

POLICY BRIEF

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The Life and Times of A. M. Nair: The Forgotten Indian Freedom Fighter in Japan

Dr. Monika Chansoria

While writing an introduction to A. M. Nair's memoirs, the editor of *Asahi Evening News*, Kimpei Shiba, noted in December 1981 how Nair, popularly called, *a la Japonaise* Nair-san, was perhaps the best-known Indian in Japan in his times. To younger generations of Japanese, Nair-san remains a name that is synonymous with his business firm: *Yugen Kaisha Nair* (Nair Corporation Ltd.) which handles a variety of Indian products and runs an Indian spice factory as well as authentic Indian restaurants. However, the older generations still recall him as an ardent Indian patriot who, for nearly half of his six decades in Japan, was at the forefront of India's freedom movement in the Far East and Southeast Asia as he made Japan his second home. Known for being an Indian patriot, Nair was colonial Great Britain's *bête noire* and spent many years as a technocrat, linguist, and adviser to the Indian Diplomatic Mission in Tokyo, eventually becoming a business entrepreneur. His advisory function was invariably marked by complete objectivity, integrity, and independence.

Nair was in the bad books of the British rulers of colonial India, and was in danger of being imprisoned if he would have returned to India after completing his studies in Kyoto. Kimpei Shiba explained this as a primary reason behind Nair's decision to stay on in Japan, continuing to work for the cause of India's freedom. In that connection, he was intimately associated with the higher echelons of Japanese politicians and other public personalities. These included the legendary Mitsuru Toyama of the Black Dragon Society (*Kokuryukai*), Kuzu Sensei, Dr Shumei Okawa and others. Besides, Nair also had a network of close contacts in the military. After conquering Manchuria, Japan created the state of Manchukuo in northeastern China in 1931. Nair went there as a state guest on the invitation of Gunta Nagao, a prominent officer of the Manchukuo government who was a fellow student at Kyoto University. Nair utilized the opportunity to establish an Indian freedom movement center in the state and organized an Asian Conference in Manchukuo.

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Consequent to his multifarious activities, he quickly earned the nickname ‘Manchukuo Nair’ among his close friends!

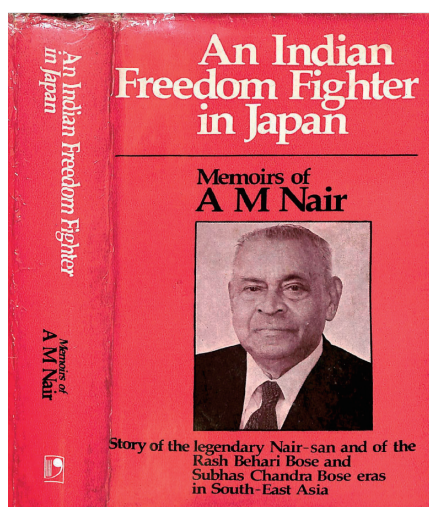
This paper primarily revisits the *Memoirs of A. M. Nair* that were first published in 1982 and brings out some significant milestones and arguments made in it, given that it provides an interesting and in-depth account of several important episodes, both before and during World War II. In his memoirs, Nair touched upon Japan’s miraculous revival virtually from the ashes to which it was reduced in 1945. His autobiographical book is rich in capturing the history and contains references that also have significant contemporary bearing. It is a fascinating and, in large measure, a poignant narrative of a remarkable life and career.

Entry and Initial Years in Japan

An Indian Freedom Fighter in Japan: Memoirs of A. M. Nair (published 1982)¹ is an eventful narrative of the journey of a young man who travelled to Japan in the early Showa period in 1928 from the southwest Indian state of Kerala. Situated on India’s tropical Malabar Coast with a 600km coastline along the Arabian Sea, Kerala is dotted with charming golden-colored beaches

and abounds with placid lagoons, majestic palm groves, and lush green rice fields. Situated quite near Nair’s hometown of Trivandrum is Kovalam Beach, regarded as one of the most beautiful sea bays in the world.

