras Tramway workers union.⁷⁹

A crowd of about 10,000 stopped the Indo-Ceylone Express between Saidapet and Mambalam by throwing stones at the train. The police opened fire to disperse the crowd, resulting in severe injuries to three people.⁸⁰ In the same day, a crowd stopped the Ceylon Express at Chingleput district and pelted stones at the trains. The police opened fire on a mob and five persons were injured as a result of firing. In this connection police arrested eight persons on the spot. Some of them were sentenced and some were acquitted.⁸¹

Hooliganism by students and crowd increased hourly and traffic was obstructed. Demonstrators stoned and attacked Europeans, Anglo-Indians as well as government buildings. They compelled the Europeans and Anglo Indians to take off their hats and ties which were burned on the spot. A police officer was attacked by the crowd. During the disturbances repeated attempts were made by political party leaders collectively and individually to pacify and disperse the mob. V.S.Somasundaram and K.Kamaraj Nadar, the President of the TNCC were among them. They met however, with no success what so ever. The government version was that ignoring the appeal by local Congress leaders to be non-violent, the strikers incited by the Communists resorted to violence.⁸² Later the situation in Madras city returned to normal.⁸³ Trams and buses began to plying as usual and police pickets were withdrawn. On February 26, the Madras city council under Sastrasala Venkataraman, Deputy Mayor in the chair adopted a resolution condemning police firing in Bombay, Karachi and Madras and other places and adjourned the meeting in protest.

⁷⁹ . *Janasakthi*, 26 February, 1946.

⁸⁰ . *RAPM*, 1946; *Andhrapatrika*, 26 February, 1946.

⁸¹ . Public (General A), 9 March, 1949, G.O.No. 650, TSA.

⁸² . Home-Political, Poll (I), File No.5/5/1946.

⁸³ . *The Indian Express*, 26 February, 1946.

The press with few exceptions⁸⁴ echoed the perspective of the national leaders. It condemned such 'disorderly conduct' (in police terminology) and called the product a conspiracy by anti-social elements to establish *goondaraj* (rule of the unruly) in contrast to the desired *swaraj*.⁸⁵ However it should be pointed out that 'crowd' was very discriminate in many places targeting only Europeans and people of authority while leaving European women alone. The crowd symbolically destroying British power and asserting its own identity was in no mood to attend to the passivity now being preached by its national leaders. The leaders lacked any proper programme for struggle beyond rhetoric and confronted with a phenomenon they helped to create but could not control, performed a volte-face on February 26.⁸⁶

On all accounts the entire Madras city expressed its just indignation against the military rule in Bombay and its sympathy for the naval ratings. All sections of the people including Congress men, Leaguers and other sections joined in the protest to make it effective. Thousands of workers who came out on the streets and the public displayed a restraint and orderliness never before known in the annals of the city. Participation of working class women in the strike was amazing. They abstained from factories and actively participated in the strikes and demonstrations. The Communist Party of India directly involved in the *hartal* and strikes. M.R.Venkata Raman, Secretary of Tamil Nadu Committee of CPI writes:

On behalf of the Communist party, I would appeal to the leaders of the Congress to come forward to help and build up the growing unity sentiment amongst the masses. We hope that the leaders of the

⁸⁴ . *Janasakthi*, the organ of the Communist Party of Madras reported that civilian participation was immemorable in solidarity movements. They called it as people's urge for revolution. *Janasakthi*, 26 February, 1946.

⁸⁵ . For example, to describe the crowd *The Hindu* on 26 February used terms such as *goondaraj* and 'hooligans.' The crowd action was called 'a thoughtless orgy of violence.' Similar vocabulary was used by *The Indian Express* also. See *The Indian Express*, 26 February, 1946.

⁸⁶ . As G.N.S.Raghavan had written, the Congress leaders had become tired and old and so they were unwilling to support any agitation, opting instead for a negotiated settlement. People acting on their own did not get their approval. G.N.S.Raghavan, *Op. Cit.*, p.81.

major organizations like the Congress and League will come forward and work unitedly for leading the people.⁸⁷

But the Congress washed their hands in the troubled condition by putting a statement. Kamaraj Nadar, says in a statement to the Associated press, “Congress was not responsible for the *hartal* on Monday.” He adds that such indisciplined action will only lead to needless sufferings.⁸⁸

The solidarity movements were not confined to Madras city alone. It spread to other parts of the Presidency. On February 27, Madura observed *hartal* on a call by the Madura District Communist party. Bus drivers and conductors, judkawallas and riksha pullers struck work. The whole transport system was at a standstill. Lower grade railway employees, parcel office porters, painters, gatesmen and Indian refreshment room staff joined the strike.⁸⁹ The train service was completely dislocated. Some trains started service carrying Congress flags on engines. Students also participated in the strike. All the local schools were closed. Majority of the mills struck work. In the evening a huge procession was organized ending with a meeting in the main street of the big *maidan* in the eastern part of the city. The meeting adopted a resolution which condemned Bombay firing. The meeting demanded that there should not be any victimization of the naval ratings.⁹⁰ On March 1, *hartal* was observed in Madura and Trichinapoly. In the SIR colony at Golden Rock, 5000 workers, 500 clerks and 200 sweepers struck work. All the shops, factories and hotels of the Golden Rock were closed and streams of workers in processions came from all parts that included railway workers, *beedi* workers, scavengers, bus workers and shop assistants who assembled for rally to voice their sympathy for the RIN ratings in Bombay and Karachi.⁹¹ The official reports revealed that the government was concerned about the solidarity

⁸⁷ . *The Hindu*, 27 February, 1946.

⁸⁸ . *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ . *The Times of India*, Bombay, 28 February, 1946.

⁹⁰ . *The Hindu*, 28 February, 1946.

⁹¹ . *The Indian Express*, 28 February, 1946.

movements and they blamed the Communists for organising the strikes and *hartal*.⁹²

In the first week of March, people of Kanjeevaram observed *hartal* in sympathy with the RIN mutiny.⁹³ It cleared that the hardships suffered by the people owing to the food situation and the resentment against the government policy roused the anti-government feelings of the people. There were serious riots in Cheyyar over rice rationing on March 2, 1946.⁹⁴ It resulted in police firing in which one was killed and four injured.

In the mob actions, slogan served to unify the crowd itself and to direct its energies toward precise targets and objectives. In the demonstrations it was an effective means of rallying supporters and terrifying or discomfoting opponents. The part played by the tri-colour and the red flag of CPI was remarkable. As George Rude observed, "By such means groups and individuals with widely varying motives and beliefs might be rallied in support of a common cause and to focus their protests on a common cause."⁹⁵

After the solidarity movements in connection with the naval mutiny, strikes continued in the Buckingham & Carnatic Mills, Madras, Indian Metal & Metallurgical Corporation of Mettur and Railway workshop at Perambur and many short lived strikes from Tirupur and Coimbatore.⁹⁶ In connection with the strike in the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills a number of workers had been sentenced.⁹⁷

⁹² . Home-Political, Poll (I), File No. 5/5/1946.

⁹³ . *The Hindu*, 5 March, 1946.

⁹⁴ . USS Files, 27 May 1946, G.O.No. 5494/46.

⁹⁵ . George Rude, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England 1730-1848*, New York, 1987, p.187.

⁹⁶ . In a telegram dated 26 February, 1946, Governor of Madras reported to the Viceroy that students and workers observed *hartal* and strike in the Madras city in sympathy with RIN strike and to protest against Bombay firing. He blamed the Communists for organising the *hartal* and strike. On 1 March, he reported that Madura and Trichinapoly also observed strikes and *hartals* to condemn the Bombay firing, FR of Madras for the Second Half of June 1946.

⁹⁷ . USS Files, 27 July 1946, G.O.No. 6254/46.

Working class participation in the solidarity movements was momentous. The RIN uprising intensified the agitating mood of the people. The solidarity movements in the mills and industrial centers provided a new phase to the labour movement in the Presidency. The post-war situations worsened the economic sufferings of the workers. It made them restive and resulted in a wave of strikes. In 1945 there were 850 strikes in India involving some 8,00,000 people where as the first three months of 1946 witnessed 426 strikes involving 5,80,000 people all over India.⁹⁸ There was a wave of labour unrest in most of the districts of Madras Presidency resulting in strikes, of which there were 273 as against 77 during 1945.⁹⁹ Most of the strikes were organised by the Communists. The most important of these strikes was Madras Corporation workers strike, South Indian Railway Employees strike, workers of Central workshop, Golden Rock, Trichinapoly district, textile workers of Kaleswaram and Somasundaram mills, Coimbatore etc.¹⁰⁰ The official sources noted labour showed a tendency to strike on the slightest provocation and admitted the spreading of Communist influence among the industrial workers.¹⁰¹

Role of Students

In the post-war period, the students of the Madras presidency were in the forefront of the agitation against British. They provided a militant character to the anti-British struggles. There were three major students' organizations in Madras. These were the Madras Provincial Students Federation led by the Communist Party of India, Tamil Nadu Student Congress led by Indian National Congress and Muslim Student Federation of Muslim League.

Earlier students had participated quite vigorously in the Quit India Movement, abstaining from classes and actively participating in the strikes, demonstrations and *hartals*. In honour of the INA leaders, students held

⁹⁸ . Panchanan Shah, *History of the Working Movement in Bengal*, New Delhi, 1978, p.45; For details, see Sukomal Sen, *Working Class of India: History of Emergence and Movement, 1830-1970*, Calcutta, 1977.

⁹⁹ . *RAPM*, 1946.

¹⁰⁰ . *RAPM*, 1946.

¹⁰¹ . Home-Political, Poll (I), File No.18/2/46.

meetings and *hartals* in different parts of the presidency. Strikes were organized in major centers. Students of many schools and colleges observed *hartal*. In Madura, a number of students abstained from classes and went in procession touching various schools on November 6, 1945.¹⁰² At a student's meeting in Guntur held on November 12, 1945, one speaker said, "In Bengal wall posters have been put up threatening to murder 20 white men for every INA men executed by the government."¹⁰³

A public meeting of students of Madras representing various parties - Congress, League and Communists was held at People's park under the president-ship of Muhammed Raza Khan, Secretary of Madras District Muslim League on February 14. Congress, League, Communist and Dravida Kazhakam flags were displayed. They shouted the slogans of 'Calcutta firing-shame shame', 'Police Rule-Down Down', 'Students unity Zindabad', 'Down with imperialism' etc. Girl students also attended.¹⁰⁴ On February 14, a majority of the students of all the colleges in the city including the Muhammedan college and of a very few high schools abstained from attending their classes as a protest against the police firing in Calcutta. A number of students from the various colleges came to the Presidency College where they held a meeting. Members of Indian Student Congress and Muslim Student Federation shouted 'jai Hind' slogans. About 600 students started in a procession and proceeded to the Napier Park.¹⁰⁵

The students of the Madras presidency had shown their solidarity to the RIN mutineers through demonstrations and *hartals*. On February 24, Indian Students Congress and Madras Students Federation held a meeting and decided to observe *hartal* on the next day and passed resolution which demanded the

¹⁰² . *The Hindu*, 28 January, 1946.

¹⁰³ . Home-Political, Poll (I), FR of Madras for the First Half of November 1946, File No.8/11/45 ; For a study relating to Bengal, see Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt against the Raj' in Amit Kumar Gupta (ed.), *Myth and Reality: The Struggle for Freedom in India, 1945-47*, New Delhi, 1987, pp.152-171.

¹⁰⁴ . Police Department (Confidential), 14 December 1946, G.O.No.2703.

¹⁰⁵ . *Ibid*.

students to abstain from classes on February 25, in order to sympathise with the RIN ratings of Bombay.

Most of the students of various colleges and other educational institutions kept away from their classes.¹⁰⁶ They organized successful demonstrations and meeting all over Madras.¹⁰⁷ They conducted huge processions of 3000 students including girls through the main roads of the city and Central Station. They wore badges with inscription, 'Strike for RIN.' They also raised slogans like 'Jai Hind' and 'Strike for the ratings.' They held a meeting inside the High Court compound where resolutions were passed expressing sympathy with the RIN ratings and condemning the action of the police and military. News papers reported that processions of school boys could be seen in every parts of the city. They shouted slogans and urged people working in offices to join them.¹⁰⁸

All the schools in the George Town area were closed. Schools in other parts of the city like the Hindu High school, the Kellett High school, the P.S High school and the Ramakrishna High school were working with partial strength. The Chindaripett High school was practically empty and students of that institution went in a procession along Mount Road. The students of the Presidency College abstained from their classes and marched in procession to the People's Park. Over a thousand students assembled in the Congress House grounds at Rosapetta, carrying the flag of Congress and the banner of Indian Student Congress marched in procession along Mount Road, Central Station and China Bazar Road towards the High Court. A cycle squad of volunteers preceded the protesters on foot. Reaching the High court grounds, they held a meeting and it was presided over by M.Ramunni Menon.¹⁰⁹

On behalf of the Indonesian youth Association Madras branch, Toof offered fraternal greetings to the youth of the city for making the *hartal* a

¹⁰⁶ . *Free Press Journal*, 25 February, 1946.

¹⁰⁷ . *Dravidanadu Weekly*, Madras, 10 March,1946, Periyar Rationalist Library and Research Center, Madras.

¹⁰⁸ . *The Hindu*, 26 February, 1946.

¹⁰⁹ . *Ibid.*

complete success.¹¹⁰ Official sources commented on the unprecedented participation of students in the sympathetic strikes.¹¹¹ M.R.Venkataraman of CPI observed that the students had demonstrated their anger against the imperialist rule of terror in Bombay and their sympathy with the naval ratings fighting for their demands.¹¹²

The students of Madras Medical College boycotted their classes to protest against the Bombay firing.¹¹³ On hearing the news, the students held a meeting in the campus. In the *hartal* and demonstrations, most of the students participated. Later the College authorities followed repressive attitude towards the students. Many students were dismissed from the college.¹¹⁴

On February 26, Indian Student Congress of Trichinapoly called for students strike. Most of the students belonging to the local educational institutions abstained from their classes. M.K.Ramamurthy, Vice-President of the Tamil Nadu Student Congress, presided over the meeting. It passed a resolution which strongly condemned the police firing in Bombay, Karachi and other places.¹¹⁵ On March 1, 1946, there was a *hartal* and procession by local High school students in Kanjeevaram town and Chingleput organised as a sign of sympathy with the strikes in Bombay and Madras.¹¹⁶ The same day, students of the Pachaiyyapa and the Anderson High schools at Kanjeevaram organised a strike to display sympathy with the strikers in other parts like Bombay and Madras and went about the streets shouting slogans. The Headmasters of these schools called the police.¹¹⁷ In Madras there were many instances that many students faced punishment from their college authorities after the revolt.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁰ . *Free Press Journal*, 25 February, 1946.

¹¹¹ . Police Department (Confidential), 14 December, 1946, G.O.No.2703.

¹¹² . *Janasakthi*, 27 February, 1946.

¹¹³ . P.K.R.Varier, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 105-106.

¹¹⁴ . *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ . *The Hindu*, 27 February, 1946.

¹¹⁶ . Home-Political, Poll (I), FR of Madras for the First Half of March 1946, File No.18/03/46; *Dravidanadu Weekly*, 10 March, 1946.

¹¹⁷ . USS Files, 19 March 1946, G.O.No.26/2460; *Dravida Nadu Weekly*, 10 March, 1946.

¹¹⁸ . HFM Files, Extracts from *The Indian Express*, File No.107.

Unlike the official leadership of the Congress and Muslim League, Student Congress actively participated in the solidarity movements related to the RIN strike. The students felt that assertiveness was the answer to imperialism rather than negotiations. The British documents revealed that the Congress leaders were really alarmed at the mutiny of the RIN ratings in Bombay and at the effects which political propaganda had on the students.¹¹⁹ For instance, when Rajendra Prasad visited Jamshedpur, the Deputy Commissioner called on him and spoke on the undesirability of school boys taking part in the demonstrations. On the same evening, he made a speech condemning unauthorized and undisciplined demonstrations which had occurred in Calcutta.¹²⁰ He advised the students to give up the idea of staging demonstrations which brought chaos and anarchy.¹²¹

It can be seen that the February uprising in Madras were actually in support and sympathy of the ratings of Bombay. It was a non-violent hunger strike. This attracted the public attention and support. It was first started by the ratings of Madras; soon the civilians and students rose to the situation and made it as a mass movement against imperialism. Various groups of the workers and middle classes joined the struggle and made it as a violent uprising. The students and workers initiated a militant movement to protect and uphold the ratings of Bombay. The heterogeneous crowds marched to the streets waving Congress, League and Communist Party flags together.

As Gautam Chattopadhyay observed:

The students, workers and others fought back valiantly, but they were in no position to prevent the compromise. They were defeated, but remained unbowed. The Indian revolution remained unfinished. The heroic Bengal students' mood was best reflected in a poem by

¹¹⁹ . Extracts from Provincial FR of Madras for the Second Half of February, 1946.

¹²⁰ . *Ibid.*

¹²¹ . *Meezan*, Hyderabad, 4 March, 1946, Afsal Ganj Public Library, Hyderabad.

Sukanto Bhattacharya: '*Guli Bendha Buke, Uddhata Tabu Matha.*'
(We are pierced by bullets, yet our head is held high).¹²²

The mood of Bengal students was not confined to Bengal alone. It was reflected throughout the country.

Section 2

Vishakhapatanam

The word Vishakhapatanam or Visagapatam means 'city of Vaisakha', the Hindu equivalent of Greek god Mars. The god noted for his martial fury has been visiting the town from time to time in the form of cyclones.¹²³ It is located on the eastern coast of India in Andhra Pradesh at latitude 17 14' 45" north and longitude 83 17' 15" east. It is one of the principal sea ports on the Coromondal coast. The shore line in the immediate neighbourhood of Vishakhapatanam was recessed back from the general line of the coast for six kilo metre distance between 'Waltair point' on the north side of the town and the prominent hill called 'the Dolphin nose' in the south.¹²⁴

Vishakhapatanam was an important center of the national movement. The trial of the INA officers had roused the emotions of the people. Processions, demonstrations and *hartals* were held throughout Andhra as in other parts of the country. They raised INA relief fund to defend the INA personnel. This trial once again roused the righteous anger of the people against the government. Several Municipalities and District Boards passed resolutions condemning the trial. The Congress raised a fund for the defence of the INA officers.¹²⁵

The RIN mutiny started in Vishakhapatanam on February 21, 1946. It was also a sympathetic strike towards the Bombay mutiny. The strike first

¹²² . Prastut Hao (Get Ready), Swabhinata (Bengali), Calcutta, 15, February, cited in Gautam Chattopadhyay, *Op. Cit.*, pp.167-68.

¹²³ . Baldeo Sahai, *The ports of India*, New Delhi, 1986, p.103.

¹²⁴ . N.Seeralan, *A Survey on Ports and Harbours in the Madras presidency, 1858-1900*, Erode, 1987, p.43.

¹²⁵ . Sarojini Regani, *Highlights of the Freedom Movement in Andhra Pradesh*, Hyderabad, pp.162-64.

began in the naval base, HMIS Circars, a shore establishment in Vishakhapatnam.¹²⁶ The ratings boycotted food and it started as a hunger strike. Later it spread to other ships like HMIS Sonavati, HMIS Ahmedabad, HMIS Shillong and HDMC Flotilla.¹²⁷ When the ratings heard the news of the happenings of Bombay, they banded together and decided to join the fight. The first expression of the decision was the pulling down of the White ensign.¹²⁸ The ratings hoisted national tri-colour on the mast of HMIS Sonavati and inscribed 'Jai Hind.'¹²⁹ When the strike started, CO addressed the ratings. But his orders were not obeyed. The ratings complained about the unfair treatment and poor pay, food and other grievances.¹³⁰ They demanded equal treatment.¹³¹ The men then rushed out of the barracks and raided the jetty. From there they called upon the ratings on the Sonavati and Ahmedabad to join them.¹³² Then they marched to the Base jetty where they were joined by the ratings of HMIS Sonavati, HMIS Ahmedabad, HMIS Shillong and M.L of 121&136 Flotillas.¹³³ Then they together marched in the streets and shouted national slogans.

They seized a few motorboats and came ashore. When all were gathered together on a shore around 600 ratings marched out in a procession to the city, waving Congress and League flags in front of them and shouting revolutionary slogans.¹³⁴ *Andhra Patrika* reported that the ratings hoisted the national flag and marched in the city with great enthusiasm.¹³⁵ Some of the strikers were remaining in the city and arrangements were being made to feed them. It is further learnt that all the ships and motor launches were unmanned as the crews

¹²⁶ . NL 9935, *Report of the Mutiny in Vishakhapatnam* (Hereafter NL 9935), Sl. No.31, RIN Mutiny Papers.

¹²⁷ . NL 9935.

¹²⁸ . Victimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*, p.94.

¹²⁹ . *The Hindu*, 22 February, 1946.

¹³⁰ . NL 9935.

¹³¹ . *Andhrapatrika*, 23 February, 1946.

¹³² . *The Indian Express*, 23 February, 1946.

¹³³ . *The Hindu*, 22 February, 1946; T.P.Gopalakrishnan Nair, *Op. Cit.*, p.32.

¹³⁴ . *Mathrubhumi*, 22 February, 1946.

¹³⁵ . *Andhrapatrika*, 25 February, 1946.

came out leaving the national flags flying on them.¹³⁶ In the naval bases, section 144, Criminal Procedure Code was passed to crush the naval strike. Ultimately the mutineers were rounded up by the military and confined in a camp.¹³⁷ On February 23, the naval officer in command, Vishakhapatnam announced that the position at the port was completely under control.¹³⁸ No violence occurred. Military guards had been placed on the ships and establishments and over arms and ammunitions.¹³⁹ Armament of all RIN crafts immobilised and small arms and ammunitions removed from the ships.¹⁴⁰ *Meezan*, a daily from Hyderabad reported that great security was provided to the armoury and ships.¹⁴¹

The ratings returned to the barracks on February 22. As per the advice of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Bombay ratings surrendered on February 23. By hearing the news of surrender, the ratings of Vishakhapatnam also surrendered the same day. After their surrender, ten ring leaders were taken into custody and court martialled.¹⁴² A unique feature was the non-violent hunger strike.¹⁴³

The people of Andhra Pradesh showed their solidarity to the mutineers. Under the leadership of the Communist Party mammoth meetings and processions were conducted. There were several strikes and *hartals* by workers in different parts of Andhra to support the RIN mutiny and in protest against the Bombay firing.¹⁴⁴ The Port workers of Vishakhapatnam participated in the sympathetic strike for 15 days.¹⁴⁵ One Communist activist remembers that there were several strikes in different parts of Andhra in support of the RIN mutiny.¹⁴⁶ People from rural areas also participated. Taking advantage of the

¹³⁶ . *The Hindu*, 22 February, 1946.

¹³⁷ . TP Gopalakrishnan Nair, *Op. Cit.*, p.32.

¹³⁸ . *The Hindu*, 22 February, 1946.

¹³⁹ . *The Deccan Chronicle*, 25 February, 1946.

¹⁴⁰ . Home-Political, Poll (I), File No.5/21/46.

¹⁴¹ . *Meezan*, 25 February, 1946.

¹⁴² . *NL 9935*.

¹⁴³ . *The Pioneer*, Lucknow, 25 February, 1946.

¹⁴⁴ . Y.V.Vijayakumar, *Jeevitha Saramsham* (Telugu), Prakthi, Hyderabad, 2002, p.45.

¹⁴⁵ . *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ . J.Sathyanaarayana, *Jeevitham : Attupottulu* (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1988, p.84.

situation, the Communist Party organised party units among the workers, organised State Trade Union Conference in Rajamundry and motor workers unions all over the province.¹⁴⁷ Railway strike in Guntur started along with the solidarity movements of the naval uprising.¹⁴⁸

Student participation was memorable in the *hartal* and strikes.¹⁴⁹ Huge demonstrations, strikes and *hartals* were organised in Hyderabad, Karimnagar, Suryapet and many other centers by the All Hyderabad Students Union¹⁵⁰ The government retaliated by rusticing many active student leaders from the schools and colleges. To protest against these rustications, a state-wide call for strike and demonstration was given which was effectively responded to by the student community.¹⁵¹

As per the Madras Peace Protection Ordinance, government resorted to the policy of suppression towards the mutineers and its sympathisers.¹⁵² The Communist Party workers launched campaigns in the villages in support of the mutiny.¹⁵³ One pamphlet entitled *Strike of Indian Navy*¹⁵⁴ was circulated among the people.¹⁵⁵ Police arrested Rama Rao, Secretary of Youth League who was distributing the pamphlet and was explaining the mutiny to the people. Two other persons Lakshmana Rao and Narayana Rao were also arrested by the police.¹⁵⁶

Section 3

¹⁴⁷ . *Ibid*; J.Sathyanarayana, *Op. Cit.*, p.87.

¹⁴⁸ . Ramasubhaya.P, *Pooratta Pathamlo Nenu* (Telugu, *I am in the way of Struggle*), Marxist Study Center, Hyderabad,1997, p. 127.

¹⁴⁹ . C.V.K.Rao, *Atmakatha* (Telugu), Part II, Kakinada, 1992, p. 185.

¹⁵⁰ . *History of AISF*, Andhra Pradesh Committee of AISF, Hyderabad, 1985.

¹⁵¹ . S.M.Jawad Riswi, *Political Awakening: Hyderabad*, Hyderabad, 1985, p.76.

¹⁵² . J.Satynarayana & K.L.Mahendra, *History of Working Class movement in Andhrapradesh*, Kakinada,1987, p.67 ; N.Prasad Rao, a Prominent freedom fighter memorises that the protest movements against Bombay firing was prevalent in all parts of Andhra. He actively participated in the movements and was arrested and imprisoned, Ravi Kelakapally (ed.), *N.Prasad Rao*, Hyderabad,2002, p.64.

¹⁵³ . I.Subbaraju, *My Memoirs* (Telugu), Hyderabad,2004.

¹⁵⁴ . It was a pamphlet issued by the Communist Party during the mutiny.

¹⁵⁵ . *Prajasakthi*, Vijayawada, 25 February, 1946.

¹⁵⁶ . *Ibid*.

Cochin

The word *Kocchi* means *bandar* or small port. It was one of the largest ports in the Madras presidency and a fine harbour. Its backwater was capable of affording shelter to a large number of shipping. The town was located on the southern bank of the principal navigable entrance to the Travancore estuary, in the Cochin-Kanayannur taluk. The harbour works, the Tata oil mills, the Standard and Burmah Shell Oil Companies and several other mills and industrial concerns thrived there. All these factors accounted for the great density in this area.¹⁵⁷ According to the census of 1941, the population of Cochin was 1,422,875.¹⁵⁸ It had the largest urban population with four towns in it including the commercial emporium of Mattancheri and the seat of the Cochin government, Ernakulam.

No wonder this place became a very important location of active supporters of agitation against INA trial. The government imposed restrictions, on processions and public meetings being held in support, as per the Criminal Law Amendment Act.¹⁵⁹

The Cochin harbour was full of ships and Landing Craft Terminals (LCT). The RIN strike first started in HMIS Venduruthy at the base establishment. On February 21, the ratings heard the RIN mutiny in Bombay through the BBC news from the Information room and local newspapers. Then it was discussed by them and decided to start a hunger strike on February 22. One leading seaman M.G. Nair, informed the Regulating Petty Officer, Riasat Ali Khan that the lower ratings intended to stage a non-violent mutiny on the following day to express their solidarity with mutineers in Bombay.¹⁶⁰ But M.G. Nair did not participate in the mutiny. On February 22, the ratings pasted a strike notice on the notice board and started the hunger strike.¹⁶¹ It stated that

¹⁵⁷ . For details of density of population of Cochin, see Appendix B, Table 3.

¹⁵⁸ . Census of Cochin, 1941.

¹⁵⁹ . *Report on Administration of Cochin for the year 1121 ME*, Cochin Government press, Ernakulam, 1947, KSA.

¹⁶⁰ . *NL 9940, Board of Enquiry into the Mutiny in Cochin* (Hereafter *NL 9940*), Sl.No.36, RIN Mutiny Papers.

¹⁶¹ . *NL 9940*.

the ratings of HMIS Venduruthy have decided to go on strike for the following reasons:

- a. To express sympathy for the victims of recent firing held in Bombay against RIN ratings.
- b. To demand better pay and allowances as given to ratings of the RIN, speedy demobilisation, post-war settlement and equal terms with officers.
- c. To demand withdrawal of the new rules and regulations of HMIS Venduruthy
- d. To demand better food and basic needs.¹⁶²

Ratings staged a demonstration going in a procession along the streets of Ernakulum shouting slogans such as 'Cease fire in Bombay' and 'Indian navy Zindabad.'¹⁶³ Later in the day HMIS Baroda, a minesweeper arrived from Colombo, contact was established between the two ships and they jointly continued the strike. The ratings were on strike and proposed to abstain from food until the trouble in Bombay was settled.¹⁶⁴ About 150 ratings conducted a demonstration shouting slogans they demanded equal wages and position to the Indian ratings.¹⁶⁵

On February 22, the ratings held a meeting at Wellington Island.¹⁶⁶ It was very disciplined and orderly. In the midst of loud slogans, the ratings condemned the British military action against Castle barracks and demanded the withdrawal of the threatening statement by the FOCRIN.¹⁶⁷ Majority of the lower ratings were involved in the mutiny. Senior ratings did not join the mutineers. But some were in sympathy with the ratings and their grievances.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² . *NL 9940*.

¹⁶³ . T. P.Gopalakrishnan Nair, *Op. Cit.*, p.32; *The Hindu*, 25 February, 1946.

¹⁶⁴ . *The Hindu*, 25 February, 1946.

¹⁶⁵ . *Mathrubhumi*, 22 February, 1946.

¹⁶⁶ . Victimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*, p.95.

¹⁶⁷ . T.P.Gopalakrishnan Nair, *Op.Cit.*, p.32.

¹⁶⁸ . *NL 9940*.

The ratings however quietly went back to work on receipt of news that the Bombay ratings had surrendered.

A Board of enquiry held on March 18, 1946 admitted that the mutiny was a manifestation of the nationalistic feelings.¹⁶⁹ There was no evidence of any contact with political leaders. The ratings obviously imbibed nationalist ideology through the radio broadcast and the press. The Board recognised the non-violent character of the mutiny. In the witness box most of the ratings complained about service grievances.¹⁷⁰ In their petitions, they included other grievances along with their efforts to raise protest against police firing in Bombay and other places. It is very interesting to note that the British could not find out the ring leaders of the mutiny. The Board interrogated many ratings. But the ratings were not ready to reveal the name of the leaders. It showed the unity among the ratings.

On February 23, anniversary of Cochin Harbour and Port workers Union was held at Perumanoor. It was under the presidentship of Panampally Govinda Menon, a prominent Congress leader. They passed a resolution which gave whole hearted support to the RIN mutineers.¹⁷¹ Beyond this, it seems, the pro-Congress labourers were not willing to go. In contrast to the neighbouring Malabar, Cochin did not witness widespread protest movements. However, working class solidarity was not expressed though Cochin had small and middle level factories and a not so insignificant labour force. The INTUC had a strong presence there and this could be one of the reasons for the indifference shown by the labour force.

But students actively participated in the solidarity movements. On February 25, a joint meeting of Indian Student Congress and Student Federation was held at Aluwa. It was presided over by M.Lohithadas, a prominent Student Congress leader.¹⁷² It passed a resolution which condemned Bombay firing. P.Govinda Pillai, P.K.Vasudevan Nair and Madhava Kurup

¹⁶⁹ . *NL 9940*.

¹⁷⁰ . *NL 9940*.

¹⁷¹ . *Mathrubhumi*, 24 February, 1946.

¹⁷² . *Deshabhimani*, Calicut, 26 February, 1946.

addressed the gathering. All of them criticized the suppressive policy followed by the British towards the ratings of Bombay and Karachi.

When we look at the foregoing chapters we naturally come to the conclusion that the RIN mutiny in South India was largely sympathetic in nature. Though it lasted one or two days only the unique feature was the unparalleled support it received from working classes and students. The political role of the working class was revealed during the February days in South India. The awakening of the working class an integral part of the working class upsurge which was unprecedented in this country. The strike wave was spread far and wide. It had brought in its compass mills, factories, workshops, presses, offices, banks, schools, water works, power houses, railways, buses and even government departments.

Section 4

Malabar

Malabar was handed over to the British by Tipu in 1792 as per the Treaty of Srirangapattanam. It then became a district under the Madras Presidency. 'Malabar' district had its headquarters in Calicut and Sub-Collector's office and district court at Tellicherry. As a part of the Madras presidency, the history of Malabar differed from that of the princely states of Cochin and Travancore. Until 1947 this area was in the clutches of the colonial government. At the time of Second World War, Malabar was a part of British India. In those days this region was an inferno of anti-colonial politics; labour struggles, peasant and political movements culminating in the Quit India Movement which drew many people into organised action.

The geographical terrain of Malabar underwent serious political and socio-economic calamities during the Second World War. These events and movements in Malabar were distinct from the similar changes in other parts of South India. This difference was due to the fact that Malabar had different material background. The presence of the Communist movement linked with the anti-landlord and anti-imperial outlook was the prime reason. The war had

thoroughly destroyed the fabric of everyday life of the common people and it was further strengthened by the extreme exploitation under landlordism and colonialism. The presence of large number of families whose members were serving in the British army in different parts of the world also aggravated the situation. The geographical position of Malabar had compelled the British Government to intervene in the everyday life of the people in cultural terms and also take military precautions to defend India from sea and air attacks. The post world war Malabar also experienced similar impact due to the influence of RIN mutiny and heightening of the anti-imperialist movements.

In the twentieth century, nationalism acted as a binding force and provided a wider identity. The nationalist movement in Malabar was more intensive than in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin. Feudal oppression and colonial exploitation were rampant and pushed the people to the wall. The general economic depression added fuel to fire. Naturally the nationalist movement in Malabar was anti-feudal and anti-colonial in content. The Indian National Congress was less enthusiastic in the struggle against landlordism but the leftist forces fought against both landlordism and colonialism with the same vigour.

When the war started, the prices of essential goods increased rapidly.¹⁷³ The commencement of war with Japan in December 1941 and the conquest of Burma by the Japanese in May 1942 threw agriculture out of gear by creating a shortage of food grains. The situation was rendered more acute by the difficulties of weather and easy transport within the country itself. The table given in the appendix shows the figures of retail prices of rice and ragi from 1938-39 to 1943-44 and this would illustrate the price trends during this period.¹⁷⁴

It may be noted that the steep rise in prices in 1942-43 was caused by the entry of Japan in the war and the complete stoppage of import of rice from Burma. Food production of Malabar was so poor when compared to that of Cochin and Travancore. During the war, import and export was disturbed.

¹⁷³ . For details, see Appendix B, Table 4.

¹⁷⁴ . For details, see Appendix B, Table 5.

Malabar produced only 45% of its rice requirements and was dependent on Burma. Prices in the local market faithfully registered the fluctuations in production in Burma as well as the prices of transportation from Rangoon.¹⁷⁵ Besides, the main supply of rice was diverted to military instead of the common people. With the onset of the war import of rice to Calicut declined rapidly and by February 1941, they had fallen to 13,000 tons from the annual average of 32,000 tons over the past two years.¹⁷⁶

A.C.Kannan Nair described the price hike and other miseries created by the war in his diary.¹⁷⁷ In September 1942, the price of one sack of sugar was raised from Rs.20/- to Rs.145/- and one bottle of kerosene raised from three *anna* (a smaller denomination of money. One rupee was six annas) eight *paisa* to Rs. 6.50/- The Cannanore Municipality passed a resolution which demanded the reduction of prices of essential goods.¹⁷⁸ Peasants did not get prices for their produce. But prices of essential goods had reached an all time high.¹⁷⁹ With the anticipation of dearth in the market, stocks were withheld and speculation in grain was rife throughout Malabar. Above all the peasants were asked to contribute to the war fund by officials. In many places peasants under the leadership of *Karshaka Sangham* protested against the illegal collection of war funds. K.Madhavan writes that at Cheruvathur, peasants protested against the Deputy Collector of Puthur who was stationed at Cheruvathur TB for collecting the funds.¹⁸⁰

In 1943 famine broke out in Malabar. Small pox spread in Cannanore and surrounding areas. By 1944 around 3000 people had small pox. Relief committees were formed by the Communist party. On August 27, 1943

¹⁷⁵ . *Development Department*, Government of Madras, 23 June 1941, G.O.No.1138, TSA.

¹⁷⁶ . Malabar Collector to Development Secretary on 16 February 1941, Government of Madras, Revenue Department, 17 June 1943, G.O.No.1911, RAK.

¹⁷⁷ . K.K.N.Kurup (ed.), A.C.Kannan Nair: *Oru Padanam* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1985, p.102.

¹⁷⁸ . *MDG*, 1940, 321, RAK.

¹⁷⁹ . C.Bhaskaran (ed.), *Sakhakkaluteyum Sakhavu: Ormmakurippukalum Padanangalum* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 2006, p.27; Cherukadu, *Jeevithapatha* (Mal.), (1974), Reprint, Trissur, 2003, p.421.

¹⁸⁰ . K.Madhavan, *Oru Gandhian Communistinte Ormmakal* (Mal.), (1987), Reprint, Calicut, 2002, p.132.

A.C.Kannan Nair noted in his diary, “In India there is no war, but people died due to starvation. But in the iron and coal producing England, war is there, but no starvation and no death.”¹⁸¹ It is clear how an imperialist power utilised our resources for their own purposes and how it created famine in the land.

Hoarding and black marketing were the common phenomenon of war. In the rural areas the landlords were the principal food hoarders and black marketeers in grains.¹⁸² They also let loose naked oppression on the cultivators and tried to get the last *seer* of paddy in the form of rack rent or interest. V.M.Vishnu Bharatheeyan observed that most of the *amsom* (a lowest administrative division) *Adhikaris*, engaged in black marketing and hoarding during this time, became rich and built houses ¹⁸³

In 1944, the Government introduced procurement programmes for the purchase of rice.¹⁸⁴ Seven Purchase officers were first appointed for procurement of all surplus rice from the producing areas for export to deficit areas. There were district grain purchase officers, *taluk* grain purchase officers, and *firka* (a revenue division) grain purchase officers. Supply officers in the district, *taluk* and *firka* levels were appointed. Besides there was grain purchasing inspectors. Their duty was to procure all available surpluses of cereals from the ryots and distribute them to the statutorily and informally rationed areas according to their requirements. In all the *taluks* there were many wholesale dealers for the purchase of paddy for the district-wide procurement and rationing scheme.¹⁸⁵ But the procurement scheme was not worked effectively. It was under the control of the landlords and *amsom*

¹⁸¹ . K.K.N.Kurup, *A C Kannan...Op. Cit.*, p.127; *Vikasana Rekha*, Vol. 140: Cheruthazham Grama Panchayath, Kerala State Planning Board, 1996, pp.10-11.

¹⁸² . To describe the horror of black marketing, E.M.S quoted the words of Nehru, to the effect that ‘black marketeers and those hoarding food grains etc should be caught and tied to the nearest lamp posts.’, E.M.S.Namboodirippad, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam: Utbhavavum Valarchayum* (Mal.),Trivandrum, 1995, p. 103.

¹⁸³ . V.M.Vishnu Bharatheeyan, *Adimakal Engane Udamakalayi* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1980, p.299.

¹⁸⁴ . *Civil Supplies Department Files* (Hereafter CSD), 1944, Bundle No.8, Sl. No.4, RAK.

¹⁸⁵ . *MAR.*, 1944.

Adhikaris. There were many complaints of harassment of the poor ryots.¹⁸⁶ The *amsom Adhikaris* used coercion for collecting paddy from small peasants. People raised complaints against the supply officers who helped hoarding and black marketing.

The rationing system introduced by the British also proved corrupt. On October 15, 1944, rationing was introduced in four northern *taluks* of Malabar. Rice, millets, wheat and wheat products were the rationed articles. In the towns, for getting rice, people were compelled to buy 1/6 of wheat. In the city it was limited as 1/8.¹⁸⁷ Australian wheat had to be imported to cover up the disparity and it was used as supplement to rice.¹⁸⁸

Ration cards were issued to the influential persons only. It is ironically stated that in the landlord's house's ration cards were issued to even their Gods and elephants.¹⁸⁹ The war period was the golden age of these black marketers and hoarders. On the other hand common man suffered all the hardships. Sugar and kerosene were not available to them. For lighting, especially during dinner the people lighted *choottu*. (a bundle made of brambles of wood and coconut leaves to be used as torch). Students' condition was much pathetic. They could not read and write when darkness came. The students of Kottakkal A.V.College and 150 High school students of Ponnani submitted petitions to the *Tahsildar* (a revenue administrative official in charge of the tahsil) for the supply of kerosene.¹⁹⁰ So night became a nightmare to common man.

Apart from piling up stocks of grain, large *tharavadus* (ancestral house) had begun to cash in on the high market prices for rice. Land was reclaimed from tenants and till 1944; there was dramatic increase in the number of redemption suits instituted by landowners on the plea that they needed the lands for their own cultivation.¹⁹¹ That it was directly connected to a desire to produce rice for the market became clear in October 1944 when eviction suits

¹⁸⁶ . CSD, 1944, Bundle No.10, Sl. No. 39.

¹⁸⁷ . P.Andalatt (ed.), *Vegam Pora: Collected Works of C.H Kanaran* (Mal.), Trivandrum, N.D, p.13.

¹⁸⁸ . Governor's Report, 1 May 1944 and FR of Madras for the Second Half of May 1944.

¹⁸⁹ . Vishnu Bharatheeyan, *Op. Cit.*, p.299.

¹⁹⁰ . *Deshabhimani*, 5 March, 1944.

declined dramatically after rationing was introduced and excess stocks of paddy were purchased by the government at controlled rate. Eviction of tenants became very common. Even long standing tenants were not spared. At Madikai, the Echchkanam *Jenmi* evicted Vaayakkotan Kannan who had cultivated the land for the past 32 years.¹⁹² As paddy became the most valuable food grain, many of the wet land cultivators belonging to poor sections were frequently evicted by landlords. The marginal peasantry further failed to clear the rent arrears and as such their land holdings passed into the hands of the landlords. The rich peasants were able to accumulate wealth by disposing of their surplus grain in the black market. These developments strained the landlord tenant relations in Malabar.¹⁹³

Life in Malabar became miserable at the end of Second World War. The gap between the rich and the poor widened alarmingly. As a popular folk song put it:

The elites in big mansions
Eat and make merry
Have they ever touched
A tender rice sapling?
We till all day
in the paddy field
But what use of it?¹⁹⁴

This revolutionary folk song sung by Keraleeyan illustrated the deteriorated condition of peasants. In this circumstance, the peasant and working class movements had grown deeper in Malabar.

Government could have intervened meaningfully by preventing hoarding and black marketing. But they did not do so. Rationing was not

¹⁹¹ . Dileep Menon, *Caste, Nationalism & Communism in South India*, Cambridge, 1994, p.162.

¹⁹² . K.Madhavan, *Op. Cit.*, p.168.

¹⁹³ K.K.N.Kurup, *Agrarian Struggles in Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1989, p.15.

¹⁹⁴ . Free translation of Revolutionary Folksong of Keraleeyan cited in K.K.N.Kurup (ed.), *Keralaleeyante Therenjetuthe Lekhanangal (Mal.)*, Kozhikode, 1997, p.4

efficiently organised nor was it free from corruption. Rice procurement scheme which was introduced was not successful as admitted by a government official. The pathos of those times is reflected in popular memory and literature.¹⁹⁵ In such writings the war period is depicted as a period of great distress with very few happy memories. Peasant struggles and labour unrest, often violent, which broke out during 1945-47 reflects this distress.

As a result of the war, life in rural areas was thrown out of gear. Abject poverty, famine, scarcity of food leading to malnutrition and epidemics affected thousands. The black marketeers and landlords made good out of the situation.¹⁹⁶ The purchasing power of the working classes considerably deteriorated.¹⁹⁷ Unemployment became very severe. Thousands of workers were retrenched. Around 80,000 men, as against official records of 60,000, demobilised from the army returned to Malabar.¹⁹⁸ It increased the hardships of every phase of life. On the other hand, the British used all their machinery for the collection of war funds and other saving bonds. Thirteen crores of rupees were collected as savings bond. This was done mainly with the help of landlords, moneylenders and other British loyalists. They tried to make the war as the war of Indians. But they completely neglected the welfare of their colonised subjects. The official reports show that the mobilisation of war funds and distress were interrelated. We can see an increase in the annual collection

¹⁹⁵ . Vaikom Muhammed Basheer's (1908-1994) novel, '*Maranathinte Nizhalil*' (*In the shade of Death*) depicted the deteriorated position of people due to the war. One character in the novel, eight year old girl Kunhamma raises an innocent question, 'what is the use of grass in war?' It cleared that even the prices of grass also had risen (Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, *Samboornna Krithika I (Mal.)*, Vol.1, Kottayam, 1992. pp.596-646); C.J.Thomas (Malayalam playwright), his play, *Avan veendum varunnu* was another example. In this play, one character, Mathukutty's mother always complained about the hike in prices of essential goods (C.J.Thomas, *C.J.Yute Natakangal, Nataka Vivarthanangal*, Trissur, 2004); M.Govindan's drama, 'Nee Manushyane Kollaruth' also portrayed the popular distress created by the war; Maha kavi Vallathol Narayana menon delivered the presidential address in a conference at Bombay on 16th October 1943 providing information about the famine situation of Malabar (*Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Calicut, 17 October, 1943); A.C.Kannan Nair's diary also details popular distress.

¹⁹⁶ . M.N.Govindan Nair, *Emmente Atmakatha* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1984, p.439.