Following his schooling in Kerala, Ayyappanpillai Madhavan (A. M.) Nair [1905-1990] boarded the Japanese ship *Suwa Maru* from Colombo (Ceylon/Sri Lanka) on February 18, 1928 and reached Japan. The *Suwa Maru* berthed at Kobe on March 12, 1928. The immigration officers were rather puzzled at seeing the entry in Nair’s passport under the heading ‘national status’ wherein he was described as a ‘Citizen of Travancore—British protected person.’ Japanese immigration staff were not aware of a ‘country’ called Travancore. However, Nair describes in his memoir that one of the officers knew that Travancore was ‘some place in India.’ Japanese immigration in the 1920s was not generally aware that the British had created as many as 601 small Indias within India, terming them ‘Princely States’ (or ‘Native States’). The British made special treaties with each princely state, giving certain special privileges to its rulers, in return for their pledge of loyalty to the British Empire. Nair described this as ‘devious modes of political skullduggery



1 The primary document cited and referenced from, throughout this paper, *An Indian Freedom Fighter in Japan: Memoirs of A. M. Nair* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1982).

which the British rulers practiced in India to tighten their colonial grip on the country.²

A. M. Nair belonged to a distinguished family and, on the advice of his brother who received education at the Imperial University of Sapporo, entered Kyoto University (then Kyoto Imperial University), where he majored in engineering and graduated as a civil engineer. He also studied the Japanese language, learning it well enough to be able to deliver lectures fluently. During and after World War II, Nair was able to broadcast talks on India in the Japanese language over NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation), where he was held in high regard. His professional stint as an engineer was rather short-lived, as he got drawn inexorably into Japanese politics, finding his place as a *Ronin* – the category of right-wing activists who sought no personal rewards but wielded the highest influence in the country. Nair-san, as he was commonly known across Tokyo and elsewhere, lived in Japan for over six decades, and spent several years in Manchuria, where he was an unofficial adviser to the Manchukuo government and the Kwantung Army, known for backing anti-colonial movements against the exploitative British imperialism in India and other parts of Asia.

First Meeting with Rash Behari Bose

Early in April 1928, Nair visited Tokyo briefly with a bigger purpose. The famous Indian patriot and revolutionary Rash Behari Bose, who arrived in Japan in June 1915, was living in self-exile in Tokyo. Bose, an indefatigable fighter for the liberation of India, had led a strong revolutionary freedom movement in India, much to the discomfiture of the British authorities. The latter put a price on his head, but he

somehow managed to escape and reached Japan in 1915.³ The British requested the Japanese Foreign Office to apprehend, arrest, and extradite Bose in consideration of the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902. Though the Japanese authorities tried to locate and arrest Rash Behari Bose, they failed because he had placed himself under the protection of the powerful patriot Mitsuru Toyama, who had close ties with the Japanese military.⁴

Bose was known for launching an organized movement in Japan to promote the struggle for the liberation and freedom of India. Nair had heard much about Bose and his work in India as well as his continued activities in Japan for the cause of India's freedom. Nair narrates that he was only too keen to meet Bose as early as possible and called on him at Nakamura, the store operated by Bose and his family in Shinjuku, recalling that Bose welcomed him warmly with a good hot meal of curry and rice. Nair was struck by Bose's bearing, which was both kindly and forceful. Although he was some 25 years older than Nair, the latter could easily sense Bose's magnetic personality.⁵ Bose expressed happiness to see Nair since he was the only Indian student in Japan at that time, and soon enough Bose and Nair established a close rapport. Bose's prominent role in the anti-British agitations in India in the early decades of the 1900s were well known to Indian revolutionaries inside and outside India. After meeting Rash Behari Bose, Nair returned to Kyoto with a feeling of having gone on a pilgrimage and stood before a holy presence who never ceased to inspire him.⁶

Bose continued till his very end to fight for India's freedom. He technically acquired Japanese citizenship by naturalization for his

2 *Memoirs of A.M. Nair*, n. 1, Chapter Six: *Departure for Japan*, p. 42.

3 *Memoirs of A.M. Nair*, n. 1, Chapter Eight: *Meeting Rash Behari Bose*, p. 52.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

survival in 1923, which enabled him to intensify his lobbying for India by means of lecturing and organizing pro-India associations in Japan and across Southeast Asia. Bose had mastered the Japanese language so well that he could not only lecture in it but could also translate English, Bengali, and Hindi texts and books into Japanese with felicity.⁷ Among his known Japanese translations was Jabez Thomas Sunderland's 1929 book, *India in Bondage*.⁸ Nair recalled having the good fortune to know the great Somas of Nakamura and the Higuchi family. Nair and his family long maintained a warm and affectionate relationship with them. In another coincidence, Bose married the daughter of the Somas, while Nair also married a Japanese lady from an aristocratic family. Nair's wife waited until after India's independence to become an Indian citizen.