¹⁹⁷ . *Vikasana Rekha*, Vol. 140: Cheruthazham Grama Panchayath,, *Op. Cit.*, 1996, pp.10-11.

¹⁹⁸ . *Deshabhimani*, 20 February, 1946.

in the beginning. But the rate of increase over the years was declining.¹⁹⁹ It may be due to the economic condition of the area. If people could not meet their daily necessities, how could they contribute money to the war fund?

Politically the Communists had become strong in Malabar by this time. After the Kerala Congress Socialist Party had been transformed into the Kerala unit of the CPI, the Communists had been active in the peasant and labour fronts. During the period of the 'People's War' Policy, they used traditional art forms to whip up anti-Japanese and anti-fascist feelings.²⁰⁰ They started 'anti-Jap *melas*' (festive gathering) in all parts of Malabar. They used all their organisational capacity for anti-Jap propaganda. Meetings and processions were organised. They utilised all the cultural forms. Jap *Patakams* (invocation song sung during temple rituals) were performed.²⁰¹ So by the end of the war the general political consciousness had been radicalised and we find a spurt of peasant and working class protest between 1945 and 1947. The Communists also led struggles against black marketing and hoarding of grains.²⁰²

The peasants were the backbone of all popular movements of Malabar against the colonial state apparatus after the Second World War. The organised peasantry and workers participated in all the post war movements. The popular movements against hoarding of food grain were under the leadership of the peasants. 1940s witnessed new radical political consciousness of the peasantry along with the growth of the working class movement in Malabar.²⁰³ The trade union movements also flourished in the industrial centers of Malabar like Calicut and Cannanore.²⁰⁴ The beedi workers, tile factory and cotton mill workers etc got organized. Also numerous other workers of the scattered industrial units joined hands.

¹⁹⁹ . See Appendix B, Table 6.

²⁰⁰ . Cherukadu, *Op. Cit.*, pp.393-406; K.K.N.Kurup (ed.), *Keralaleeyante...Op. Cit.*

²⁰¹ . P.Narayanan Nair, *Ara Noottandiloode* (Mal.), Trissur, 1973, p.164.

²⁰² . *Deshabhimani*, 1943-44; A.V.Kunhambu, *Kayyurum Karivellurum* (Mal.), (1986), Reprint, Calicut, 2013, p.23; K.K.N.Kurup, *Agrarian... Op. Cit.*, p.11.

²⁰³ . N.E.Balaram, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1973, p.132.

²⁰⁴ . G.D.Nair, *Malabarile Thozhilali Prasthanam* (Mal.), Payyannur, 2004, p.21.

Like the other parts of South India Malabar also witnessed protest meetings against the INA trial. Demonstrations and processions were conducted in all parts of Malabar. KPCC formed INA Relief Committee with K.Damodara Menon as its secretary. Funds were mobilised and its details were published in *Mathrubhumi weekly*.²⁰⁵ In the beginning of 1946 Captain Lakshmi visited Kerala and attended public meetings in Calicut, Kanhangad and other places.²⁰⁶ The visit of Captain Lakshmi created new enthusiasm and vigour among the working classes. It was under such circumstances that the news of the RIN mutiny reached the people of Malabar.²⁰⁷ On February 21, 1946, A.C.Kannan Nair noted the details in his diary.²⁰⁸

The RIN mutiny affected the political scenario of Malabar. There were massive demonstrations against Bombay firing and sympathetic strikes to the RIN mutiny. The CPI took active leadership in conducting a *hartal* on February 26, 1946. It was decided to organise secret groups in all the factories to conduct strikes.²⁰⁹ P.Krishna Pillai, a Communist leader organized meetings and demonstrations all over Malabar.²¹⁰ Most of the workers came out from their place of work and participated in the *hartal* on February 26. Cotton mill and beedi workers of Chirakkal also joined by organizing protest meetings. But the Chirakkal Congress Election Committee tried to prevent the workers from participating in the protest meetings. They exhibited banners which declared

²⁰⁵ . K.A.Damodaran Menon, *Thirinju Nokkumbol* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1981, pp.195-96; *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Calicut, Janaury 1946.

²⁰⁶ . K.K.N.Kurup, A.C. *Kannan Nair...Op. Cit.*, p.139.

²⁰⁷ . *Mathrubhumi*, 20 February, 1946; *Deshabhimani*, 20 February, 1946.

²⁰⁸ . K.K.N.Kurup, A.C. *Kannan Nair...Op. Cit.*, p.138.

²⁰⁹ . P.Andalatt, *Sakhavu Krishnapillai* (Mal.), (1979), Reprint, Trivandrum, 1989, p.142.

²¹⁰ . P.Krishna Pillai came to Malabar from Travancore to participate in the Civil disobedience movement. After the Civil disobedience movement, he became a Socialist and later, a Communist. A fiery orator and able organiser, he took the initiative in organizing protest meetings and demonstrations when the mutiny broke out. Azheekkodan Raghavan, another Communist leader has reminiscended that the news of the mutiny reached them when they were reading newspaper in the morning at Chirakkal taluk Weavers Union Office. P.Krishna Pillai jumped up and with 'fire blazing from his eyes' announced that the British had fired on the ratings and that they should protest, "Sakhavu Azheekkodan Raghavan" in *KSRTC Association Azheekkodan Souvener* (Mal.), 1973, p.94.

these strikes as illegal.²¹¹ They declared that Congress did not recognize these strikes.

Another important place where protest meetings were held was Karivellur. The CPI Karivellur branch organised *hartal* on February 26, 1946. All the shops were closed. In the evening, there were processions of workers. They paraded through the streets shouting anti-imperialist slogans and then took part in a meeting in the nearby *maidan*. The meeting was addressed by local communist leader, K.Krishnan. It passed a resolution which demanded the Congress and League to address the issue of RIN mutineers.²¹² The cotton mill workers of Cherukunnu and Kannapuram also observed *hartal*. The beedi workers and cotton mill workers of Peralassery also held a meeting presided over by K.K. Kunhikannan, a local communist leader.

A similar protest meeting organised by cotton mill workers of Thiruvannur was addressed by local Communist leader, M.Apputti. In Payyannur, the workers and students observed *hartal* and was addressed by E.Kannan.²¹³ They passed a protest resolution supported the demands of the naval ratings. So did the workers of Mayyal.

The protest meetings and demonstrations continued on February 27 at Kannatiparambu by cotton mill workers under the leadership of K.Krishnan Nambiar.²¹⁴ At Chala near Cannanore, A.K.Gopalan, a prominent Communist leader, addressing a rally criticized Patel's appeal to the naval ratings to surrender. According to him, "In the struggle against imperialism, Patel should have asked Wavell to surrender and not the naval ratings."²¹⁵ Subramanya Shenoy and K.Madhavan, prominent Communist leaders and freedom fighters of North Malabar, recalled those days of revolutionary fervour. They remembered that

²¹¹ . *Deshabhimani*, 27 February, 1946.

²¹² . *Ibid.*

²¹³ . *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ . *Ibid.*, 28 February, 1946.

²¹⁵ . *Ibid* ; G.D.Nair, *Op.Cit.*, p.62.

many protest demonstrations and meetings were organised in Payyannur, Kanhangad and other places.²¹⁶

On February 26, the workers in the spinning mill of Samuel Aaron, a Congress leader, at Pappinissery went on a strike to sympathise with the naval mutiny. Some of these workers were retrenched and the strike lasted 110 days.²¹⁷ The workers under the leadership of P.Krishna Pillai protested against the deed of Aaron who employed *goondas* (a unruly person, ruffin) to suppress the fighting workers.²¹⁸ The workers in and around Cannanore came out in strong support against Aaron.²¹⁹ But the management dismissed all the workers who participated resulting in an indefinite strike. A strike Committee was formed under the leadership of P.Krishna Pillai.²²⁰ C.Kannan was its President and K.P.Stanley Secretary.²²¹ Aaron was ready to reinstate the workers if they apologised. But the workers were not ready to do that. They considered that if they apologised in this matter, it will be a disgrace for the national movement itself. So they stood firm.²²² They got the local support. Peasants and people brought food for the workers.²²³ Thus the strike went on for 110 days.²²⁴ The strike came to an end only by sending it to arbitration.²²⁵ After negotiations, Aaron reinstated the workers. But he dismissed some of them who in Aaron's argument, tried to kill him.

The Aaron mill strike shows that RIN Mutiny that happened in Bombay and other sea ports in India had a greater impact down even in deep South. Obviously it had shown how the civilians had taken it as a problem of

²¹⁶ . Interview, Subramanya Shenoy, at his residence in Payyannur on 12 November, 2011 and K.Madhavan, at his residence in Kanhangad on February 15, 2002.

²¹⁷ . Home-Political, Poll (I), FR of Madras for the First Half of March 1946, File No.8/3/46; Andalatt, *Op.Cit.*, pp.142-43.

²¹⁸ . *Azhekkodan Souveneer*, *Op.Cit.*, p. 95.

²¹⁹ . P.Andalatt (ed.), *Sakhakkale Munnote* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1998, p.452.

²²⁰ . Bhaskaran (ed.), *Op.Cit.*, p.135; *Vikasana Rekha*, Vol.141: Kannapuram Grama Panchayath Kerala State Planning Board, 1996, p.12.

²²¹ . *Deshabhimani*, 28 February, 1946.

²²² . *Vikasana Rekha*, Vol.141:Pappinisseri Grama Panchayath, *Op. Cit.*, p.4.

²²³ . C.Bhaskaran (ed.), *Op.Cit.*, p.126.

²²⁴ . Andalatt (ed.), *Sakhakkale...Op. Cit.*, p.452.

²²⁵ . G.D.Nair, *Op.Cit.*, pp.62-63.

their own. The workers' strike was a sign of solidarity. People, from both rural and urban areas, accepting this as affecting their daily lives spontaneously supported the movement.

Student's role in the strikes was outstanding. They held meetings, processions and boycotted classes. Reports of their involvement came in from all over Malabar. Students boycotted classes on February 25 and 26 and went for processions led by Communist leaders. The pro-Congress students also participated. The students shouted anti-British slogans and passed resolutions condemning military action, sympathising with the mutiny and demanding an impartial enquiry.

Some of the events are recorded here:

- a. On February 26, the Federation students and Congress students of Alakkad Higher Elementary school jointly observed *hartal* to protest against the Bombay firing. They informed the Principal about the *hartal* and protest meetings were held near the school premises. The meeting was presided over by Parameswaran Namboodiri and addressed by M. Raghavan Nambiar. They passed a protest resolution against the police and military firing at Bombay and supported the demands of the ratings and asked the government to concede the demands of the ratings.²²⁶
- b. At Payyannur Student Federation and Muslim Student Federation jointly conducted processions.
- c. At Nilambur, students organised processions which demanded the release of Captain Rashid Ali and protested against Bombay firing. They hoisted Congress, League and Student Federation flags.
- d. The students of Karivellur Higher Elementary school also observed *hartal* and conducted processions shouting anti-imperialist slogans.
- e. On March 2, 1946 Valluvanad *Taluk* student meeting was held at Shornnur. It passed a protest resolution against Bombay firing and

²²⁶ . *Deshabhimani*, 27 February, 1946.

expressed sympathy towards the demands of the ratings. The meeting was inaugurated by P.Bhaskaran and flag was hoisted by E.M.S Namboodiripad, a prominent Communist Leader.²²⁷

The remarkable feature of the student's solidarity movement was their joint demonstrations. The joint demonstrations of Student Federation, Muslim Students and pro-Congress organizations revealed the unity of the student community on this issue, which was absent among the major political parties. The nationalist leaders did not seem to encourage the students' agitation in support of the naval mutineers. The holding of different flags also demonstrated this camaraderie. It is another matter whether these were sanctioned by the leaders of these student organizations or not. This fraternization was unprecedented in Malabar. It has to be noted that the student community irrespective of their communal or political affiliations had magnificently responded to the call of the RIN ratings, exhibiting acts of selfless devotion, marvels of resourcefulness and resistance along with their countrymen in their mission for combating the imperialist forces.

The students had realised that they had a decisive role to play in the final battle of India's freedom. They had indeed shaken the roots of imperialism during the INA release campaign. Now they upheld a distinct sense of awareness that was seething in the minds of the RIN ratings, that the Indian defence forces were truly national and that they should not be utilized for suppressing the freedom movements inside or abroad.

The working class participation in the political activity in Malabar shows the reciprocity between the problem of the working class and the attitude of the political leadership. K.Madhavan recollects how the RIN mutiny had shaken imperialism in India. The Communist Party utilised the situation to organize class struggles and other struggles like *Thol Viraku Samaram* in North Malabar.²²⁸ The CPI mobilized the working class in the national liberation

²²⁷ . *Ibid.*, 3 March, 1946.

²²⁸ . This was for asserting the right to collect firewood and from an estate which was forbidden by its owner. K.Madhavan, *Op. Cit.*, p.186.

struggle. Through gradual political participation, he claimed, the leftists could alter the political culture of Malabar and the class consciousness of the working classes was developed. This made the national movement in Malabar more revolutionary.²²⁹

The various strikes and demonstrations of the workers show the importance of political ideology in the mobilisation of people. Participation by workers in a strike for better wages was understandable. But expression of solidarity with a naval uprising was quite different. The workers also received public support as was the case in Aaron mill strike. It should also be noted that there were no urban-rural divide as far as demonstrations and protests were concerned. This differentiated Malabar from other places such as Bombay, where protests and demonstrations took place only in urban areas.

It is interesting to note that the question of violence was seldom raised by the Congress leaders when they spoke about the mutiny. Earlier when the struggles of different sections of the society had developed in Malabar, the Rightists within the Congress had raised the questions of violence, pointing out that the Leftists were against the Gandhian ideal of non-violence. But at that time, actual violence was absent, as peasant movements and labour strikes were non-violent. So the 'bogey' of violence was raised during 1934-40 to oppose the growing strength of the leftists. In dealing with the mutiny the Congress leaders were concerned, it would seem, more with discipline in the armed forces after independence. Forms of struggle, we would admit, depended on the situation and context. Any evaluation which did not take these into consideration would be inadequate.

In the end when we sit back and evaluate the events, we will come to the natural conclusion that hardships, manifold sufferings by way of poverty, starvation, epidemics and any number of hardships are not enough to draw people into protests and demonstrations. It requires much more than that to spearhead and lead people into meaningful protests. A strong ideology is an absolute must to inspire and organise mass movements. And, to sustain any

²²⁹. K.Madhavan, *Op. Cit.*, p.186.

such movements, a strong leadership is required. While the ideology of nationalism spurred the people of South India as whole, in Malabar nationalism and Communism together provided the much needed will and enthusiasm. In spite of all that was said and done to inspire the people, it has to be admitted that the protests lost their initial momentum and were not sustained. Either they were suppressed or the ratings went back to duty. Another reason for losing the momentum was that the expressions of solidarity by other sections of society were not strong enough except in Malabar to carry the mutiny forward to its natural conclusion. The mutiny remained only as strong protests of short term duration. At the same time the effect the RIN mutiny had on the working classes should not be overlooked. The Communist Party succeeded in creating an atmosphere of labour unrest in the South. Trade union movements became stronger. The Leftist Party encashed on the situation by creating revolutionary fervour. People from all walks of life joined hands to participate in mass actions. To an extent this was unprecedented. Yet another social group who came to the forefront were the students. In many places they acted on their own, without waiting for guidance and approval from their elders. Their expressions of solidarity were also unprecedented in that it cut across caste, religious and class divisions. However, in the final analysis, there is no escaping the fact that the mutiny did not achieve the results it deserved.

Chapter 5

POLITICAL REACTIONS, BRITISH ATTITUDE AND ECHOES IN THE ASSEMBLY AND MEDIA

A combination between the Hindus and Muslims and others for the purpose of violent action is unholy and will lead to and probably is a preparation for mutual violence- bad for India and the world.

Mahatma Gandhi¹

Reactions towards the February uprising were varied. Media gave wide publicity to the revolt and various political leaderships reacted cautiously. Though the British government tried to dismiss it as a mere mutiny officially they were aware of the severe implications of the rebellion.

Section 1

Attitude of political parties

The Mutineers who wanted to do their best in the cause of the country's freedom had dreamt of capturing the navy and placing it at the disposal of the national leaders. They wanted the national leaders to come and lead their battle against the British. But to their great surprise none of the national leaders came to them. The major political parties did not support or co-ordinate the seizure of military power. The nationalist leaders did not want such a revolt. As one of the leaders of the mutiny writes:

We thought that all we had to do after the takeover of the navy was to report to the national leaders. The Royal Indian Navy (RIN) was offered to them as the 'Indian National Navy' on a platter. The leadership did not touch it, it is shocking. We felt bewildered,

¹ . Mahatma Gandhi's statement on the RIN Mutiny and Bombay uprising cited in *Harijan* on 3 March, 1946.

despirited and humiliated. We had captured the ships. Alright, but where does one find a navigator.²

He further writes that when news of the disturbances reached Mahatma Gandhi who was in Poona then – he casually told his evening prayer meeting that if the ratings were unhappy they could have resigned. An unfaltering practitioner of non-violence the Mahatma tried to teach his followers the efficacy of his chosen path for decades and had seen to it that all those who did not fall in line with him were kept out of the National Liberation Movement. “To Gandhi, the test was whether it was violent or not. Our mutiny smelt of violence. And that ended all argument. Whether the ratings were in a position to resign all was a peripheral matter.”³

The national leaders joined with the British in stating that the rebellion was not really ‘political’ but only ‘economic’; and that servicemen were concerned only with such minor conditions of life as the quality of food. They reassured the men that they would support their just grievances and urged them to surrender to the British. The organisers of the naval revolt against British state power afterwards sank into obscurity, their conditions unrecognised within independent India.

The first national leader whom the Naval Central Strike Committee (NCSC) approached was Aruna Asaf Ali, the left wing Congress leader, who happened to be then in Bombay. To some of the ratings, ‘she appeared to resemble the legendary Laxmi Bhai of Jhansi.’⁴ They hoped that Aruna would come and lead the naval mutineers.⁵ But they were disappointed. B.C.Dutt writes, “She merely advised us to remain calm. This sounded like the language of the Mahatma. It did not make sense to us. The navy was under our control. We had indications that the army and Air force would soon fall in step with

² . B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny of the Innocents*, Bombay, 1971, pp.137-38.

³ . *Ibid.*

⁴ . B.C.Dutt, ‘Revolt of the Ratings of the Royal Indian Navy’ in Nishith Ranjan Ray, et. al. (ed.), *Challenge: A Saga of India’s Struggle for Freedom*, New Delhi, 1984, p.596.

⁵ . *The Bombay Chronicle*, Bombay, 20 February, 1946.

us.”⁶ Aruna however sent a telegram to Jawaharlal Nehru: ‘Naval strike tense, situation serious climaxing, to grim close, you alone can control and avoid tragedy. Request your immediate presence in Bombay.’⁷ According to her, “The mutineers had mixed political demands with their service grievances.”⁸ She asked them to separate the two and formulate their service demands for submitting to the naval authorities. When she was told that the mutineers themselves were the then authorities of the navy, she directed them to see the highest Congress authority in Bombay, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, for she thought that what the ratings sought was the support of the national forces for their just cause. She did not, however, clarify what the cause was. She however did take a quite independent and different stand on the RIN revolt. She had all support and sympathy for the entire demands of the rebels. Through press statement she declared, “I am sure the Congress and the labour and the student’s organization of Bombay will extend their moral support to their legitimate demands.”⁹ Later she demanded the reinstatement of discharged ratings from the navy.¹⁰

The members of the NCSC went from one Congress leader to another. Sardar Patel refused to give support to ratings’ revolt. Patel’s biographer wrote:

He was convinced that the British were sincere in their desire to quit India. They had become reconciled to the inevitable. To those who talked of struggle with the government, he said it was no use flogging a dying horse and instead of fighting the British, the time has come to help them to roll up their bedding and depart.¹¹

⁶ . B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny...Op. Cit.*, p. 139.

⁷ . *The Bombay Chronicle*, 19 February, 1946.

⁸ . *Free Press Journal*, Bombay, 20 February, 1946.

⁹ . *The Bombay Chronicle*, 20 February, 1946.

¹⁰ . In an interview given to *The Blitz* on 1 February, 1947, Aruna Asaf Ali demanded to the reinstatement of discharged mutineers, *The Blitz*, Bombay, 1 February 1947; *NL 9988, Articles in Connection with the Mutiny Published in the Press*, Sl. No. 82, RIN Mutiny Papers, NAI. In the 1980s Aruna Asaf Ali felt that had the revolutionary spirit shown by the people during the Quit India Movement and the RIN mutiny, been mobilised for a final round of the struggle for freedom, the sub-continent’s partition might possibly have been averted. See G.N.S.Raghavan, *Aruna Asaf Ali: A Compassionate Radical*, New Delhi, 1999, p.81.

¹¹ . Kewal.L.Punjabi, *The Indomitable Sardar: A Political Biography of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Bombay, 1962, p.713.

Patel persuaded the ratings to surrender on February 23, giving an assurance that the national parties would prevent any victimization.¹² He gave emphasis to the discipline in the navy. He wrote to Andhra Congress leader Viswanathan on 1st March, 1946, 'discipline in the army cannot be tampered with... we will want army even in free India.'¹³

In a letter to Lord Wavell dated February 27, 1946, Sir J.Colville (Governor of Bombay) reported that the Congress leaders had decried any share in the mutiny and had advised people to pressure order:

I received a message from Vallabhbhai Patel to this effect on Thursday, together with an offer to do anything which he could to prevent bloodshed. Aruna Asaf Ali had been attempting to fish in troubled waters, but had received no encouragement from Patel. An order had been served on her debarring her from taking part in public meetings. It was reported by the police that the Congress Socialists and Communists were busily stirring up trouble obsessively in sympathy with the mutineers and that we might anticipate strikes and outbreaks over the week end.¹⁴

When following the British firings and killings of naval strikers at Bombay and Karachi, the Communist party, trade unions and student organizations of Bombay called for a general strike and *hartal* to be observed on February 22, 1946. Patel issued a counter statement which said:

There should be no attempts to call for a *hartal* or stoppage of mills or closing of schools and colleges. Such a thing is not likely to help the unfortunate naval ratings in their efforts to redress of their legitimate grievances or in the great difficulty in which they find themselves. All possible efforts were being made by the Congress to help them out of their difficulty and to see that their genuine

¹² . *The Bombay Chronicle*, 22 February, 1946.

¹³ . Maniben Patel & G.M.Nandurkar (ed.), *Sardar's Letters*, Vol.IV, Ahmedabad, 1977, p.165.

¹⁴ . Sir.J.Colville to Wavell, 27 February, 1946 in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power 1942-47*, Vol.VI, London, 1976, p.1079.

grievances are immediately redressed. The Congress as a big party in the Central Assembly and is doing its best help to them. I would therefore earnestly appeal to them to be patient and peaceful.¹⁵

He not only toned down the intensity of the revolt but totally ignored the 'political content' of the ratings' demands. But people ignored the appeal of Patel. On February 22, the people of Bombay - scores of workers, students, middle classes and shopkeepers came into the streets to express their solidarity with the ratings' fight against British. Peaceful demonstrations assumed violent forms when the fully white military and military police resorted to indiscriminate firing. People set up barricades on the streets which became the scenes of pitched battles between the people and armed forces. More than 250 people were killed in Bombay on that single day. On February 22, 1946 the Central Legislative Assembly debated the adjournment motion on the revolt presented by Asaf Ali, a prominent Congress leader of the time. His motion and the subsequent discussion reduced the naval uprising to a 'grave situation' arising purely out of the 'mishandling by immediate authorities concerned.' Moving his adjournment motion, Asaf Ali said:

I am as conscious as anybody else that the army is to be kept out of party politics. I do not want a single man in the Army who is not patriotic. The army must serve the people and fight for their country and so far as they were animated with this feeling. I respect and honour them.¹⁶

This appeared to be strange logic to the mutineers. How could they be patriotic and at the same time remain loyal to the foreign rulers? But Asaf Ali and the majority of the Congress leadership had their own logic. They thought that India's ship was nearing the shore and had to be piloted as cautiously as possible out of the shoals which lay ahead.

Gandhi condemned the ratings in unequivocal terms advising them to resign without bothering about the fact that a defence person could not resign,

¹⁵ . *Ibid.*

¹⁶ . *Legislative Assembly Debates*, Official Report, Vol.II, February, 1946, p.1346-47.

he could only be dismissed.¹⁷ The problem of violence or non-violence was the main issue before him. On this ground, he even made a controversial statement that “a combination between Hindus and Muslims and others for the purpose of violent action is unholy and will lead to and probably is a preparation for mutual violence bad for India and the world.”¹⁸ This is a strange logic. Why should not leaders learn from the masses that instinctively put up joint resistance against the military? Why should this not spur them to seek agreement on a joint plan of common freedom so that all Indians may together launch a united struggle against imperialism? Aruna Asaf Ali came to severely criticise Gandhi on his advice to the ratings. She was unable to understand Gandhi calling upon RIN ratings to resign if their condition was humiliating. If they did that they would have to give up their only means of livelihood. Moreover they were fighting for certain principles. If they resigned now there would be hundreds in those days of unemployment to take their places who would be subjected to the same discrimination and treatment and the RIN ratings would not have achieved anything. In *Harijan*, an article named ‘Ideas of Contrast’, Gandhi replied to Aruna Asaf Ali’s anxieties:

Those who hold that enlistment of the RIN is their only means of livelihood must have a very poor opinion of them. A soldier’s is a hard life. He is disciplined to work in co-operation and trained to work with the pickaxe and the spade. Such a one will disdain to think that apart from soldering, he has no means of livelihood. They would have gained honour and dignity if they had manfully given up their job and taught the citizens of Bombay the way to save honour and dignity.¹⁹

There were many who criticized Gandhiji’s stand towards the RIN mutiny. According to Gail Omvedt, “Gandhi as friend of capitalists and Brahmins, attempting to pacify and control mass uprisings throughout India-

¹⁷ . B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny...Op. Cit.*, p.138.

¹⁸ . *Harijan: Journal of Applied Gandhism*, Vol. X, 1946, New York, 1973, 3 March, 1946, p.6.

¹⁹ . *Harijan*, *Op. Cit.*, 10 March, 1946, p.36.

this is a less attractive picture than Gandhi the saintly politician, living in slum areas, travelling third class on the trains and sweeping out village untouchable quarters.’²⁰

Gandhi managed to establish Congress as a mass organization linked to village elites throughout the country. The result was the pacification of the Indian revolution. Jawaharlal Nehru took a different view point of other Congress leaders. Referring to the naval strike, he said:

This strike is of great political importance. Our boys in their zeal might have done thing with which they may disagree but that cannot minimise its importance or wash away the powerful reactions which this event has created in the country. It has also shown that the iron wall which the British created between Indian army and the Indian people has collapsed and that the Indian soldiers who mostly hail from the peasant class are as sensitive to political and economic exploitation as their brethren in fields and factories.²¹

Nehru said that the year 1946 would be the most eventful and decisive year for India. In other words, he said, ‘The 150 year old British rule in this country has almost come to an end.’²² It was on February 25, Nehru reached at Bombay. On the next day he addressed the public meeting in the city.²³ In his characteristic way, Nehru conveyed an idea that the revolt was both right and wrong. He spoke thus:

The RIN episode has opened an altogether new chapter in the history of the armed forces of India. It has been my special conviction that our armed forces should be closely connected with

²⁰ . Gail Omvedt, ‘Gandhi and the Pacification of the Indian Revolution’ in *Robin Jeffrey, et.al. (ed.), India: Rebellion to Republic, Selected Writings*, New Delhi, 1990, p.75.

²¹ . *The National Herald*, Lucknow, 27 February, 1946; Sarveppalli Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. XV, New Delhi, 1982, p.2.

²² . *The Bombay Chronicle*, 27 February, 1946; Sarveppalli Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works... Op. Cit.*, Vol.XV, p.22.

²³ . *The Hindu*, Madras, 28 February, 1946; Sarveppalli Gopal has written that ‘Patel was thought to be none too pleased about’ the visit. See his *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, 1889-1947*, Vol.1, New Delhi, 1975, pp.311-12.

the civilian population. During the past the armed forces have worked as part of the army of occupation and have been freely used as instruments of repression by our foreign rulers.²⁴

Pointing out the fact that our army was not an army of a free nation, Nehru said, “Our armed forces have every right to revolt against the foreign ruler in order to achieve the freedom of our country. But they committed a mistake in fighting against ‘heavy odds’ with no provision and very little ammunition.”²⁵ So Nehru had all ‘sympathy’ for the ratings. Though he recognized the great political importance of the naval revolt, but as the revolt was over, none of his theoretical formulations indeed, revolutionary in spirit would have had any immediate practical implications.²⁶ Further in his hundred minute’s speech, Nehru did not say a single word about the brutal and indiscriminate firing by the white military. In his speech, Nehru denounced the violence of ant-social elements who had exploited the public indignation. What has happened in Bombay, he said:

Clearly demonstrates how anti-social elements in a vast city like Bombay exploited the situation. In every free country there is this problem. The time has come when we would direct our energies along the channel of constructive work. What happened in Bombay shows that the constructive tendency is lacking.²⁷

Freedom was not far off and Nehru impressed this on his audience. “For the past 25 years”, he continued, “The people of India have made tremendous sacrifices in the cause winning our national independence. Our freedom is near at hand today. We have all the virtues for winning our freedom. But I confess that we lack the discipline which is essential for a free country.”²⁸ Abul Kalam Azad in an interview stated that RIN mutiny was rather ill-advised. He

²⁴ . *Free Press Journal*, 27 February, 1946; Sarvepalli Gopal (ed.), *Selected works...Op. Cit.*, Vol.XV, p.2.

²⁵. Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawahar...Op. Cit.*, p.312.

²⁶. B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny...Op. Cit*, p.216.

²⁷. *The National Herald*, 26 February, 1946.

²⁸. Frank Moraes, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Bombay, 1969, p.314.

criticised that the ratings did not consult the national leadership before embarking on the step they took.²⁹

It can be seen that Congress as a major political party did not give support to the revolt. The leaders thought that it was their navy that was rebelling against authority, that 'lawlessness' once encouraged was very difficult to stop. Freedom was at hand and it needed only to be negotiated, not 'brought with blood.'³⁰ It is very clear from the statement of Patel who persuaded the ratings to call off the agitation as 'the dawn of freedom is breaking and the sun will rise in a few months.'³¹ The majority of the official records of the time tend to prove that Congress and Muslim League were prepared to assist the British to restore 'law and order' by putting an end to the RIN revolt and the general upsurge.³² Natarajan, then editor of *the Free Press Journal* stated in the preface to B.C.Dutt's book:

I was greatly amazed at one stage to receive a message from Asaf Ali who was in Bombay on a short visit. His host dropped in one evening, and taking me aside said very solemnly, 'Asaf Ali has told me to remind you that Indians will soon be in power. It will be very difficult for the defence minister if the strictest discipline is not upheld now'. There was more of this, with the suggestion that Asaf Ali has expected to be the Defence minister himself.³³

It was indicative of the new attitude of the Congress men who feeling that independence was at hand, feared that the last delicate negotiations would be upset by anything the British disapproved. It is most significant that it was while the RIN strike was on that Asaf Ali and Commander-in-Chief had

²⁹ . *The Statesman*, New Delhi, 26 February, 1946, Extracts from Newspapers, NAI. See also his *India Wins Freedom*, Calcutta, 1959.

³⁰ . Michael Edwards, *The Last Days of British India*, London, 1963, p.113.

³¹ . *The Bombay Chronicle*, 22 February, 1946; Quoted in Durgadas (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-50*, Vol. II, Ahmedabad, 1972, p.xix.

³² . Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, p.1078.

³³ . Natarajan, Preface to B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny...Op. Cit.*,p.7

constant talks about the future of the armed forces and the reconstitution of the Defence Consultative Committee to include popular leaders.³⁴

Muslim League's attitude towards the revolt was the same as that of the Indian National Congress. When the Strike Committee members met I.I.Chundrigar, President of the Bombay branch of the Muslim League, the latter declined to give any 'assurance without a directive from the Muslim League High Command 'that is Jinnah' then in Calcutta.³⁵ To Liaqat Ali Khan, the Secretary of All India Muslim League, the RIN revolt was just a 'trouble' that could have been avoided by authorities if they had been a little more responsible.³⁶

Chundrigar and S.K. Patil, Bombay Provincial Congress Committee Secretary (BPCC) offered the services of volunteers to help the police in the maintenance of law and order during the strike. In his report to the Viceroy, the Governor of Bombay, Sir J. Colville stated:

I received calls from Chundrigar, Provincial head of the Muslim League and S.K.Patil, BPCC, Secretary, both of whom assured me of their anxiety to allay the disturbances and offering the help of volunteers to assist the police. I saw several of these volunteers on the following days and they did useful though limited work.³⁷

Jinnah's statement made on February 22, from Calcutta put the final seal on League's position. The statement said:

Newspaper reports from various parts of India and particularly from Bombay, Karachi and Calcutta show that the RIN men have some very just grievances and it has been made clear by them how deeply they are affected by these grievances and how they genuinely feel hurt about their present position. No civilized government or

³⁴ . Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, p.1079. It is not surprising that the AICC files, in NMML do not contain any matter relating to the RIN mutiny.

³⁵ . B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny...Op. Cit.*, pp,178-79.

³⁶ . *Ibid.*, p.208.

³⁷ . Sir J.Colville to Wavell dated 27 February, 1946,Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, p.1079.

responsible man in this country can treat their feelings and grievances lightly.³⁸

Then he gave his ‘assurance’ to get their ‘grievances’ redressed if the ratings would ‘adopt constitutional, lawful and peaceful methods.’ He therefore appealed the ratings, ‘to call off the strike’ and to the public in general; not to add to the difficulties of the situation. Jinnah finally showed his communal colour by making a special appeal to the Muslim ratings. He concluded thus: “Particularly I call upon the Muslims to stop and to create no further trouble until we are in a position to handle this very serious situation.”³⁹ Jinnah’s statement was calculated to split our ranks, writes B.C. Dutt.⁴⁰ The ratings had in fact hailed from widely different regions and religions. They were completely free of communal virus that had infected the Indian public life of time. The slogans calling ‘for national unity’, ‘Hindus and Muslims unite’ and ‘Inquilab Zindabad’ resounded in the streets of Bombay. The ratings marching the streets with flags of Congress and League tied together were really a strange sight for the people of Bombay. To the mutineers, it was the difference between the Congress and League which at that time seemed to be holding up India’s independence. Hence their action of carrying the Congress and League flags symbolised national unity. The RIN Mutiny thus showed, what Aruna Asaf Ali later correctly remarked that it was far easier to unite the Hindus and Muslims at the barricade than at the constitutional front.⁴¹ Many ratings felt that the national leaders betrayed the ratings in as such as their commitments and promises were not fulfilled. It may be because that they had been fully assured off the transfer of power by the British.⁴²

The Communist Party of India seemed to be the only political party which gave its whole hearted support to the RIN revolt in all its political implications. There were many references that the Communist party urged the

³⁸ . B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny...Op. Cit.*, pp.182-83.

³⁹ . *Ibid.*, p.184; *Amrit Bazar patrika*, Calcutta, 22 February, 1946.

⁴⁰ . B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny...Op. Cit.*, p.184.

⁴¹ . *Free Press Journal*, 26 February, 1946; Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India* (1983), Reprint, New Delhi, 2005, p.425.

⁴² . Biswanath Bose, *The RIN Mutiny: 1946*, New Delhi, 1988, pp.15-16.

people to join the defence forces during the period of the Second World War.⁴³ This was when they adopted the 'People's war' policy.⁴⁴ Besides the Communist Party documents show that the Communists tried to spread revolutionary propaganda among the soldiers and police and explained the necessity of an armed insurrection together with the toiling masses of the country against British rule.⁴⁵ The Party understanding was thus:

The Indian soldiers and police are socially in the main, poor peasants who have been forced to seek employment in the army by poverty, landlessness and hunger. They fight for the allotment of land to the soldiers equally with all the other toiling peasants. They called upon its supporters to explain to the soldiers and ex-soldiers that the only means of acquiring land, abolishing indebtedness and getting work is the revolutionary overthrow of the British and the feudal supremacy. They called upon its organisation and class conscious workers and revolutionaries to begin organising revolutionary group among soldiers. The aim of these groups must be to persuade and prepare the soldiers to take action in support of a general armed insurrection of the people for liberty, land and a workers' and peasants' government. It is necessary to explain to the soldiers by concrete examples drawn from their daily lives (arbitrary action by the officers, shooting down of demonstrators, workers' strike, flagrant inequality of treatment of white and Indian soldiers, worse food, clothes, allowances etc) that Indian soldiers are only a blind tool in the hands of the British who use them to maintain the national and social oppression of the toiling masses of our country.⁴⁶

⁴³ . *Indian Communist Party documents, 1930-56*, The Democratic Research Service, Bombay, 1957; Jyothi Basu, (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Movement in India, 1944-48*, Vol. V, Calcutta, 1997, pp.103-127.

⁴⁴ . Hitler's invasion of Soviet Union in June 1941 transformed an imperialist war into a 'People's War' in the eyes of the Communists. For more details, see Jyothi Basu, (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, Vol. IV.

⁴⁵ . *Indian Communist Party documents 1930-56*, *Op.Cit.*

⁴⁶ . *Ibid.*

As a result, many joined the navy.⁴⁷ One of the participants of the mutiny stated that by 1945-46 about 500 party units were functioning inside the army.⁴⁸ There were many references that the followers of the party tried to form Communist groups within the navy. Pavanan, an ex-army man memorises in his autobiography that when he was in the army, he had close relations with the Communist Party and he spread Communist literature among the soldiers. He tried to form Communist unit in the navy.⁴⁹ But before that the naval revolt had broken out. So how far the Communist groups influenced the revolt is not clear.

Commodore J.W.Jefford, CO of HMIS Akbar reported before the Enquiry Commission that there were CID reports that 30 Communists serving in HMIS Akbar.⁵⁰ There were many other instances to show that the British followed an anti-Communist attitude in the defence forces. Some persons were released from the navy accused of their Communist party relations.⁵¹

The Communist Party issued statement supporting the RIN ratings' struggle. G.Adhikari, the Central Committee member of the CPI and D.S.Vaidya, Secretary of the Bombay Committee of the Communist Party kept in touch with the developments concerning the RIN revolt. Adhikari appealed to all leaders and parties particularly Congress to treat the RIN issue as important as the question of Indian National Army (INA) and see that justice was done to the ratings. *People's Age*, the chief organ of the CPI commented on the RIN revolt thus: "The strike of the Indian Naval ratings in Bombay is a historical event for more than a single event; it reflects the unity of the entire people against imperialist rule."⁵² Regarding the ratings demands of a political nature, The Organ said; "The inclusion of these demands marks the

⁴⁷ . Interview, M.Madhavan Atiyoti, For details, see chapter 1.

⁴⁸ . Interview, Murugesan, Madras, *In Retrospect, South India*, Vol. IV, 1946.

⁴⁹ . Pavanan, *Aadhyakala Smaranakal* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1990, pp.186-190; He was a renowned Malayalam writer.

⁵⁰ . *The RIN Mutiny Commission of Enquiry*, July 1946 (Hereafter *CER*), Serial No.6, RIN Mutiny papers, NAI, p.160.

⁵¹ .Interview, N.C.Rananavare, Banglore, *In Retrospect, South India*, Vol.IV, 1946; Rananavare served the native infantry in the Rajaram Rifles for about six months. Later he was released on the ground of Communist Party relationship.

⁵² . *People's Age*, New Delhi, 23 February, 1946.

identification of servicemen with their civilian brothers in the battle for Indian freedom.”⁵³ D.S. Vaidya issued a leaflet asking people to:

Support the demands of naval ratings, protest against racial discrimination and barbarous treatment towards the Indian boys. We appeal to leaders of all political parties in Bombay to support the demands of the ratings particularly, we ask the League and Congress leaders to take up the issue in the Central Assembly and see that the demands of these men are met.⁵⁴

The Communist Party submitted a memorandum entitled, *Towards a People's Navy* to the Enquiry Commission. It hailed that the mutiny, was the struggle of the men of the RIN for equality with the Royal Navy, was a part of our country's struggle for freedom and thus must be supported by every freedom loving Indian.⁵⁵ .E.M.S Namboodiripad critical of the leaders of the Congress or League following the path of negotiations wanted them to adopt the path of revolutionary struggles.⁵⁶ E.M.S argued that due to the negotiating policy of the Congress and League, although the naval mutiny became a great event in the history of Indian revolution, it did not become the forerunner of Indian revolution as expected by the organizers of the mutiny.⁵⁷ Jyoti Basu, the Communist leader regarded the naval revolt as an event of far reaching consequence. The British rulers in India were convinced that their days were numbered as it was no more possible for them to rule over India by force. It is in this background that the proposal of the Cabinet Mission and Mount Batten plan is to be evaluated.⁵⁸

The leadership of both the Congress and League had adopted the method of negotiation. The left, including the Communist Party on the other

⁵³ . *Ibid.*, 26 February, 1946.

⁵⁴ . Jyothi Basu, (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, Vol. V, p.232.

⁵⁵ . *Towards a People's Navy*, Pamphlet, 29 May, 1946, Contemporary Archives, JNU, New Delhi; Jyothi Basu, (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, Vol. V, pp.219-34.

⁵⁶ . E.M.S.Namboodiripad, *A History of Indian Freedom Struggle*, Trivandrum, 1986, p.491.

⁵⁷ . *Ibid.*, p. 491.

⁵⁸ . Jyothi Basu, (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 233.

hand, had not risen to the position of the national leadership of the Indian people including the members of the armed forces, although they had risen to the position of the leader of the working class in certain places like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras.

Though the official leadership of the Congress and League followed anti-mutiny approach, the local level Congress and League workers supported the mutiny. They were also willing to associate themselves with the Communists in protests and demonstrations. A crowded meeting of Ward Congress members was held at Thana area on February 21. It passed a resolution which supported the demands of the ratings and extended moral support to their strike.⁵⁹ To protest against the firing in the Castle barracks on February 21, the Bombay Municipal Corporation adjourned its meeting and passed resolution which criticized the government's policy towards the ratings.⁶⁰ On February 25, a jubilee meeting at Gaurishankar Park at Cuttack presided over by the President of Town Congress Committee, Biswanath Pandit, was convened under the joint auspices of the Congress and Communist party. It passed a resolution fully supporting the RIN ratings demands and condemning police and military firings and demanded that there must not be any victimisation of the mutineers.⁶¹ Representatives of Student Congress and Student Federation attended the meeting. Indian Student Congress actively participated in the solidarity movements. Purushotham Tricumdas, President of the Ex-service Association appealed the Congress leaders to take up the issue of the RIN ratings.⁶² Comrades of Bhagat Singh and Ex-prisoners of the Lahore Conspiracy Case who were recently released after 17 years of imprisonment held a meeting and passed resolution which demanded the trial of those officers who mishandled the situation. They extended support to the demands of the RIN ratings.⁶³ In an interview commenting on the Bombay happenings,

⁵⁹. *Free Press Journal*, 21 February, 1946.

⁶⁰. *The Bombay Chronicle*, 22 February, 1946.

⁶¹. *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, 26 February, 1946.

⁶². *The Bombay Chronicle*, 21 February, 1946.

⁶³. *Ibid.*, 26 February, 1946.

Vijayalakshmi Pandit remarked, “RIN revolt indicates rising temper of the services who are with the people in the country’s demand for freedom.”⁶⁴

At the same time there were many instances of harsh criticism against the mutineers. Hansa Mehta, President of the All India Women’s conference condemned the mutiny. She called it an ‘orgy of arson and mutiny’ and stated that ‘those who indulged in it were not the friends of India.’⁶⁵

It can be seen that the mutiny did not get the official support of either the Congress or the Muslim League.⁶⁶ But ordinary people, some of them ordinary members of the Congress, fraternized with the mutineers in a show of patriotic sentiments irrespective of their religious or political affiliations. This was a clear indication of the masses acting on their own. It could also be regarded as an expression of their opposition to the British.

We shall now take up the British attitude which would be followed by an evaluation of its manifestation in Assemblies and the media.

Section 2

British Attitude

The naval mutiny surprised the British authorities and the popular support it received rattled them. The then Viceroy’s Journal throws light on the RIN mutiny. Wavell recorded that February 19 was a day of alarms not excursions. He writes, “On 19th February, I met the Commander-in-Chief who was gloomy of all, though he was talking about sticking to our principles, he was really hoping that I would give a lead to recommend to HMG, surrender to public opinion and total abandonment of INA trials.”⁶⁷ It cleared that the naval authorities realized the danger of INA trials and its impact on the RIN mutiny. But the Government at first sought to trivialize the mutiny. They tried to

⁶⁴. *The Statesman*, 27 February, 1946.

⁶⁵. *The Deccan Chronicle*, Hyderabad, 26 February, 1946.

⁶⁶ . It is very interesting to note that after their discharge from the navy, the ratings returned home in a state of uncertainty with no one, including the politicians, giving them any credit for their participation in the mutiny. See Appendix C, Biographical Sketch.