During the time when Nair was a student in Kyoto, his association with Bose was limited to occasional meetings but, from the time Japan entered World War II, Nair, who was in Manchukuo at that time, maintained close contact with Bose. Nair described Bose as technically being a naturalized Japanese citizen who was perfectly adjusted to the Japanese way of life; however, in his innermost heart, Bose remained as strong an Indian patriot as he was before arriving in Japan. Bose dedicated his entire life to the cause of Indian independence. Nair recalled that often, during his lectures on Hindu philosophy, Bose would announce that his only wish, after India's liberation, was to live

either on Mount Fuji or in the Himalayas.⁹

Travels to Mongolia and Sinkiang

Nair travelled widely in Mongolia and China. His journeys took him across vast and terrifying desert regions and high mountainous terrain. Nair visited Mongolia briefly in 1933 in the company of Raja Mahendra Pratap¹⁰, who wanted to utilize Nair's knowledge of the Chinese and Mongolian dialects. The tour lasted about six weeks and was useful to Nair, for he saw it as a great opportunity to observe the lay of the land, mix with the people, and understand their work, customs, manners, and religion. Perhaps the most important economic activity in the region that could not escape anyone's attention, including that of Nair, was the vast caravan trade in wool coming in from Tibet and the interior of Mongolia into China, and going towards the port city of Tientsin which the British had secured on lease from China.¹¹ Nair outlined the three main caravan tracks: one coming from Tibet and merging with the Sinkiang route; another from Ala Shaan; and the third from places deep inside Mongolia. However, all of them converged at Pao-tao. These caravans were amazingly long, consisting of some hundred thousand or more animals, mostly camels, and a fair number of mules. They would traverse anything up to a few thousand miles before delivering the consignments at Tientsin. Nair made detailed enquiries that revealed the wool was not for use in China but rather for transshipment to England, for the benefit of the textile mills of

7 Ibid., p. 59.

8 For more details see, Jabez T. Sunderland, *India in Bondage: Her Right to Freedom and a Place Among the Great Nations*, (New York: Lewis Copeland Company, 1929).

9 *Memoirs of A.M. Nair*, n. 1, Chapter Eight: *Meeting Rash Behari Bose*, pp. 59-60.

10 Nair met Raja (King) Mahendra Pratap in 1930 when he was still studying at Kyoto University. Mahendra Pratap, with his background of being an erstwhile Indian prince, held the reputation of being the first Indian to have organized a provisional government of independent India in Kabul (Afghanistan) in 1915. He was among the early Indian patriots who worked for Indian Independence from outside the country. He was in Europe in the early stages of World War I, and later went to Afghanistan where he was given protection and the Afghan citizenship.

11 *Memoirs of A.M. Nair*, n. 1, Chapter 13: *In Mongolia and Sinkiang*, p. 105.

Manchester and Lancashire.¹²

After the brief visit to Mongolia was over, Nair decided to stay back in Manchukuo and contacted his friend Lt. General Seishir Itagaki, Chief of Staff of the Kwantung Army. Nair told him that he wanted to visit China and Mongolia once again, but Itagaki felt that Nair was exposing himself to serious risks. Nonetheless, he was able to persuade Itagaki to eventually agree and obtain Tokyo's clearance.¹³ The regions Nair was planning to visit were politically and economically vital. Taking advantage of the age-old enmity between the Chinese and the Mongols, Japan had acquired an unusually strong position in northern China, especially after the creation of Manchukuo. Strategically, the Japanese Army wanted to secure a buffer between Manchukuo and the Soviet Union.¹⁴ The government in Nanking had virtually carved out a large part of the Mongol territory adjoining north China, naming it Inner Mongolia. It comprised the provinces of Ningsia, Suiyan, Chahar, and certain other areas. From Jehol, the Japanese maintained close connections with several Mongol princes who were already seeking autonomy from Chinese control. The most important among these Mongol chiefs was Prince Teh Wang.¹⁵

Even today, Mongolia remains a remote land of mystery to many, much like the fictional Shangri-La. Others imagine it as the land of Genghis Khan, who, seven centuries ago, struck terror in about four-fifths of the then-known civilized world, covering Central Asia, China, and Europe. Together with his sons and grandsons, Genghis Khan built the largest empire in history. For some 600 years thereafter,

Mongolia declined and remain isolated before rejoining the global mainstream.¹⁶ This central Asian tableland, which was like a wedge between the Soviet Union and China, now stands divided into two political entities: one, the former autonomous region known as Inner Mongolia now integrated into the People's Republic of China; and the other, previously called Outer Mongolia, being a sovereign state but remaining within the orbit of erstwhile Soviet influence. Kublai Khan, a third grandson of Genghis Khan, had ambitions of conquering Japan in the 1270s but failed due to the intervention of the Japanese *kamikaze* that swept all his ships away from the Japanese ports.¹⁷