⁶⁷. Penderel Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy’s Journal*, New Delhi, 1973, p.216.

characterize it as nothing more than a 'hunger strike.' On February 21 it was recorded:

A hunger strike by some ratings of signal school in Bombay on grounds of inadequate pay and racial discrimination touched off a mutiny by other ratings that took possession of their ships and threatened to open fire on the military guards.⁶⁸

British claimed that the RIN Revolt did not make any threat to the British Empire. But in reality they were alarmed by the mutiny and civil disturbances. In a letter to Wavell, dated February 27, 1946, Pethick Lawrence reported that we have had a disturbed week with the RIN mutiny and the serious riots in Bombay. All these disturbances are undoubtedly due in a large degree to the freedom of speech permitted to the political parties and press.⁶⁹ The day-to-day correspondences between Viceroy and the Secretary of State, Viceroy and the Governors revealed the intensity of their concern about the mutiny.⁷⁰ On February 24, Wavell reported to Attlee that the primary cause of whole trouble was speeches by Congress leaders since September last.

I have warned them publicly and privately on many occasions. The top leaders of the Congress had nothing to do with inciting this mutiny and did not wish it. Gandhi has put out a good statement condemning violence. But some smaller Congress fry had a good deal to do with it and probably also Communist agitators.⁷¹

In a broadcast from New Delhi on February 25, 1946, General Claude Auchinleck said that:

The word 'strike' had been loosely used to describe the recent acts of indiscipline and disobedience in certain sections of the armed forces in India. The correct word is mutiny and this refers to any collective act of a few or many persons subject to naval, military or

⁶⁸. *Ibid.*, pp.216-17.

⁶⁹. Wavell to Lawrence, 27 February, 1946, Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, p.1075.

⁷⁰. *Ibid.*, 19 February, 1946 to 22 March, 1946, pp.1016-1234.

⁷¹. Wavell to Attlee, 24 February, 1946, *Ibid.*, p.1054.

air force law against the legal authority of the service. Unrest in certain of the armed forces in India has undoubtedly caused misgivings in people's minds. Any attempt to whitewash collective disobedience by using the civil term 'strike' is damaging to the discipline and stability of the armed forces and can only react unfavourably. On law and order generally the use of the term strike is dangerous in that it suggests something less serious than mutiny and implies that the armed forces can be excused if they indulge in such direct action as is legally open to those in civil employment.⁷²

Government resorted to suppressive measures to curb the mutiny. It is a clear sign of the nervous state of the government. Troops were called on the 19th when police firing could not restrain the ratings. A Maratha battalion rounded up ratings from the streets while troops besieged the ships and forced surrender. The government's repressive measures were clear from Attlee's announcement in the House of Commons that RN ships were proceeding to Bombay.⁷³ It was confirmed by Admiral Godfrey's stern ultimatum to the ratings, the troop's encirclement of ships and the bombers flying over them. Peace was restored by Monday 25th, following heavy causality among the civilians – 228 dead and 1046 injured. In Karachi eight ratings were killed when troops forced ships to surrender. Police firing in the city left eight dead and eighteen injured. In Madras city four died and many were injured.

The British Government's support of the attitude of Claude Auchinleck, on the naval revolt was announced in the House of Commons on February 27, by the Prime Minister and in the House of Lords by Lord Pethick Lawrence, Secretary of state for India. Atlee declared:

The British government fully agrees and will support the attitude of Auchinleck who justly enjoys the confidence of all responsible sections of both British and Indian opinion. Turning to the civil disturbances, he told both the Congress and Muslim League leaders

⁷². *The Statesman*, 26 February, 1946.

⁷³. *The Bombay Chronicle*, 22 February, 1946.

co-operated in condemning and attempting to stop the disturbances but he blamed the Communist party for their support to the movement.⁷⁴

On March 8, a meeting of Defence Consultative Committee was held at New Delhi to discuss the mutiny under the president-ship of C-in-C Claude Auchinleck. He made a statement of the policy he was recommending to the Government of India (GOI) viz. there would be no vindictive punishment and appointment of an enquiry commission. The government constantly declared that there will be no victimisation. But after the surrender of the ratings, the mutineers were tried and dismissed from service. Some of them were given one to three months rigorous imprisonment.

In a letter to His Majesty King George VI dated on March 22, 1946, Wavell reported that:

The RIN Mutineers came on us with practically no warning. The RIN expanded so rapidly during the war, that it is very short of experienced officers, Petty Officers and it did not have the background and traditions of the Indian Army. But that the expression of any grievances there took the form it did was undoubtedly due to instigation by political agitators, Communist and left-wing Congress. The riots in Bombay which accompanied the mutiny were simply due to the dangerous mobs which are always ready in any Indian city to seize the opportunity for burning and looting. They have of course been encouraged by the violent speaking during the last six months. A very ugly situation was extremely well-handled by the police and military.⁷⁵

After the mutiny the authorities discussed the loyalty of Indian ratings. They felt that RIN and Royal Indian Air force (RIAF) cannot be regarded as reliable. To tackle the situation the C-in-C of India has estimated that he would

⁷⁴. *The Statesman*, 27 February, 1946.

⁷⁵ . Wavell Papers, Private Correspondence - His Majesty the King, pp.110- 114, Cited in Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, p.1234.

require that British forces now in the country to be retained at their existing strength. In particular the proposed run down in the British infantry battalions to a total of fifteen had to be halted. This would entail a serious additional manpower commitment.⁷⁶ Both Auchinleck and Wavell were against trying the loyalty of Indian troops too highly in an attempt to repress their own countrymen, and Whitehall was advised against using Indian troops in Indonesia. Being imbued with nationalist ideas they might not wish to suppress freedom movements elsewhere, it was felt.

The report of the Board of Enquiry into the causes of the mutiny in HMIS Talwar admitted that the grievances of the ratings especially racial discrimination led to the mutiny.⁷⁷ According to it, the primary cause of the mutiny was a deep seated feeling of discontent and unrest, real enough to provide field of exploitation.⁷⁸ It further stated that external political stimulus in the shape of Bombay political meetings was identified as the first fundamental cause of the revolt. Further roles were attributed to the extremist press, as also to the *Free Press Journal*. The country-wide discussion of the INA trials and example of the RAF and RIAF strikes which occurred in later 1945 and early 1946 were seen as having inspired the RIN revolt.⁷⁹

The British attitudes, though characterized by imperialist notions, show their nervousness in dealing with not just a mutiny but a civilian uprising as well. Further they are 'objective' to the extent of admitting the genuineness of the grievances of the ratings. However 'disobedience' could not be condoned and so they proceeded to court-martial the mutineers

Court Martial Proceedings

The court martial apparatus as part of the bureaucratic penal system promptly nipped indiscipline in the bud, before it could spread among the rank and file. The court martial apparatus enabled the imperialists to maintain

⁷⁶ . Defence Committee Paper, D.O (46)68,R/30/1/7: ff 96-106, *Ibid.*, Vol.VII, pp.892-893.

⁷⁷ . NL 9930, *The Report of the Board of Enquiry into the Causes of the Mutiny in HMIS Talwar* (Hereafter NL 9930), Sl.No.26, RIN Mutiny Papers, NAI, p.1.

⁷⁸ . NL 9930., p.1.

⁷⁹ . CER., p.506.

discipline in the colonial army. The colonial state relied heavily on particular notions of law and legality to enforce its sovereignty and authority. Soon after the mutiny and the unconditional surrender of the ratings in all ships and establishments, the government applied this theory over the RIN ratings.⁸⁰

Arrests of alleged ringleaders in the navy began immediately after the surrender. On February 23 itself nearly 400 ratings were arrested in and around Bombay. In Karachi some 500 ratings were placed under arrest. No official figures of arrests were released. Only two days after the surrender, Khan and other members of the NCSC were removed to an unknown destination. B.C.Dutt quotes the last words of Khan as he was carried away to detention, “We surrendered to India and not to the British. I don’t know where they are taking us. We shall never give in. Good bye and good luck.”⁸¹ According to B.C.Dutt:

No one ever got to know how many ratings were put behind bars or what punishments were meted out to them. Even the ratings did not know one another’s fate. According to my own reckoning then, more than 2000 were taken away from the ships and barracks. They were kept isolated for a few months in different detention camps, specially got ready for the purpose. Some five hundred were sentenced to prison terms. They served their terms with common criminals. They were denied even the status of political prisoners. From the jail gates they were taken to the railway stations and sent to their respective homes under police escort, deprived of all their legitimate dues and to be engulfed in oblivion.⁸²

The young men who were thus mercilessly discharged became men in the street.

⁸⁰ . Home-Political, Internal, Poll (I), File No. 21/8/46, Court Martials arising out of the RIN Mutiny.

⁸¹ . B.C.Dutt, *Mutiny... Op. Cit.*, p.187.

⁸² . *Ibid.*

In Bombay, 396 men from RIN ships and shore establishments out of all those condemned in the mutiny had been removed to Mulund camp pending investigation.⁸³ Mulund was an important detention camp in Bombay. As per the newspaper reports, those removed included 14 members of the Strike Committee comprising NCSC President M.S.Khan, Vice-President, Madan Singh and Secretary V.Akbar.⁸⁴ The men belonged to ships and establishments of HMIS Talwar, Castle barracks and Fort barracks 80, ships in the eastern stream 180, HMIS Cheetah 12, Ships in the dock 50, wireless station at Mahul 10, HMIS Hamla at Marve 60 and detention barracks four. Some ratings were segregated but remained in their establishments.⁸⁵ *The Statesman* reported that 84 ratings of the RIN regarded by the naval authorities to be mainly responsible for the naval strike have been removed from Bombay to an unknown destination.⁸⁶ In Karachi, an important detention camp was at Malir. After surrender, alleged ratings were taken to the detention camp and court martialled.⁸⁷ Many ratings were directly taken to Kakuari demobilisation camp at Bombay and within two or three months, they were demobilised.⁸⁸

Such forcible displacements were a prelude to the launching of a series of court martial trials against the ratings. While under detention the ratings were fairly well treated but were made to live in tents and huts surrounded by huge barbed wire-fence, manned at regular intervals by sentries on duty round the clock, with wooden towers carrying searchlights to detect attempts at escape. The detainees remained at Mulund for varying periods, depending on the degree of preparation deemed necessary for their trial.⁸⁹

⁸³ . *The Statesman*, 28 February, 1946, p.1; *The National Herald*, 28 February, 1946.

⁸⁴ . *The Pioneer*, Calcutta, 28 February, 1946; *Free Press Journal*, 26 February, 1946.

⁸⁵ . *The Bombay Chronicle*, 28 February, 1946.

⁸⁶ . *The Statesman*, 28 February, 1946.

⁸⁷ . NL 9936, *Court Martials of Mutineers at Karachi* (Hereafter NL 9936), Sl.No.32, RIN Mutiny Papers; NL 9933, *Mutineers Remanded in Custody at Malir*, Sl. No. 29, RIN Mutiny Papers.

⁸⁸ . Interview, Harinarayanan, son of late. Netinjalil Krishnan, a participant, at his residence in Cherukulam on 15 January, 2013.

⁸⁹ . Percy.S.Gourgey, *The Indian Naval Revolt of 1946*, Chennai, 1996, p.52.

In the detention camps, the ratings faced ill-treatment from the authorities. On March 12, at Mulund camp, about 40 ratings complained about the bad food. It led to problems between an officer and ratings. Then the ratings started hunger strike to protest against the ill-treatment by the authorities. On March 13, a large number of ratings observed hunger strike. The authorities realised the danger of the situation and they segregated the alleged 40 ringleaders to Kalyan detention camp in Bombay.⁹⁰ The authorities alleged that it may be the influence of the Communist party. The intelligence bureau reported that many ratings of them were under the influence of the Communist party and was caught attempting to communicate with them while under arrest in the camp.⁹¹ An infantry guard drawn from the Maratha Light Infantry had been mounted at Mulund camp.⁹² At Malir, on March 15 about 300 ratings started a hunger strike to protest against the ill-treatment of the officers.⁹³ Obviously the British realised the danger of the situation but they were not ready to solve even the basic needs of the ratings.

A series of court martials were held in Castle barracks and elsewhere. The sentences passed on those convicted of mutiny ranged from mild ones such as dismissal off ships and disrating or loss of seniority, to those of greater severity such as dismissal with disgrace from the service and imprisonment.⁹⁴ The government had ignored the conditions of the total surrender namely that there would be no victimisation. As proved by the subsequent actions they went back on their own promise. One of the participants of the mutiny stated that:

After the surrender, we all reported for duty next morning they asked every one of us to submit a written apology for taking part in the mutiny. Many did so. A few ratings did not obey. We were taken

⁹⁰ . *The Times of India*, Bombay, 20 March, 1946.

⁹¹ . Confidential, 5/3/47- CS dated 8-12-47, KSA.

⁹² . *The Pioneer*, 28 February, 1946.

⁹³ . NL 9959, *Petitions made by Ratings in Malir camp awaiting Court Martial*, Sl.No.55, RIN Mutiny Papers; Interview, Karunakara Menon. He was taken to Malir detention camp and after the hunger strike, he was taken to Bombay to segregate him from other prisoners. His participation was explained in chapter 3.

⁹⁴ . Gourgey, *Op. Cit.*, p.52.

to a remote barrack in an excluded area in the campus and put under 'internal detention.' There we were subjected to severe physical and mental harassments beside humiliations. We were denied regular rations or other adequate usual facilities. After two months we were sent one by one to another establishment for discharge concealing the fact that we were being sent for participating in the revolt.⁹⁵

The Congress and the public demanded that the trials be open like the INA trials and every possible facility given to the accused by way of defence. Vallabhbhai Patel stated in Bombay that such action as the ratings took might be technically described as an offence. But there would be no punishment for such technical offences especially when racial discrimination in regard to status, pay and conditions of living was involved.⁹⁶ Nehru gave a fitting reply to the C-in-C's statement that the defence forces should be above party politics. If the C-in-C meant, the services should take no interest in the country's fight for freedom. This is not acceptable as it is also politics of a high order, according to Nehru, "The first duty of an Indian soldier was that of a citizen and in that capacity he had to associate himself fully with the forces fighting for the country's freedom."⁹⁷ He demanded public trial of the leaders of the RIN mutiny and indicated that the Congress would arrange for their defence. It was folly to put up, inferior violence to oppose the superior violence at the disposal of the authorities.

The Working Committee of the Bombay Provincial Muslim League set up a Defence Committee to give legal assistance to the RIN ratings who were likely to be put on trial. The Committee adopted a resolution protesting against mass arrests of naval ratings of Bombay.⁹⁸ The Sindh Pradesh Congress Committee decided to arrange for the legal defence of the ratings arrested during the strike. But they were not allowed to interview the ratings. The Chief Secretary to the Government of Sindh in the course of a communication to the

⁹⁵ . T.V.Govindan Nambiar, *RIN Mutiny of 1946: Memoir of a Mutineer*, Calicut, 2001, p.4.

⁹⁶ . *The Hindu*, 28 February, 1946.

⁹⁷ . *Ibid*; Sarvepalli Gopal, *Selected Works...Op. Cit.*, Vol.XV, pp.2-3.

⁹⁸ . *Meezan*, Hyderabad, 5 March, 1946.

Congress Committee informed that the local military had received instruction from their superior authorities not to allow any civilian to interview the internees in any circumstances without express permission of the C-in-C.⁹⁹ The Government of Sindh had imposed rigorous press censorship on outgoing press messages - inland and foreign, since the RIN ratings strike at Karachi. According to the Chief Secretary, Mcklhinnny, the action had been taken under the posts and telegraph acts.¹⁰⁰ The messages include those of two India agencies, *the United Press of India* and *the Orient Agency - the United Press of America* and of press correspondents of *Free Press Journal*, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Tribune*, *The Bombay Chronicle* and few other newspapers.

One of the participants of naval mutiny asserted that the British naval command did not concede to the demand on the lines of INA trial out of fear that such a trial would expose many of the heinous deeds of the British.¹⁰¹ He condemned that although the mutiny was withdrawn, the British naval authorities continued their racial hatred and spite. Naval mutiny was to them an indiscipline which should attract the heaviest penalty. The official reports admitted that British government was not ready to repeat the INA mistakes which aroused popular vigour and enthusiasm in all over the country.¹⁰²

However in view of the assurance given to the national leaders, all those who had participated in the mutiny were just named in stages and categorized according to the plan and ousted from the navy. British records asserted that ring leaders of mutiny must of course receive proper punishment.¹⁰³ Interestingly none of the dismissed personnel was given the reason for the dismissal as participation in the mutiny in their discharge certificates.¹⁰⁴ On the

⁹⁹. *The Deccan Chronicle*, 21 March, 1946.

¹⁰⁰. *The Pioneer*, 28 February, 1946.

¹⁰¹ . E.Narayana Kitavu, *RIN Mutineers Association Report*, Calicut.1996.

¹⁰² . Penderel Moon, *Op. Cit.*, p.295.

¹⁰³ . Wavell to Attlee (via India Office) 24 February, 1946, Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, p.1054.

¹⁰⁴ . T.V.Govindan Nambiar, *Op. Cit.*, p.4; P.Madhavan Nair, a participant of the mutiny mentioned that his discharge certificate did not mention his participation in the mutiny, Interview at his residence in Karuvassery on 30 October, 2004; Most of the participants admitted and raised this issue. It affected their future careers. For details, see Appendix C, Biographical Sketch .

contrary, the reasons for the dismissal varied from - Dismissed (without showing reason), Services no longer required, Unsuitable, Class 'A' release, Excess to requirements and IP-NS (Invalidated person-unfit for naval service).¹⁰⁵

Out of the eleven leaders of the mutiny in the RIN Torpedo School HMIS Valsura at Bedi, three had been sentenced and eight discharged. The three convicted mutineers had been lodged in the agency jail at Rajkot.¹⁰⁶ In a letter to John Colville, the Governor of Bombay, Field Marshall Francis Mudie, Governor of Sindh informed that "Viceroy had given permission to trial of RIN mutineers accused of mutiny with violence or of mutiny on the high seas."¹⁰⁷ Ten ratings were brought to trial at Bombay and two at Karachi.

After the mutiny, Lt. Ishaq Sobani, RINVR, HMIS Hamla was under arrest and kept in the Transit camp, Colaba without trial for three and half months. So he sent a petition demanding the privilege of Habeas Corpus.¹⁰⁸ Commander King and Lt.Sobani were court martialled at Bombay. But later their trial was suspended.¹⁰⁹

The ratings recommended for discharge as unsuitable were sent to the RIN Depot or Kakauri camp.¹¹⁰ The authorities believed that it will create an atmosphere of discipline.¹¹¹ After the mutiny, many ratings who did not participate in the mutiny were given promotion. For example Ghulam Hyder, CPO was given promotion as Warrant officer, though he failed to pass in all the subjects during Gunner's course. The officials reported that as his loyalty and discipline was exemplary, he may be promoted to Warrant officer in 'special

¹⁰⁵ . Interview, E.Narayana Kitavu.

¹⁰⁶ . Home department, Political (internal), Poll (I), File No.21/8/46, NAI.

¹⁰⁷ . *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ . *NL9934, Conduct of Officers and Men of HMIS Godavari* (Hereafter *NL 9934*), Sl. No.30, RIN Mutiny Papers ; For details, see *NL 9941, Allegation against Lt. Ishaq Sobani* (Hereafter *NL 9941*), Sl. No. 36, RIN Mutiny Papers.

¹⁰⁹ . *The Blitz*, 30 March, 1946.

¹¹⁰ . Interview, P.Madhavan Nair stated that after the mutiny he was taken to Kakauri camp and after two months, dismissed from service without giving any benefits.

¹¹¹ . *NL 9912.*

conditions.’¹¹² This reveals the British attitude: punish those, whom they considered guilty, promote those who were loyal.

In March and April alone, nearly 5500 men were demobilised from the RIN. Quite a number of them were discharged with the remark, ‘services no longer required’ but without the benefits of normal release. Others were discharged as ‘unsuitable.’¹¹³ The authorities had discharged naval ratings on the ground of ‘excess to requirements’ were bringing in new recruits to man in the ships and shore establishments. There was no arrangement to give the dismissed persons alternate employment. Government did not show any interest in the rehabilitation of the dismissed.

After their discharge from service, the government instructed the respective state governments and princely states through confidential notes to keep an eye on these people for three months.¹¹⁴ As a reply to the enquiry of the Madras Government, the Diwan of Travancore reported to the Resident of Madras state that an ex-rating, Albert of Perurkada had not yet returned to his home and that it was understood that he has settled down in Poona.¹¹⁵

Some ratings were straight away dismissed by the Commanding officer. Some of them were court martialled. The ban on re-employment in naval service operated both in the case of ratings who were dismissed as in the case of those who were dismissed with disgrace. After independence, many of the Ex-ratings submitted petitions for re-instatement of service.¹¹⁶ But Government of Free India also followed the same policy of the British. The Government

¹¹² . NL 9934.

¹¹³ . Victimised Ratings, *Op. Cit.*,p.141.

¹¹⁴ . The Rapiebam of Madras informed the Diwan of Travancore that one naval rating, C.Albert of Perurkada, Trivandrum had been dismissed from the service with effect from 7 June, 1946 and sentenced to 42 days imprisonment, Confidential, 28-6-46,File No. 528/46/CS, KSA; CS- Confidential, 8-12-1947, File No. 4/3/47, KSA.

¹¹⁵ . CS- Confidential, 8-12-47, File No. Dis.749/47, KSA.

¹¹⁶ . Interview, B.Hussain, a participant of the mutiny, at his residence in Payangadi on 22 February, 2002. He through A.K.Gopalan, then Opposition leader of Lok Sabha, had written a letter to the Defence Minister for reinstatement of service which was turned down; NL 9987,*Mutiny Petitions*, Sl.No.81, RIN Mutiny Papers; NL 9991, *Reinstatement of Ratings Dismissed in Connection with the Mutiny*, Sl. No. 85, RIN Mutiny Papers.

orders stated that in view of the policy decision that RIN mutineers of 1946 should not be treated on the same footing as INA personnel, and that those who are dismissed from service should not be re-instated.¹¹⁷

A large number of *Malayalees* were dismissed from the navy for their participation in the mutiny. Their participation in the revolt was not mentioned in their discharge certificates.¹¹⁸ Memoirs of popular leaders had thrown light on the court martial proceedings and discharge of mutineers from the navy.¹¹⁹ It is interesting to note that after their discharge from the navy, the ratings returned home in a condition of uncertainty. Most of them recollected with grief that none of the politicians recognized or identified their participation in the mutiny.¹²⁰

The court martial proceedings show the duplicity of the British. They discriminated between the RIN mutineers and the INA members. Fear of popular protest made them very secretive. It also shows that even at the dawn of independence, they were ruthless and disregarded natural justice.

Section 3

Manifestations in Assemblies and Media

The RIN mutiny found its echoes first in the British Parliament and then in the Central Legislative Assembly. The first reference to the mutiny in the

¹¹⁷ . Home Department, Political (internal), Poll (I), File No.21/8/46; *NL 0220, Reinstatement of Ratings Removed from Service*, Sl. No. 89, RIN Mutiny Papers; The sudden discharge from the navy saw many ratings returning home with empty hands. Life became uncertain though some of them gradually found some kind of occupation. These helpless ratings became indifferent. Interview with L.Thomas Kutty, son of late K.P. Lazar, Kollam, a participant of the mutiny, at his residence in Calicut University on 5 November, 2013.

¹¹⁸ . Interviews with a group of Participants from Kasaragod, Kannur, Kozhikode and Malappuram districts of Kerala. See Appendix C, Biographical Sketch.

¹¹⁹ . Berlin Kunhanandan Nair, *Enpathu Thikanja E.M.S* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1990, p.28. In this work, E.M.S, the veteran Communist leader refers an incident during his underground life. While he was underground, he taught English to a boy named Kunhiraman. During the war period, Kunhiraman joined the navy. But after the February mutiny, he was dismissed from service. He reached Calicut with empty hands and with a certificate of 'discharge with disgrace.'

¹²⁰ . Interviews with a group of participants from Kasaragod, Kannur, Kozhikode and Malappuram districts of Kerala, See Appendix C, Biographical Sketch.

House of Commons was made on February 22, 1946, when Henderson Stewart asked leave to move the adjournment of the House on a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the grave extension of the mutiny among sections of the RIN, which now were reported to have seized twenty four ships. In reply, Prime Minister Attlee stated:

I have had no notice that the honorable member was going to raise this question and I have not at present any information from the GOI. The only information I have come from naval sources which state that certain vessels of the Royal Navy are proceeding towards Bombay. I suggest if the House would wait until I get some information. I will give it to them then and that it would be for the House then to consider whether they would like to raise the matter.¹²¹

The naval revolt was raised in the Central Legislative Assembly by M.R.Masani and D.P.Karmarkar on February 22, 1946.¹²² They put forward questions about the grave situations in Bombay and Karachi. Philip Mason, the Defence secretary explained the situations in the Assembly. The usual question hour was dispensed with in order to devote more time to the discussion of the mutiny. While Congress leaders in the Assembly justified to a certain extent the action of the ratings, their sharp criticism was reserved for the government benches with whom they were as they declared, in a state of permanent opposition. Particular indignation was expressed over Vice-Admiral Godfrey's treatment towards the ratings. Prime Minister Attlee's announcement that warships of the Royal Navy were on their way to Bombay aroused further discontent.

Philip Mason tried to justify the actions of Godfrey.¹²³ The Congress members sharply criticized Commander King of his abusive and insulting language towards the ratings. M R Masani asked, "Will the honourable

¹²¹. Cited in Percy S.Gourgey, *Op. Cit.*, p.43.

¹²². *Legislative Assembly Debates, Op. Cit.*, pp.1346-47.

¹²³. *The Statesman*, 23 February, 1946.

member kindly state if it is a fact that as reported in the *Free Press Journal* of Bombay of February 19, the language used by Commander King to his ratings included phrases like ‘Sons of bitches’, and ‘Sons of coolies.’” Mason replied, “I have not seen that report but as I said the question of what he said will be inquired into and is being enquired into and he himself is quick positive that he used no positive language.”¹²⁴

Mason gave summary of the incidents which had already occurred.

On February 19, at twelve noon that is mid day serious trouble broke out in HMIS Talwar, the RIN Signal School in Bombay. All ratings except Petty Officers and Chief Petty Officers refused duty and refused to listen to their officers. The establishment included about 1100 ratings. The flag officer Bombay at once took over charge of this establishment himself and visited it, but he was unable to find out what the men’s grievances were.... He came to the conclusion however was that the officer of the HMIS Talwar should be replaced and was replaced by a senior and very experienced officer.¹²⁵

On the next day on February 23, Asaf Ali, the Deputy leader of the Congress party in the Assembly put down an adjournment motion to call attention to the mishandling of the situation by the authorities concerned.¹²⁶ He denounced the high handed attitude of the naval authorities towards the young boys of the navy. He suggested that the Defence Consultative committee should be consulted in this matter and that the rebel ratings should be informed that the whole question was being referred to the representatives of the people in consultation with whom the war department would formulate its policy for the future. He observed that he was fully conscious of the danger of the strikes in the army.¹²⁷ Sarat Chandra Bose supported the suggestion of Asaf Ali.¹²⁸

¹²⁴. *Legislative Assembly Debates, Op. Cit.*, p.1343.

¹²⁵. *Ibid.*

¹²⁶. *Ibid.*, p.1407.

¹²⁷. *Ibid.*, p.1408.

¹²⁸. *Ibid.*

Sardar Mangal Singh opined that the country should be grateful to the efforts of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on whose advice the country had been spared of widespread blood bath. He held that source of trouble lay in the racial discrimination which was practiced by the war department.¹²⁹ Masani held the view that the major cause of these disturbances was the feeling of insecurity among the ratings. While on the one hand hundreds of Indian officers and thousands of Indian ratings are being demobilized, on the other, three hundred British Royal Navy officers were being transferred to the establishment in India. He expressed the hope that the legitimate grievances of the ratings would be redressed and their patriotism and sense of self-respect would be recognized. Liaquat Ali Khan regretted that no effort had been made by the government to enquire in to the grievances of the ratings or to remedy them. He urged the GOI to shake off their lethargy and be more responsive to public opinion expressed in the floor of the Assembly.¹³⁰ The adjournment motion was debated for two days and finally adopted by the House by 74 votes to 40. On March 19, the war secretary made a statement on the hunger strike at Mulund camp in Bombay.

In the Assemblies, as it can be seen, the RIN mutiny did not evoke heated debates. The members were critical of how the situation was handled. The members, most of them moderates or liberals, were not expected to support the mutiny.

Section4

Media and the Mutiny

The media means mainly print media and radio in those days. Radio was owned by government and any news broadcast over it was pro-government. Newspapers were of two categories - pro-British papers like *The Times of India*, *The Statesman* etc. and anti-British papers like *The Bombay Chronicle*, *The National Herald* and *People's Age* etc.

The RIN mutiny got a detailed coverage in the daily newspapers. National, international and regional level newspapers reported the day-to-day

¹²⁹. *Ibid.*

¹³⁰. *Ibid.*

events of the mutiny. The newspapers like the *Free Press Journal*, *The Blitz*, *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Bombay Chronicle*, *Harijan*, *The Hindu*, *Deccan Chronicle*, *People's Age*, *Times of India*, *The Pioneer*, *The Indian Express* etc of this period come in this category.

The Free Press Journal of Bombay was the first to come to the rescue of the ratings. It was from their office that the whole incident assumed a national complexion. The Press came out with a demand for the Admiral's instant removal, and gave the fullest publicity to the manifestation and acts of the strikers. The ratings were warned against political manipulations. It gave wide coverage to the mutiny, giving day to day account of it. The paper praised the discipline of the ratings that had shown during the protest. They argued that it would be an important landmark in the political history of our country. On February 20, the Press had written an editorial on the mutiny.¹³¹ The paper argued that the use of the national flag and the shouting of national slogans by the ratings linked up to the protest with the political movements in the country. On February 23, it allotted great space to report about the shooting incident in the Bombay city. The paper commented that the RIN strike and demonstration following the Air force strike revealed that the forces are solidly national in their outlook.¹³² The free use of INA slogan 'Jai Hind' by the boys of the RIN showed how they had been able to not only value India's estimation of the INA correctly but even to share it themselves. On February 22 and 23, the paper gave detailed report about the suppression and surrender of the revolt. On February 23, it published main heading news, 'British bullets claim over 100 Bombay lives.'¹³³ The paper reported that in the Friday disturbances, over 100 were killed and 1000 injured. Military rule prevailed practically throughout Bombay. Burning of military vehicles, post offices, police chowkies, bank furniture and looting of government grain shops were the chief features of the day.¹³⁴

¹³¹. *Free Press Journal*, 20 February, 1946.

¹³². *Ibid.*

¹³³. *Ibid.*, 23 February, 1946.

¹³⁴. *Ibid.*

Navasakthi, Bombay carefully points out that the root causes of the discontent among the Indian ratings must not be lost sight of while dealing with the serious proportions their strike and eventual mutiny by them assumed. They are against racial and other discrimination and their repeated demands met with only indifference. The Vice-Admiral's turbulent tone was out of tune with these basic complaints and the paper says that it was no use for Congress leaders to repeat non-violence cries. But they must see that their grievances were redressed.¹³⁵

Harijan, a journal of applied Gandhism provides valuable account of the attitude of Gandhi towards the mutiny. In an article named 'Conflict of Ideas' dated on March 10, 1946, Gandhi justified his approaches towards the mutiny.¹³⁶ According to him:

In resorting to the mutiny, they were badly advised. If it was for grievance, fancied or real, they should have waited for the guidance and intervention of political leaders in their choice. If they mutinied for the freedom of India, they were doubly wrong. They could not do so without a call from a prepared revolutionary party. They were thoughtless and ignorant if they believed that by their might, they would deliver India from foreign domination.¹³⁷

The Bombay Chronicle extensively covered the mutiny. *The Tribune*, Lahore's pictorial coverage of the mutiny in Karachi and firing incidents was quite good.¹³⁸ *The Dawn*, New Delhi reported the news of the strike in the front page headlining – 'Naval Mutiny: Orgy of Lawlessness in City.'¹³⁹ *The National Herald*, Lucknow published news about the mutiny. It reported in great detail to the events which happened in Bombay, Karachi, Calcutta and Madras. Though a nationalist paper, it had a sympathetic attitude towards the mutineers. In its editorial on February 23, it stated that in the name of discipline

¹³⁵. *Navasakthi*, Bombay, 19 to 26 February, 1946.

¹³⁶. *Harijan*, *Journal of Applied Journalism*, Vol. X, 3 March, 1946.

¹³⁷. *Ibid.*

¹³⁸. *The Tribune*, Lahore, 20, 21 & 22 February, 1946, Microfilm, NMML.

¹³⁹. *The Dawn*, New Delhi, 20 February, 1946, Extracts from Newspapers, NAI.

a few hundreds of young Indian naval ratings have been subjected to violence by the organized strength and force of the British empire and the country will echo from end to end the protests of the leaders of Bombay against the unnecessary blood bath in which the city has been drenched.¹⁴⁰ The paper severely criticized the attitude of British Government in unequivocal terms. It stated methods of the authorities in Bombay and Karachi could be described in one word - panic. Instead of sympathetically attending to the young fellows grievances, it reported the authorities behaved strangely. They seem to have been stirred by memories of 1857 and 1942 and used exactly the same methods that were then adopted.¹⁴¹ On February 28, it had written the editorial, 'The RIN trials' which demanded the trial of ratings like the INA trial.¹⁴²

People's Age, the organ of the Communist party, published news about the day-to-day events of the mutiny. The paper showed a sympathetic attitude towards the mutiny. On February 22, G Adhikari, editor issued a statement on behalf of the Communist Party of India. It appealed the people to observe complete *hartal* as a mark of their disapproval of government repression and to demand immediate cessation of repression, the opening of negotiations and the satisfaction of the just demands of the strikers.¹⁴³ On 24, *People's Age* wrote, three days, February 21-23, 1946 will always be remembered as historic dates in the annals of our freedom struggle. On the 22 and 23 the workers and people of Bombay supported the heroic action of these men in defence of their just rights by an unprecedented demonstration of fraternal solidarity in the form of a complete city wide *hartal* and strike.¹⁴⁴ Communist Party papers like *Deshabhimani* (Kerala),¹⁴⁵ *Janasakthi* (Tamil Nadu),¹⁴⁶ *Prajasakthi* (Andhra)¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁰. *The National Herald*, 23 February, 1946.

¹⁴¹. *Ibid.*

¹⁴². *Ibid.*, 28 February, 1946.

¹⁴³. *People's Age*, 22 February, 1946.

¹⁴⁴. *Ibid.*, 24 February, 1946

¹⁴⁵. *Deshabhimani*, Calicut, M.N.Smarakam, Thiruvananthapuram.

¹⁴⁶. *Janasakthi*, CPI Office, Chennai.

¹⁴⁷. *Prajasakthi*, Vijayawada, C.R.Foundation, Kondapur.

gave detailed coverage to the mutiny and solidarity movements occurred in different parts of the country.

Amrit Bazar Patrika, Calcutta also reported the mutiny in a detailed way. On February 21, front page news was given about Calcutta events.¹⁴⁸ In its editorial on February 25, it criticized the government's suppressive policy towards the mutiny. On 26th, when the editor of *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, went to see Wavell, the paper reported, took him to task for the unbridled intemperance of press in the last six months, which had naturally resulted in outbreaks such as at Bombay.¹⁴⁹ The Lucknow edition of *the Pioneer*, Calcutta provided detailed coverage to the February events and stressed the grievances of the ratings in front paged news.¹⁵⁰ *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi gave detailed reports of the mutiny. On February 19, it published on front page a report titled, 'Naval ratings on strike.'¹⁵¹

The Indian Express, Madras was another important newspaper of this period. It published reports from the initial day itself. On February 19, it published the front coverage news, 'About 7000 men of RIN on strike.'¹⁵² *The Hindu*, Madras published the news in an inconspicuous place in the middle of the page with two headings, 'Naval ratings on strike', 'Better conditions demanded' on February 19.¹⁵³ It reported striking ratings numbered 3000 organized demonstration in the Flora Fountain area of Bombay and caused wild confusion and complete hold up of traffic.¹⁵⁴ *Deccan Times weekly*, Madras had written an editorial which sympathised with the mutineers. At the same time it criticized mob violence.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁸. *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, 21 February, 1946.

¹⁴⁹. *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, 27 February, 1946.

¹⁵⁰. *The Pioneer*, 19 February, 1946.

¹⁵¹ . *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 19 February, 1946, *A Bundle of Old Newspaper Cuttings bearing on the Mutiny*, Sl. No.8, RIN Mutiny Papers, NAI.

¹⁵² . *The Indian Express*, 19 February, 1946.

¹⁵³ . *The Hindu*, 19 February, 1946.

¹⁵⁴ . *Ibid.*, 20 February, 1946.

¹⁵⁵ . *Deccan Times Weekly*, Madras, 3 March, 1946, Microfilm, NMML.

Another paper which gave coverage to the mutiny was *the Deccan Chronicle*. From February 19, it published front page news on the mutiny. On 23rd, It reported the mutiny in Madras in a first column news, ‘Sympathetic strike in Madras.’¹⁵⁶

The Statesman, New Delhi, a pro-British paper criticized the hooligan elements of the mutiny. They connected the crime mentality of the people with the warm weather of Bombay city.¹⁵⁷ On 23rd, in their editorial on ‘Mutiny in the RIN’, they stated that dissatisfaction, public indiscipline and violence sweep the world. It is sweeping through the RIN whose outbreak and refusal of duty sets more anxious problems for statesmen in India and Britain.¹⁵⁸ *The Times of India*, Bombay also gave details of the mutiny. From February 19 onwards it reported the mutiny. In its editorial on February 28, it criticized ‘*goondaraj*’ and condemned violence.¹⁵⁹

The newspapers in different regions also gave wholehearted support to the mutiny. Important among them were *Mathrubhumi* daily, *Mathrubhumi* weekly, *Malayala Rajyam Weekly*, *Prabhatham* (Mal.), *Dravida Nadu*, *Kuti Arasu*, *Ananda Vikadan* (Tamil), *Andhrapatrika* (Telugu), *Meezan* (Urdu) etc. *Mathrubhumi* daily newspaper published from Calicut lent all support to the mutiny. The paper published with much importance everything connected with the mutiny right from the outbreak of the mutiny to the report of the Enquiry commission. The first report had the front page coverage with the title, ‘Strike of the Ratings.’¹⁶⁰ For the next few days, the reports were related to the further developments of the mutiny. It continuously reported the trial of the Enquiry commission in various ships. The editorial of February 23, 1946 reveals its sympathetic attitude towards the ratings. But it indirectly criticized the Communist party which observed a *hartal* in Bombay on February 22, 1946

¹⁵⁶ . *The Deccan Chronicle*, 23 February, 1946.

¹⁵⁷ . *The Statesman*, 28 February, 1946.

¹⁵⁸ . *Ibid.*, 29 February, 1946.

¹⁵⁹ . *The Times of India*, Bombay, 28 February, 1946.

¹⁶⁰ . *Mathrubhumi*, 20 February, 1946.

there by revealing its anti-Communist attitude.¹⁶¹ *Prabhatham* weekly published from Kollam also reported the naval mutiny. On 24th, it published front page coverage news entitled 'Naval Mutiny Ended: It has no Precedence.'¹⁶²

The foreign newspapers like *The Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Manchester Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Reynold News*, *Teglichen Rundschau*, *The Times* etc of this period gave wide publicity to the RIN mutiny.

Seven of Britain's eight national daily newspapers gave first place in their news columns to the RIN mutiny. The eighth, *The Daily Herald* made it a second story with a long dispatch from its own Bombay correspondent. Typical headlines were - '*The Daily Express* - Mob out of Hand: Police open fire'; '*The Daily Mirror* - Doom Threat to Mutineers'; '*The Daily Herald* - Army Peace man told- stop navy strike.'¹⁶³ Two of the three papers which commented editorially on the mutiny, *the Daily Express* and *The Daily Mail* declared that the mutiny must be suppressed.¹⁶⁴

Many newspapers argued that British would send Cabinet Mission to India as a result of the naval revolt of 1946. *The Times*, London, a pro-British paper provided detailed story of the mutiny. On February 22, it front paged news on the event.¹⁶⁵

Bombay riots were front paged in the American newspapers. On February 22, Mutiny hit banner lines. Some of these were, 'Bombay rioting as Indian sailors mutiny', 'Anti-British rebellion from Egypt to India', 'Frenzied mobs overruns Bombay' etc. The language of most of the papers was restrained. *The New York Times* wrote, "The daily widening of riots and

¹⁶¹ . As Noam Chomsky pointed out one of the factors influencing the nature of mass media monopoly the world over is anti-Communist sentiment. Noam Chomsky & Edward.S.Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political economy of the Mass Media*, New York, 1988.

¹⁶² . *Prabhatham Weekly*, Kollam, 24 February, 1946.

¹⁶³. Cited in *The Hindu*, 23 February, 1946.

¹⁶⁴. Cited in *The Indian Express*, 24 February, 1946.

¹⁶⁵. *The Times*, London, 22 February, 1946.

bloodsheds in Indian warfts, the trouble in Egypt and Greece. India will be the scene of a decisive struggle in the post-war period.”¹⁶⁶ *The Washington Star* wrote, “If the Indian armed forces cannot be relied upon the situation may offer a parallel to the famous Indian mutiny.”¹⁶⁷ *The Weekly Nation* stated, “Out of its golden Indian flask, British imperialism has let out a genie which can neither be subdued nor appeased.”¹⁶⁸ Most of the papers editorialised. The Sunday editorial of the *New York Herald Tribune* said, “A revolt results only in a minor degree from famine threats or Communists. The real cause is that men with brown and yellow colour are striving to free themselves from the white man’s domination.”¹⁶⁹

The first US Communist party reaction to the Indian riots was reflected in a *The Daily Worker* editorial which termed the mutiny as Indian celebration of Washington’s birthday by another revolt against tyranny of British imperialism. The Indian Naval mutiny is the highest point of a great wave of mass activity expressed mainly in great stress and demonstrations directed against British rule in India.¹⁷⁰ *The New York World Telegram* led its front page with the Indian mutiny devoting several columns to detailed dispatches from the scene.¹⁷¹ Striking features of the mutiny were published on February 21, in the American weekly, *Life*, one of the most widely read periodicals in the US. Devoted two full pages to its illustrated commentary on the disorders, *Life* asserted: “The moment that compromise had time and again been postponed in India, the moment of actual revolt, came a little closer last month.”¹⁷² Another widely circulated American weekly *News Week* devoted over two columns of its foreign news section to Indian matters, giving prominence to the Bombay

¹⁶⁶. *The New York Times*, New York, 25 February, 1946, Microfilm, NMML.

¹⁶⁷. *The Washington Star*, Washington, 25 February, 1946, Microfilm, NMML.

¹⁶⁸. *The Weekly Nation*, Washington, 25 February, 1946, Extracts from Newspapers, NAI.

¹⁶⁹ . ‘New York Herald Tribune’, New York, 25 February, 1946, cited in *The Indian Express*, 27 February, 1946.

¹⁷⁰ . ‘Daily worker’, Washington, 24 February, 1946, cited in *People’s Age*, 26 February, 1946.

¹⁷¹. Cited in *The Hindu*, 24 February, 1946.

¹⁷² . ‘Life’, New York, 26 February, 1946, cited in *The Bombay Chronicle*, 27 February, 1946.

mutiny.¹⁷³ A column banner head in the *Hearst Press* read, 'New Riots sweep Bombay' and in red type 'Attlee lays revolt to Reds.'¹⁷⁴ *The New York Post* headline was 'British Machine gun crowds in Bombay.'¹⁷⁵

The New York Times carried alarming reports about the mutiny of the ratings as well as the civilian riots that followed. Its correspondent from London expressed greater concern over civilian riots or open rebellion than the naval mutiny itself. American correspondent reported from Delhi on February 21 that the British were concerned over the effects of these mutinies on the morale of the Indian armed forces and on the government's authority, which was solely based on such a force. Its editorial on February 22, 1946 it commented; "The revolt of Indian seamen in Bombay underlines the urgency of the mission of three Cabinet ministers which the British Government is sending to India."¹⁷⁶

French view was sharply divided over anti-British movements in India and Middle East. The Communist and pro-Communist press welcomed what the left wing resistance newspaper *Franc Tireur* called the death knell of the British Empire.¹⁷⁷ In reporting the Indian incidents, many newspapers including moderate, radical as well as Communist highlighted the spread of a popular liberation movement against imperialist oppression. The moderate paper *Resistance* said, "The British Government is faced with irreconcilable problems of a socialist government in possession of an imperialist, colonial and capitalist empire of which they no more want to be the liquidators than Churchill."¹⁷⁸

The Indonesian daily *Merdeka* expressed joy at the reports of mutiny in India and wished the people success.¹⁷⁹ It had written an editorial saying that "The Indian people understood that non-violence is not useful for getting

¹⁷³ . *News Week*, New York, 26 February, 1946, Extracts from Newspapers, NAI.

¹⁷⁴. Cited in *The Hindu*, 25 February, 1946.

¹⁷⁵. Cited in *Ibid*.

¹⁷⁶. *New York Times*, New York, 22 February, 1946.

¹⁷⁷ . 'Franc Tireur', Paris, 24 February, 1946, cited in *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, 26 February, 1946.

¹⁷⁸. Cited in *The Hindu*, 25 February, 1946.

¹⁷⁹. Cited in *Free Press Journal*, 26 February, 1946.

freedom. It also says that the mutiny would spread all over India and Gandhi and Nehru would use this opportunity. Indonesian people have sympathy to all of them.”¹⁸⁰ The paper concluded, “Not with discussions can we throw off the burden of the white man but only by fighting as we, the Indonesians have already proved.”¹⁸¹

The *De Valero*, Irish paper editorially refers to the mutiny and the forthcoming Cabinet Mission in India. For whatever may have been the immediate cause that has provoked such incidents as the naval mutiny and outbreak of violence in Bombay, Karachi and Calcutta, there can be little doubt that these ratings have their ultimate sources in the exasperated feelings of the nation, whose patients has been tried to the limits of its endurance.¹⁸²

The British documents revealed that they were alarmed about the press reports on RIN mutiny. In a letter to Wavell, Pethick Lawrence worried that press carries rather sensational news about the mutiny and disturbances in Bombay.¹⁸³ Government continuously criticized the press for its reporting. They blamed that immediate cause of mutiny in other ships and establishments was inflammatory articles in the press.¹⁸⁴ The government implemented many restrictions on the freedom of press.¹⁸⁵ During the mutiny warning was given by the authorities to newspapers like *Peoples’ Age*, *The Blitz*, *The Dawn* and *Free Press Journal* for printing ‘objectionable articles.’¹⁸⁶ A warning was given to the editor of *The Blitz* for publishing the letter of an Indian rating which was considered ‘objectionable’ on May 23, 1946.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁰. Cited in *Mathrubhumi*, 27 February, 1946, p.1, c.1.

¹⁸¹. Cited in *Free Press Journal*, 26 February 1946.

¹⁸². Cited in *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, 27 February, 1946.

¹⁸³. Pethick Lawrence to Wavell, 19 February, 1946, Mansergh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol.VI, p.1016.

¹⁸⁴. *NL 9930.*, p.55.

¹⁸⁵. Home-Political, Poll (I), File No. 33/4/1946.

¹⁸⁶ . Home-Political, Poll (I), File No. 33/39/1946 ; Poll(I), File No.33/28/46; Poll (I), File No. 33/29/46.

¹⁸⁷ . Home-Political, Poll (I), File No. 33/13/1946; Similar warning was given to the editor of *the Dawn* and action was taken against him, Poll (I), File No. 33/34/1946.

The newspapers were generally sympathetic to the RIN rebels. But most of the papers characterised the solidarity movements as the product of a conspiracy by anti-social elements to establish *goondaraj*. To describe the crowds, *the Bombay Chronicle*, used the terms such as ‘Frenzied Crowds’ and ‘Hooligans.’ The crowd action was called a ‘thoughtless orgy of violence.’¹⁸⁸ *The Times of India* also used the same vocabulary.¹⁸⁹ The papers echoed the voice of the national leaders. Even *People’s Age* which was by and large sympathetic to the Bombay working class, mentioned that in Bombay’s three days of heroic battle, ‘anti-socials’ in some localities took advantage of the situation by organizing orgies of loot and senseless burnings. An attempt was thus made to dissociate a disciplined working class from some anti-social elements.¹⁹⁰

The wide spread reports in the media enlightened the common and influenced his thinking. In fact these media reports were largely responsible for the support that the ordinary citizens gave to the RIN mutiny. *Mathrubhumi* and *Deshabimani*, published from Malabar, were critical of the handling of the mutiny and their reportage presented an avid picture to the local people. Though condemnatory of mob violence the press in reporting about the mutiny in great detail, helped to spread its message to every nook and corner of the country. This was at a time when communication systems were not well developed.

¹⁸⁸ . *The Bombay Chronicle*, 24 February, 1946; Similarly *the Hindu* used the terms *goondaraj* and ‘hooligans’ and *The Indian Express* called the crowd action, ‘a thoughtless orgy of violence’. See *The Hindu*, 26 February, 1946 and *Indian Express*, 26 February, 1946. This has been explained in the fourth chapter.

¹⁸⁹ . *The Times of India*, 24 February, 1946.

¹⁹⁰ . *People’s Age*, 3 March, 1946.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Though the British ruled India not just with the police and the military, the armed forces undoubtedly played a significant role as a 'sharp sword of repression.' For the first time after 1857, in 1946, there was an open mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy which posed a great challenge to British authority. Though short lived its impact was great. This was because it was not just a protest against specific grievances but something more important - it was also a political uprising as a large number of participants were profoundly influenced by nationalist propaganda and ideals. And for a student of history it raises several questions. The first one is about the overall strategy of the Indian National Movement. Bipan Chandra has contended that the strategy did not undergo any substantial change throughout the national movement.¹ The RIN mutiny, we believe, had every potential for a revolutionary change, but the Indian National Congress, the most important political party at that time, was not interested in such a change and so there was no change in the strategy of the national movement. So, one has to agree with his contention that the overall strategy of the Indian National Movement did not undergo any significant change. At the same time, it would be difficult to agree with Sumit Sarkar that it was 'the fear of popular excess that made Congress leaders cling on to the 'path of negotiations.'² Negotiations are part of almost all movements and the Congress had resorted to negotiations in the past even when there was no fear of popular excess.

Though the RIN mutiny elicited sympathetic strikes by the urban proletariat and protest demonstrations by the student community, often cutting across caste, religions and party affiliations, it remained a predominantly urban phenomenon and the peasantry were not involved. Only in Malabar, one could

¹ . Bipan Chandra, *Indian National Movement: Long Term Dynamics*, New Delhi, 1988, p.129.

² . Sumit Sarkar, "Popular Movements and National Leadership 1945-47" in *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW), Vol. XVII, Annual No. April 1982, pp.677-689.

find protracted protest movements and strikes involving labourers and peasants and there was no urban-rural division. This could be explained in terms of the Communist hold in the region. The lack of mass support enabled the British to suppress the mutiny and the associated protest movements. It is this lack of political support which differentiates it from the protest against INA trials which attracted universal support from all sections of the Indian people.

To what extent did the RIN mutiny lead to a change of British policy in favour of granting of independence is a debatable matter. Our study reveals that the mutineers did not have the capture of political power as their objective. After unfurling the flag of revolt they looked towards political leaders for guidance. They also made no efforts to coordinate their mutiny with people's struggles. The expression of solidarity from the people came without any conscious effort on the part of the mutineers. So the mutiny though showed transformative potentialities, did not become a full fledged revolution. That it did not last long is also indicative of this especially when comparisons are made with the aim and the revolt of 1857.

Our study also shows that more than anything else, it was the grievances of the ratings and utter disillusionment they experienced after the war and threat of demobilization that prompted them to take up arms and revolt. The British had given all sorts of promises in their recruitment drive due to the exigencies of the war situation. The promises were not kept and the hopes were belied. These contributed greatly to their disenchantment and subsequent revolt. Political ideology did play a role but it was not universal. The dissemination and the consequent internalization of nationalist ideology were not uniform and its intensity varied. But this ideology however weak made it also a nationalist, political struggle. The context is also important. After the suppression of the Quit India Movement, people's political energies were surfacing again and the INA propaganda and demonstrations against the trials of INA prisoners greatly influenced them. Unlike the INA, major political parties did not extend any support to the RIN revolt making its brutal suppression very easy for the British. But the common people found in this mutiny an expression of nationalism however vague and ill-defined. They rose

in support and expressed their solidarity in many ways. These varied forms corresponded to the class interests of those who made up the 'crowd.' The meaning of nationalism gets transformed, albeit for a short period. But, these were not adequate for the sustenance and ultimate success of the mutiny and change it to a revolution. It has at the same time, to be pointed out that this was unprecedented.

Generally the RIN mutiny went through three stages. The first was the strike by ratings. The second was the protest by the public marked by violence and expression of anti-British sentiments and the third was its spread to industrial firms and educational institutions, leading to strikes and demonstrations. The uprising of February 1946 began as an inoffensive hunger strike on the wireless signal station Talwar on February 18, Monday, spread to other ships anchored in the Bombay port, and ultimately ended with an unprecedented bloodbath in the streets of Bombay on February 24, Saturday. From February 18 to 24, the complexion of the movement changed as the working classes and students stepped in. From 21st onwards, a strike in a section of the armed forces was rapidly transformed into a popular uprising of great intensity. Finally the RIN mutiny, as the event is known, became the peak of popular protest which, carrying the legacy of 1942 had begun to swing upwards since the INA trials in 1945. Besides being the last urban uprising in colonial India the RIN revolt was also the final battle Hindus and Muslims fought together against the British.

In February 1946 the RIN ratings rose drawing the civilians of Bombay and Karachi into a mass upsurge against the Raj. In the process begun by the ratings, various groups of the working and middle classes joined making it a violent movement. The event of February 1946 was thus created by the coalescing of various factors and social groups in a movement.

The ratings were the makers of their own rebellion. They did not undertake to challenge the might of the British in a 'fit of absent mindedness.' They were conscious agents and their acts were marked by deliberation and planning though not in a detailed manner. This needs emphasis because all too

often in the literature on the subject, their actions are described as spontaneous i.e., lacking a coherent programme or plan. As Gramsci has written:

It is only a scholastic and academic historical political outlook which sees as real and worthwhile only such movements of revolt as are one hundred percent conscious i.e., movements that are governed by plans worked out in advance to the last detail or in line with abstract theory.³

Indeed as Gramsci would have it, 'pure' spontaneity does not exist in history. The ratings had a consciousness which was framed, one could say following Gramsci, through everyday experience illuminated by 'common cause.'⁴

The ratings when they revolted discarded their caps because they regarded it as emblems of slavery. Here we can make a comparison with the sepoys of 1857 revolt where they rejected their uniform and regimentation. The rejection of caps had great importance. The act of mutiny was an act of negation, an act to eliminate individuals and a form of government that was seen as a threat to the social order. But this negation even if it replicated the violence of the masters was not a mere inversion, an empty act of imitation. In the rejection of caps - all those various signs through which an alien order had tried to separate the rating from his internal identity - there is the quest however faint of groping for an alternative identity which was perhaps entrenched in the shared common world of the peasantry. The alternative lay in that commonality and it was that sense of collectivity that provided the mutiny with its ultimate source of strength. How widespread and deep was this sense, however, is debatable.

³ . See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1971), Reprint, New York, 1991, pp.196-200.

⁴ . *Ibid.*

Roumour played an important role in the uprisings.⁵ Almost as remarkable and seemingly incongruous was the sequence of cause and effect linking the popular revolt and the RIN mutiny.

The question of 'violence' has not been taken up for discussion. Often violence is counter posed to non-violence. The lack of support from nationalist leaders cannot be ascribed to the fact that the RIN Mutiny was a violent one. Exchange of fire took place only once, otherwise the effort was to avoid armed confrontations. The one which occurred was more defensive in nature. Appeals were also made to follow non-violence. So the RIN Mutiny as a whole cannot be characterised as a violent one. Moreover forms of struggle are determined by the circumstances under which they break out and can be evaluated only contextually.

The anti-imperialist upsurge had its own reflections on the people of South India. The long simmering discontent was bursting up in 1946. Different sections of the people were coming into mass actions. Workers came out on strikes in a number of places. Peasants and agricultural workers, especially those under Communist influence, also had shown their solidarity. Students also expressed their support towards the naval ratings.

The various strikes and demonstrations of the workers show the importance of political ideology in the mobilisation of people. Participation by workers in a strike for better wages was understandable. But expression of solidarity with a naval uprising was quite different. The workers also received public support as was the case in Aaron mill strike in Malabar. It should also be noted that there were no urban-rural divide as far as demonstrations and protests were concerned in Malabar unlike many other regions in the country.

In 1930 at Peshawar, the Garhwal soldiers had refused to fire on the unarmed crowds. That was the first clear information that British recruited, trained and organized Indian armed force could not for ever be used for the suppression of a people's movement. The widespread strikes in the Navy and

⁵ . George Rude, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England 1730-1848*, New York, 1987.

also the Indian Air force dissolved the imperialists' complacent confidence and marked, therefore, the end of an era. It became obvious that disaffection against the Raj was growing rapidly among the defence forces. The growing awareness among the Indians in the services that the British were soon going to leave gave them an additional inducement to shift their loyalties.

The Enquiry Commission admitted that men of all communities took part in the revolt, irrespective of the part of India from which they came. However this communal unity forged in the struggle was more symbolic and in the communally charged situation in the country could not be taken further. Partly this was due to the communal calls being made by communal politicians and partly due to the quick suppression of the uprising. The comment made by Aruna Asaf Ali that had the revolutionary spirit shown by the people been mobilised, the subcontinents partition might have been averted was more out of anguish felt by a fiery nationalist and that it did not reflect the ground reality.

Taking the mutiny in South India as a whole it can be seen that it was not sustained. Either it was suppressed or the ratings went back to duty. Secondly expressions of solidarity by other sections of society were not strong enough to carry the mutiny to another level. The major political parties did not extend any support to them. So the expressions of solidarity remained as strong protests of short term duration. RIN mutiny had a considerable impact on the working classes. It catalysed freedom struggle in South India. The leftist parties utilised the situation to create revolutionary fervour making trade union movements stronger. Different sections of people came forward to mass actions. On their demands, workers came out on strikes in a number of places. To an extent this was unprecedented. Another social group who were active were the students. In many places they acted on their own, without waiting for the advice of their elders. Their expressions of solidarity were also unprecedented in that it cut across caste, religious and class divisions. However, these remained just that- protest movements.

The RIN ratings, in sharp contrast to the men of INA, have never been given the status of national heroes. They did not receive freedom fighters pension and when it was finally granted, only those who figured in the list supplied by the British government before they left, were given the pensions. As the British government was reluctant to admit the outbreak, none of the dismissed personal was given the reason for their dismissal as 'participation in the mutiny' in their discharge certificates. This made their task of getting pension difficult in Independent India. The Communist ministry (E.K.Nayanar ministry in 1980-81) in Kerala however decided to grant them pension bringing out the 'politics' behind the granting of such pensions. That the mutineers deserved the pension as their action involved greater risk than serving terms as prisoner of war in a 'jail' as in the case of most of the INA prisoners is beyond doubt.

Here the important problem was loyalty and discipline of the armed forces. What was the concept of the state on such discipline? Is there any change in the attitude of imperialist state and an independent state? The British attitude towards the mutiny and Congress attitude was connected on the question of discipline. Independent India also required a disciplined army, was how a political leader viewed it.

Above all, the mutiny, its popular support and its spread, bring out the complexities of the Indian struggle for freedom and this research project, it is hoped, make its own contribution to a better understanding of Indian National Movement, one of the greatest mass movements of the twentieth century.

TABLE 1**Caste wise Recruitment from Malabar to the Carnatic Regiment**

Month & Year	Nairs	Thiyyas	Mappilas	Christians	Average
July-Dec. 1916	151	34	26	13	37
Jan.-June 1917	269	108	67	23	78
July-Dec. 1917	332	207	105	29	112
Jan.-June 1918	474	378	186	166	200
Total	1224	727	384	231	
%	47	28	16	9	

Source: *Revenue Records, Bundle No.204, Serial No.35, RAK.*

TABLE 3**War Time Expansion of Ratings**

YEAR	Continuous Service, Non Continuous Service and Special service ratings	H O Ratings	Transferred from Army	Total
Sept.1939	1313	162	-	1475
Dec. 1939	1449	1400	-	2849
Dec. 1940	2253	11463	-	3716
Dec. 1941	4396	2056	-	6452
Dec. 1942	9258	3506	-	12764
Dec. 1943	14679	4783	2089	21551
Dec. 1944	18668	4698	1779	25145
Dec. 1945	18610	1678	905	21193

Note: *From September 1939 to December 1945 the ratings numbers rose roughly 14.3 times. In the same period officers rose up to 16.3 times.*

Source: CER., p.8, NAI.

TABLE 4
War Time Expansion of Warrant Officers

Year	RIN	On Loan from RN	Total
Sept.1939	35	11	46
Dec. 1939	125	12	137
Dec. 1940	141	9	150
Dec. 1941	151	21	172
Dec. 1942	180	23	203
Dec. 1943	181	25	206
Dec. 1944	187	34	221
Dec. 1945	198	16	214

Note: *Warrant Officers, an important link between the ratings and the officer rose only 4.6 times between September 1939 and December 1945. During the years of hostility when the RIN was most active i.e. December 1941 to December 1944 the number of Warrant officers did not raise much. This had an important effect upon the ratings' perception of the service.*

Source: CER., pp.7-8, NAI.

TABLE 5
War Time Expansion of Service Officers

Year	RIN	RINR	RINVR	Total
Sept. 1939	114	9	29	152
Dec. 1939	117	65	52	234
Dec. 1940	132	108	163	403
Dec. 1941	161	155	387	703
Dec. 1942	170	261	880	1311
Dec. 1943	220	301	1671	2192
Dec. 1944	241	335	2104	2680
Dec. 1945	269	250	1919	2438

Note: *The number of officers rose 16 times between September 1939 and December 1945. There was one officer for 8 ratings in 1945. For the year 1944 there was one officer for 9 ratings. In any cases the RIN was never under officered.*

Source: CER., p.7, NAI.

TABLE 6
Region wise Recruitment of Ratings

Region	1939 (%)	1945 (%)
Kashmir	$\frac{1}{2}$	$1 \frac{1}{4}$
N. W. F. P	$3 \frac{1}{4}$	3
Punjab	$44 \frac{1}{4}$	$21 \frac{1}{4}$
Delhi	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
Sind	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$
Rajaputhana & C. I	$\frac{1}{4}$	$3 \frac{1}{4}$
U. P	$3 \frac{1}{4}$	$7 \frac{1}{4}$
Bombay	38	$8 \frac{1}{4}$
Madras	$4 \frac{1}{4}$	$25 \frac{1}{4}$
Travancore	$\frac{1}{4}$	9
Cochin}		
Hyderabad}	$\frac{1}{4}$	$1 \frac{1}{2}$
Mysore}		
Bihar & Orissa	-	$1 \frac{3}{4}$
Bengal	$\frac{1}{2}$	$11 \frac{1}{2}$
Assam	$\frac{1}{4}$	1
Others	-	3
Goa & Portuguese India	$2 \frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{3}{4}$

Source: *CER.*, p.8, NAI.

TABLE 7**Various Nationalities entered each Year of the War (only Officers)**

Year	British	Indian	Anglo-Indians	Others *	Total
1939	57	29	4	1	91
1940	167	42	4	1	212
1941	240	77	17	10	344
1942	309	168	45	26	548
1943	430	233	99	21	783
1944	140	280	48	8	476
1945	36	120	39	3	198
Total	1377	949	256	70	2652

* Many different nationalities

Note: *At the height of hostilities i.e. the period of December 1941 to December 1943, British officers outnumbered all others conclusive of 14 nationalities, never formed an important element in the officer corps. This confirms the ratings viewpoint which saw the British officers responsible for racial arrogance and abuse in the RIN. The CER admits that behaviour of British officers were unruly harsh but at the same time tries to shift the onus of guilt to the policy of adopting officers from other nationalities. But these figures contradict such assertions. Further not only did the figure of British officers remain high throughout the war but in the main Europeans held the higher ranks and the key positions in the service.*

Source: CER., p.9, NAI.

TABLE 8**Pay in the RIN**

Rating	Category	Pre-war and up to 31-1-1942	1-2-42 to 30-4-42	1-5-42 to 30-11-44	1-12-44 onwards
Seaman branch	First 12 months	15	15	15	15

	Boy(remaining 6 months)	15	15	15	20
	Boy Sea going	-	-	25	30
	Ordinary Seaman	20	30	40	40
	Able Seaman	25	35	45	45
	Leading Seaman	34	45	60	60
	Petty Officer	50	65	80	85
	Chief Petty Officer	70	80	90	110
Communication Branch	First 12 months	15	--	-	15
	Boy (remaining 6 months)	15	-	-	20
	Boy Sig. or Tel. (sea going)	-	-	25	30
	Ord.Sig. or Ord. Tel.	26	60	60	60
	Sig. or Tel..	34	65	65	65
	Ldg.Sig. or Ldg.Tel.	44	70	70	70
	Yeo.Sig. or P.O.Tel.	55	80	80	95
	Ch. Yeo. Sigs. Or C P O Tel.	80	95	95	115

Note: On September 1939 an ordinary seaman of RIN received Rs.20 per month; A Merchant service seaman received Rs.20 per month. Despite pay revisions in 1942 and 1944 the date of desertion did not fall. Pay rise compared to rise in prices from 1944-45 was nothing.

Source: CER., p.11, NAI..

TABLE 9

Religious wise composition of Ratings

The percentage of each class of rating in the RIN in 1939 and 1945 was:

Religion	1939 (%)	1945(%)
Hindus	9 1/4	42 1/2
Muslims	75	35
Christians	13	19 1/2
Sikhs	1/4	1 1/2

Anglo-Indians	2	1 ¼
Miscellaneous	1/2	4

CER., p.8, NAI.

TABLE 1**Population of Madras Town from 1871**

Sl. No.	Year	Population	% Increase
1.	1871	3,97,553	-
2	1881	4,05,845	3.3
3	1891	4,50,640	11.5
4	1901	5,09,346	12.6
5	1911	5,18,660	1.8
6	1921	5,26,911	1.6
7	1931	6,47,230	22.8
8	1941	8,81,485	20.1

Source: Nripendra Nath Mitra (ed.), *The Indian Annual Register*,
Jan-June 1942, Vol.1, Calcutta,1942.

TABLE 2**Working Class Struggles during the Second World War**

Year	No. of Strikes & Lockouts	No. of Workers involved	No. of Working Days Lost
1939	406	409,189	4,992,795
1940	322	452,539	7,577,281
1941	359	291,054	3,330,503
1942	694	772,653	5,779,965
1943	716	525,088	2,342,287
1944	658	550,015	3,477,306
1945	848	782,196	3,340,892

Source: Cited in Sukomal Sen, *Working Class of India: History of Emergence and Movement, 1830-1970*, K.P.Bagchi & Co., Calcutta, 1977, p.385.

TABLE 3
Demographic Details of Cochin

Taluk	Density	Rank in density	Percentage of increase	Rank according to increase
Crangannur	2,744	1	12.2	5
Cochin-Kanayannur	2,661	2	20.4	2
Trichur	1,194	3	22.5	1
Thalapally	919	4	16.2	4
Mukundapuram	604	5	17.0	3
Chittur	398	6	9.0	6

Source: *Census of Cochin, 1941, KSA.*

TABLE 4
Rise of Prices in Malabar

District	Paddy			Rice		
	Oct. 1938	Sept. 1939	Oct. 1939	Oct. 1938	Sept. 1939	Oct. 1939
Malabar	2.49	2.56	2.61	3.73	4.06	4.29
Presidency	2.53	2.82	2.84	3.83	4.19	4.21

Source: *Malabar District Gazette, 1939-45, RAK.*

TABLE 5

Retail Prices of Rice and Ragi in Rupees in Imperial Maunds* (1938-44)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Rice</i>	<i>Ragi</i>
<i>1938-39</i>	<i>3.93</i>	<i>2.35</i>
<i>1939-40</i>	<i>4.24</i>	<i>2.73</i>
<i>1940-41</i>	<i>4.83</i>	<i>2.72</i>
<i>1941-42</i>	<i>4.54</i>	<i>2.96</i>
<i>1942-43</i>	<i>8.23</i>	<i>5.31</i>
<i>1943-44</i>	<i>9.82</i>	<i>7.84</i>

Source: *Malabar District Gazette, 1939-45, RAK* (*One maund is 37.3242 Kilogram or 40 seers).

TABLE 6**Annual Statement of War Fund Mobilisation in the Madras Presidency**

Sl. No.	Year	Amount	Amount increased
1	First half of Dec. 1940	65,88,693-6-9	
2	First half of Dec. 1941	1,73,61,401-15-8	10772808
3	Second half of Dec. 1942	2,13,74, 284-4-10	40,12,883
4	Second half of Dec. 1943	2, 76, 23 ,44	62,49,163
5	Second half of Dec. 1944	3,34,18,188.	57,94,741
6	Second half of June 1945	3,49,63,451	15,45,263

Note: The above table shows that the rate of increase in the amount was not steady and that there was a decline by 1945.

Source: *Fort Nightly Reports* of Madras from 1939-45, NAI.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF PARTICIPANTS

1. E. Narayana Kitavu (Interview, Nallalam, 20-05-2005)

Belonging to Nallalam in Calicut district, Kitavu had school education in Chalappuram Ganapath High school and passed intermediate from Zamorin's college, Calicut. He joined the navy in 1942 at the age of nineteen. War time distress and his own poverty were the motivating factors. After training for three months in the Castle barracks (now known as Naval dockyard), he was appointed on a salary of Rs. 40 per month in HMIS Punjab. He realized that the promises given by the British prior to recruitment were bogue. And food and working conditions were miserable. The officers were mostly Europeans who would use filthy language and give severe punishments. Though recruited as a clerk, he was made to clean the decks and bathrooms.

National movement had influenced the ratings. They used to go as a group to hear speeches by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in the Choupathi beach in Bombay. The trial of INA members had greatly angered.

Kitavu participated actively in the mutiny and was discharged after court martial. He reached home in July 1946 and later worked in the Calicut Co-operative Milk Distribution Union. He took the initiative in forming the RIN Mutineers Association (1982) and earnestly worked to secure Central and State pensions to the mutineers.

He is of the opinion that the RIN mutiny has not got its due recognition. He leads a retired life in Nallalam at present.

2. T.V.Govindan Nambiar (Interview, Thondayad, 15-12-2001)

He belonged to Thondayad, a sub-urban locality of the Calicut city. He joined navy in 1943. At the time of the mutiny, he was the leading Stoker in HMIS Hamla. Nambiar participated in the rebellion from February 19 onwards. He sentenced to two months imprisonment after court martial.

Back in his native place, he joined for MBBS course and served as a doctor in different parts of Calicut district. He served as the President of the RIN Mutineers Association. He expired on February 1, 2002.

3. **T.Raghavan Nair** (Interview, Pokkунnu, 12-05-2006)

He was born in Pokkунnu in Calicut. He joined the navy in 1943 as a Seaman. At the time of the revolt, he was in Castle barracks. After court martial, he was discharged from service. He served as the Secretary of RIN Mutineers Association. He was grieved on return to find that his own countrymen did not accord him the due recognition. He expired on the September 14, 2006.

4. **P Madhavan Nair** (Interview, Karuvassery,30-10-2004)

He belonged to Karuvassery in Calicut district. He joined the navy in 1942 and was discharged in 1946. The discharge certificate did not mention his participation in the mutiny. He served as the President of the RIN Mutineers Association. He expired on September 25, 2011.

5. **Mamiyl Unnerikutty** (Interview, Olavanna,11-05-2013)

Born in 1921 in Olavanna in Calicut district to an agricultural family. He joined the navy in 1942 and after basic training in Bangalore joined as a Seaman in HMIS Bombay. He was discharged for participating in the mutiny. In independent India, he joined the army and retired in 1960. After retirement, he was very active in the RIN Mutineers Association. Now leads a retired life.

6. **P.Krishna Pillai** (Interview, Kokkivalvu, 09-05-2013)

Born in Thakkala in the now Kanyakumari district and joined the navy at the age of eighteen. The money orders that regularly went to the houses of soldiers motivated him to join the navy. After training in Bangalore, he underwent further wireless training in HMIS Talwar, Bombay for six months. The racial discrimination in the navy was greatly resented. At the time of the mutiny, Pillai was discharged from service on March 8, 1946. But officially his service was extended to May 26 and salary given up to that period.

Back in Travancore, he joined the PWD as a clerk and was transferred to Calicut in 1960. He has been living there ever since.

7. **B. Hussain** (Interview, Payangadi,22-02-2002)

Born in Payangadi in Kannur district, joined the navy in 1942 out of poverty. He served in HMIS Akbar in Bombay. He was courtmartialled and sentenced to three months punishment.

Back home, he lived in poverty which prompted A.K.Gopalan, then leader of Opposition in the Parliament to seek his reinstatement in the navy. But his discharge certificate mentioned that he was dismissed with disgrace. So this was not done.

8. **M.V.Kunhiraman** (Interview, Kanhangad, 20-12-2001)

He belonged to Kanhangad in Kasaragod district. He was prompted to join the navy in 1942 due to his poverty. He was an active participant of the mutiny. He was court martialled and discharged from service.

9. **Gopalakrishna Menockie** (Interview,Kakkoti,11-05-2013)

Born in East Hill in Calicut in 1923. After his education from Chalappuram Ganapath High school and Malabar Christian College, Calicut, he joined the navy in 1941. At the time of the mutiny, he served as a Telegraphist in HMIS Maratha in Bombay. He actively participated in the mutiny and dismissed from service on August 26, 1946.

Back in home, he served in the Calicut Civil station. Later, joined in the Civil Aviation department as Radio Operator. In 1967, retired from service as Assistant Communication officer.

10. **P.M.Karunakara Menon** (Interview, Manjeri, 15-12-2013)

He was born at Ramanattukara in Calicut district in 1925. He passed the Third Form from Chalappuram Ganapath High school and joined the navy in 1941. At the time of the revolt, he was in Karachi. He actively participated in

the revolt. After, he was brought to Bombay and court-martialed and sentenced to two months imprisonment. He was discharged on August 14, 1947.

Back in his native place, he joined the PWD and later became very active in the RIN Mutineers Association. Now leads a retired life in Manjeri.

11. Odakkal Muhammed (Interview, Kondotty, 02-10-2013)

He was born in 1927 in Kondotty in Malappuram district. After his education from Chalppuram Ganapath High school, he joined the navy. He was the Chief Petty Officer in Central Communication in Bombay at the time of the revolt. He was discharged in June 1946.

Back in his native place, he continued his education and served as an English teacher in Aligarh, Agra and Allahabad. He is the author of several books of philosophical nature.

12. Late. Netinjalil Krishnan (Interview with his son, Harinarayanan, Cherukulam, 15-01-2013)

Belonged to Cherukulam in Calicut. After passing the Sixth Form (today's SSLC), he joined as a teacher in a school. He joined the navy in 1944 expecting better salary. He was posted as a Seaman in HMIS Akbar. Though discharged on April 26, 1946 was allowed to rejoin the navy in April in 1947. He expired on July 7, 1990.

13. Late. Kandyil Balakrishnan (Interview with his son, Sugathan. K, Cherukulam, 15-01-2013)

Belonged to Cherukulam in Calicut. After intermediate from Malabar Christian College, Calicut, he joined the navy in 1944 as a Radio Operator. He was discharged in July 1946. Back in his native place, he became an active member of the Communist Party of India. He expired in 1989.

14. Late. K.P. Lazar, East Kallada, Kollam (Interview with his son, L. Thomaskutty, Calicut University, 5-11-2013)

He joined the navy in 1944 as a Signaller in the Communication branch at Bombay. He actively participated in the mutiny. After court martial, he got two months imprisonment and discharged with a certificate of 'discharge with disgrace.' After returning home, he engaged in many occupations. Due to the difficult life situations, he had an anti-political approach.

List of Participants

A. Calicut District

1. **Abdul Jaleel**
Kallai
13-08-1943 to 12-04-1946.
2. **P.S.Abraham**
East Hill
21-01-1942 to 26-03-1946
3. **A.K.B.Atiyoti**
Eranhipalam
17-02-1944 to 26-04-46
4. **Unnikrishnan Nair**
Olavanna-Kottayithoti
Stoker
02-01-1944 to 21-06-46
5. **K.T.Kunhikrishnan Nair**
Naduvannur Moolad
26-04-42 to 21-05-46
6. **T.C.Kunhirama Kurup**
Aaliyoor
Leading Stoker
31-10-1941 to 15-03-46
7. **E. Kunhiraman Nair**
Kayakoti
Wireless Operator
05-05-1942 to 27-07-46
8. **K.Kunju Nair**
Vengeri
Leading Stoker
03-01-1942 to 26-07-46

9. **Kunhi Mayeen Hassan**
Atholi
01-02-1942 to 07-01-1946
10. **K. Kumaran**
Makkada
Ordinary Telgraphist
29-02-1944 to 12-07-46
11. **Khan.K.Abhas**
Pokkunnu
07-09-1943 to 09-03-1946
12. **K. Gopala Menon**
North Beypore
Wireless Operator
14-04-1945 to 23-08-46
13. **P.Gopalan Kutty Nair**
Karapparamba
08-10-1942 to 18-11-46
14. **T.Govindan**
Chevayur
21-06-1943 to 25-07-46
15. **K.Jokkutti**
Puthiyara
07-01-19444 to 14-05-46
16. **N.Damodaran Nair**
Chelannur
Stoker
06-10-1942 to 19-06-46
17. **P.Damodaran Nair**
Leading Stoker
28-001-1942 to 11-06-1946
18. **P.Damodaran Nair**
West Hill
Telegraphist
11-03-1943 to 27-05-1946
19. **C.P.Damodara Panikkar**
Mankavu
Wireless Operator
07-09-1942 to 10-07-46

- 20. T.Narayanan Nair**
Peringalam
06-02-1944 to 25-04-1947
- 21. K.Pacchukutty**
Edakkad
Telegraphist
26-08-1942 to 29-04-1946
- 22. Balan Puththilakath**
Puthiyara
06-01-1943 to 11-03-46.
- 23. P.Bhaskaran**
Calicut Fourth Railway gate
Leading Writer
08-08-1942 to 16-05-46
- 24. P.N.Bhaskaran Nair**
Kizhakkummuri
20-04-1942 to 09-07-46
- 25. V.Raghavan Nair**
Chevayur
01-02-1942 to 07-01-46
- 26. K.K.Raman**
Vadakara,Nut Street
28-12-1943 to 09-06-1946
- 27. M.Rammunni Nair**
REC-Malayamma
16-11-1944 to 03-06-1946
- 28. M.Viswanatha Menon**
Eranhipalam
07-12-1942 to 25-04-1946
- 29. U.Vasudevan**
Puthiyangadi
Petty Officer
29-01-1941 to 19-08-1947
- 30. T.M.Sreedharan**
Kottooli
Steward 21-01-1943 to 20-05-1946

B. Kannur District

31. **N. K Gopalan Nambiar**
Chovva, Kannur
25-11-1942 to 6-6- 1946
32. **K. Krishnan**
Bavod, Mundalore
19-4- 1942 to 23-8-1946
33. **C. P. Kumaran**
Bavod, Mundalore
28-4-1942 to 2-4-1946
34. **Karunakaran.P**
Valappad
5-10- 1942 to 23- 3- 1946
35. **Kunjikrishnan Nair. K**
Peravoor, Kannur
19- 4- 1942 to 29- 9- 1946
36. **C. K. Karunakaran**
Talap,
23- 1- 1943 to 12- 10- 1946
37. **M. Rajan**
Palayad, Tellichery
16- 3- 1943 to 2- 7- 1946
38. **K. P. Kunhanandan**
Mayyil
10- 6- 1943 to 17- 11- 1946
39. **K. Sankunni Nambiar**
Mundayad, Kannur
20 – 11- 1942 to 16- 8- 1946
40. **K. Madhavan Nambiar**
Makkeri, Kannur
8-3- 1943 to 23- 5- 1946
41. **K. Karunakaran Nambiar**
Kokkara, Kannur
2- 6- 1944 to 4- 7- 1946
42. **C. K. Raghavan**
Chovva, Kannur
10- 10- 1942 to 17- 4- 1946
43. **K. N. Balakrishnan**
Echur, Kannur

31- 10 1942 to 6- 5- 1946

- 44. C. C. Achuthan Nambiar**
Chovva, Kannur
2- 12- 1942 to 20- 5- 1946
- 45. T. Gopalan Nambiar**
Thalipparamba
4- 5- 1945 to 15- 6- 1946
- 46. K. K. Karunakaran Nambiar**
Vadakkumbad
15- 1- 1942 to 8- 5- 1946
- 47. N. T. Damodaran Nambiar**
Kannur
28- 11- 1942 to 4-7- 1946
- 48. M. Sankaran**
Tellicherry
28- 3- 1944 to 12- 7- 1946
- 49. P. V. Kannan**
Peravoor
23- 5- 1944 to 25- 4- 1946
- 50. M. V. Balakrishnan Nambiar**
Thottada
18- 10- 1943 to 8- 4- 1946
- 51. Govindan Nair**
Kannur
5- 5- 1943 to 3- 6- 1946
- 52. K. Karunakaran**
Payambalam
10- 2- 43 to 7-6- 1946

C. Other Districts

- 53. Vele Parambil Raman**
Vadakkumuri, Trichur
5- 2- 1942 to 6- 5- 1946
- 54. K. Sukumaran**
Olavakkode, Palakkad
19- 2- 1944 to 6- 6 1946
- 55. G. D. Pillai**

- Pappanamgode, Trivandrum
24- 1- 1942 to 20- 6- 1946
- 56. C. Raghavan Nair**
Parali, Palakkad.
17- 5- 1944 to 25- 6- 1946
- 57. Kesava Menon. V. K.**
Eroor, Tripunitara
21- 12 – 1943 to 14- 8- 1946
- 58. A. Kunjappan**
Kallekkulangara, Palakkad
18- 2- 1944 to 9- 4- 1946
- 59. K. C. Karthikeyan**
Paravoor, Ernakulam
25- 11- 1943 to 20 -3- 1946
- 60. C.K. Kochukrishnan**
Palappuram, Ottapalam
9-9-1943 to 18-6-1946
- 61. K. N. Gopalan Nair**
Kodakkal, Quilon
27- 3- 1944 to 27- 8- 1947
- 62. K. Sivaraman**
Parli, Palakkad
6- 4- 1943 to 21- 6- 1946
- 63. T. Madhavan Nair**
Pazhayannur, Trichur
11- 3- 1942 to 26- 4- 1946
- 64. M. Sudhakara Menon**
Thiruvankulam, Ernakulam
4- 11- 1942 to 9- 6- 1946
- 65. K. H. Gopalakrishnan**
Panampally Nagar,Ernakulam
- 66. M. Venugopala Sodar**
Thiruvanathapuram
14- 1- 1943 to 28- 5- 1946
- 67. K. Divakaran**
Kirikkad, Aleppy
15- 3- 1943 to 15- 10 1946

- 68. A.M. George**
Kollam
11- 10- 1941 to 9- 4- 1946
- 69. A. Alexander**
Kollam,
17- 12 – 1942 to 4- 3- 1946
- 70. K. T. Karunakaran Nair**
Palakkad
31- 3- 1943 to 3- 8 1943
- 71. P. Prabhakaranunni Nair**
Trikkaderi, Palakkad
6- 10 1943 to 3- 8- 1946
- 72. N. Chellappan**
Perinad, Kollam
15- 9- 1942 to 1. 2. 1947
- 73. P. K. Muhammad Haji**
Kumaranelloor
29- 9- 1942 to 7- 6- 1946
- 74. V. Gopala Krishnan Nair**
Pattom
18- 10- 1941 to 20- 3- 1946
- 75. T. K. Das**
Vadakkad, Trichur
25- 5- 1945 to 27- 7- 1946
- 76. C. L. Mathews**
Kottayam
21- 1- 1943 to 21- 7- 1946
- 77. V. Madhava Kurup**
Palakkad
7- 12- 1942 to 27- 7- 1946

Source: *Files available with the RIN Mutineers Association, Nallalam, Kozhikode.*

TABLE 1
Hierarchy of Ranks in the Navy

Sl. No.			Army Rank
Rating	Seaman	Class II	Sepoy
	Seaman	Class I	Lands Nayak
N C. O ¹	Leading Seaman	Class II	Nayak
	Petty Officer (PO)	Class I	Havildar
J. C. O ²	Chief Petty Officer (CPO)		Jamedar
	Master Chief Petty Officer	Class II	Subedar
	Master Chief Petty Officer	Class I	Subedar Major
Subordinate Officer	Midshipman		No Equal Rank
Commissioned Officer	Acting Sub-Lieutenant Commissioned Officer		Second Lieutenant
	Sub –Lieutenant		Lieutenant
	Lieutenant		Captain
	Lieutenant Commander		Major
	Commander		Lieutenant Colonel
	Captain		Colonel
	Commodore		Brigadier
	Rear-Admiral		Major General
	Vice-Admiral		Lieutenant General
Admiral		General	

* Flag Officer: The Officers from Commodore to Admiral are known as Flag Officer. They could use naval flag in the car.

Source: Cited in Bisheshwar Prasad (ed.) *Expansion of the Armed Forces and Defence organization 1939-45*, New Delhi.

TABLE 2
Important Ships involved in the RIN Mutiny

1. Bombay (Ships)

- HMIS Narbada

¹ Non-Commissioned Officer

² Junior Commissioned Officer

- HMIS Jamuna
- HMIS Dhaush
- HMIS Gondwana
- HMIS Assam
- HMIS Mahratta
- HMIS Sind
- HMIS Kathiawad
- HMIS Clive
- HMIS Lawrence

(Mine sweepers)

- HMIS Kumaol
- HMIS Khyber
- HMIS Punjab
- HMIS Bombay
- HMIS Madras
- HMIS Orissa
- HMIS Oudh

(Trawlers)

- HMIS Agra
- HMIS Cuttack
- HMIS Karachi
- HMIS Lahore
- HMIS Madura
- HMIS Nautilus
- HMIS Nasik
- HMIS Patna
- HMIS Poona
- HMIS Rampur
- HMIS Berar
- HMIS Amritsar
- HMIS Kochin

(Gun Boats)

- HMIS Neelam
- HMIS Moti
- HMIS Lal
- HMIS Hira

(Auxiliary Vessels)

- HMIS Kalavathi
- HMIS Ramdas
- HMIS Deepavati
- HMIS Bhadravati

(Shore establishment)

- HMIS Hamla
- HMIS Kakauri
- HMIS Cheetah
- HMIS Akbar
- HMIS Firoze
- HMIS Shivaji
- HMIS Valsura
- HMIS Castle Barracks
- HMIS Fort Barracks
- Central Communication Office
- Colaba Receiving Station
- Mohul Wireless Station
- Rin Hospital Sewri
- HMIS Talwar
- HMIS Machilimar

2. Karachi (Ships)

- HMIS Hindustan
- HMIS Travancore
- Small Auxillary Vessels

(Shore establishment)

- HMIS Bahadur
- HMIS Chamak
- HMIS Himalaya

3. Cochin (Ships)

- HMIS Baroda
- Small Ships

(Shore establishment)

- HMIS Venduruthy

4. Madras (Ships)

- HMIS Adayar

5. Vishakhapatanam (Ships)

- HMIS Sonavati
- Ahmis Ahmedabad
- HMIS Shillong
- Two Flotilla

(Establishments)

- HMIS Circars

6. Calcutta(Ships)

- HMIS Rajaputana

(Establishment)

- HMIS Hooghly

7. Delhi(Establishment)

- HMIS India

8. Andaman Islands

(Mine sweepers)

- HMIS Rohilkhand
- HMIS Hongkong
- HMIS Deccan
- HMIS Bengal
- HMIS Bihar
- HMIS Baluchistan
- HMIS Kistna

9. Bahrin (Establishment)

- Wireless Transmition Station

10. Aden (Establishment)

- Wireless Transmition Station

Source: Cited in N.P Nair, 1946-Le Indian Navika Lahala, Kottayam: DC Books, 1998.

Principal Holders of Office

Clement Attlee	: British Prime Minister and first Lord of the Treasury, Minister of Defence
Lord Pethick Lawrence	: Secretary of State for India and for Burma
Field Marshall Viscount Wavell	: Viceroy, Governor General and Crown representative
General Claude Auchinleck:	: Commander-in-Chief of India
Philip Mason	: The Defence Secretary
Captain Sir Arthur Hope	: Governor of Madras
Sir John Coville	: Governor of Bombay
Sir Francis Mudie	: Governor of Sindh
R.G.Casey	: Governor of Bengal
B.Glancy	: Governor of Punjab

Source: Cited in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power*, Vol.VI, London, 1976.

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Sl.No.3, NL 9903, Board of Enquiry HMIS Hooghly.

Sl.No.4, NL 9904, Report from Madras indiscipline in 37th M S Flottila.

Sl.No.5, NL 9905, Report of Board of Enquiry in HMIS Adayar.

Sl.No.6, NL 9906, Report of the Board of Enquiry in HMIS Akbar.

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GLOSSARY

<i>Adhikari</i>	: Village Headman
<i>Adhivasi</i>	: Tribal
<i>Ambeythu</i>	: Using bow and arrow (archery)
<i>Amsom</i>	: A lowest administrative division
<i>Anna</i>	: A smaller denomination of money. One rupee was 16 annas
<i>Atta</i>	: Wheat flour
<i>Batta</i>	: A kind of bonus, in addition to regular pay.
<i>Choottu</i>	: A bundle made of brambles of wood and coconut leaves to be used as torch
<i>Firka</i>	: a revenue division
<i>Goonda</i>	: Used to refer to a person who is a law breaker.
<i>Goondaraj</i>	: Rule of the unruly
<i>Hartal</i>	: Lit., standstill. A cessation of business and other activities in protest
<i>Jenmi</i>	: Landlord in Malabar
<i>Kalari</i>	: Gymnasium
<i>Kinnam muttal</i>	: Clanging the plate
<i>Kolkali</i>	: A dance form using sticks usually performed by the Muslims
<i>Lathi</i>	: Staff or stick used as a weapon
<i>Mappila</i>	: Native Muslims of Malabar
<i>Maqbara</i>	: Tomb of a Sufi
<i>Marumakkathayam</i>	: Matrilineal system of inheritance
<i>Maund</i>	: a measure(37.3242 kilogram)
<i>Mela</i>	: : Festive gathering
<i>Nair</i>	: An 'upper caste'
<i>Nerccha</i>	: A Muslim festival, an annual programme of devotion at the shrine of a saint (Sufi) or a martyr
<i>Ounce</i>	: A measure
<i>Patakam</i>	: Invocation song sung during Temple rituals
<i>Pooram</i>	: Temple festival
<i>Seer</i>	: A measure
<i>Tahsildar</i>	: A revenue administrative official in charge of the tahsil
<i>Taluk</i>	: Revenue and administrative division
<i>Taravadu</i>	: Ancestral house
<i>Thacholi Othenan</i>	: A legendary hero of Northern Ballads
<i>Thiyya</i>	: A caste group belonging to the OBC category
<i>Valpayattu</i>	: A form of sword play in Kurumbranad taluk; Kurumbranad was famous for martial arts