Besides Mongolia, Nair greatly wished to visit Sinkiang, particularly Hami and Urumchi, for two reasons. Firstly, he wanted to discover more about the wool trade, for which this Chinese province was said to be an important region. Secondly, Nair was anxious to see the lay of the land, by way of which there obviously lay a route to India across the Himalayas. The route ran mostly over plateaus but also did meet up with high mountains in the way, some towering 15,000 feet or more. Sinkiang, although mostly barren, had much to offer by way of its majestic views. It was a great contrast to the oceans of sand of the Gobi Desert or Ala Shaan. The caravan route wound through rugged terrain, sections of which passed below rock cliffs where the wind would rush through gorges as though it were compressed air let off from huge tunnels.¹⁸ The track was highly treacherous in several places, but the camels were amazingly sure-footed animals. Nair's caravan was rather small, consisting of only three animals. At times, it would be two days before he would come

12 Ibid., p. 106.

13 Ibid., p. 107.

14 Ibid., p. 108.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., p. 113.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 116.

across a village with human habitation. Nair described his journey across Sinkiang as one where at times he would go on in stages of about 12 miles per day. It took about two weeks' time for Nair to reach Hami, the first point of interest in Sinkiang.¹⁹ Nair's Mongolia and Sinkiang journey took nearly six months in all and he was back in Hsinking towards the end of the winter of 1935. He arrived in Tokyo in February 1936 to meet senior officers of the Japanese government and the military high command to apprise them of his observations about Mongolia's wool trade and discuss the possibility of potential follow-ups.²⁰

Revisiting Mongolia: Re-routing Wool Trade Away from England to Japan

After returning from Tokyo to Hsinking in the autumn of 1936, Nair began discussions with Colonel Ryukichi Tanaka, who had received instructions from Tokyo about organizing what Nair labeled 'an economic war' to stop the wool trade with Britain.²¹ The first natural step was to establish a purchasing mission in Pao-tao. This was achieved with the active support of nine large trading firms in Japan, including Kanematsu of Kobe, the largest wool buying company with a wide network (particularly in Australia), Mitsui, and Mitsubishi. Kanematsu had all the know-how needed for grading the wool and determining its prices. The purchase mission was a composite unit, with every branch a specialized one. No British merchants could surpass it. Nair told Tanaka that he wanted Colonel Kuo, a Chinese who was then working with the Manchukuo Army; his presence as a Muslim officer would be necessary to engage with the Chinese Muslim traders who dominated the wool business. Kuo belonged to

an aristocratic family in the South Manchukuo area.²² Nair along with Colonel Kuo left for Inner Mongolia in the summer of 1937 and reached Pao-tao. After setting up the organization in Pao-tao with the help of two officers, Colonel Kuo and Lieutenant Nagashima, Nair returned in early 1938. Nagashima was a graduate of Waseda University and a native of Fukuoka who had joined Nair within a few months of his arrival in Pao-tao; Nair considered him a sincere friend. Nagashima served as a lieutenant in the Army Reserve Corps and worked as a civilian except when called up for specific military duty, and therefore had enough freedom to move around closely among the Muslim traders.²³

When a favorable time arrived, Nair told Colonel Kuo that a strong organization in Pao-tao – one that could facilitate exchanges of views on matters of common interest and promote social as well as economic cohesion – would be advisable. Working in harmony as a united body could generate better business profits. Nair wondered why the merchants would send their wool to Tientsin when they could sell it to the new purchase mission in Pao-tao at a price no lower than what they would get in Tientsin. The Pao-tao traders' association could give similar advice to their communities in neighboring areas as well. Colonel Kuo was entirely in agreement with Nair and actively promoted the idea among the Muslim populace in the areas. It caught on remarkably well and, within a few months' time, Pao-tao became the main terminal point for the wool caravans. The British found their Tientsin source for wool completely cut off.²⁴ The hope was that 1936 would be the last year of shipments of Mongolian and Chinese wool from Tientsin to England. The news spread without much delay to Japan and, at the British

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., p. 122.

21 *Memoirs of A.M. Nair*, n. 1, Chapter 15: *To Mongolia Again: My 'Economic War' with Britain*, p. 129.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p. 135.

24 Ibid.

Embassy in Tokyo, an intelligence officer named Figges was keeping a close watch on the activities of 'Manchukuo Nair' following the description compiled by Figges' predecessors.²⁵ The net effect of Nair's work was that the wool previously shipped to England until 1936 was shipped to Japan thereafter. The ongoing campaign in India for the boycott of British textiles and other goods from England became an inspiration for Nair's efforts to prevent the shipment of Tibetan and Mongolian wool for use in Manchester and Lancashire.²⁶

On his return from Tokyo to Hsinking in mid-1938, Nair hoped to concentrate more intensively on publicity efforts for the Indian freedom movement and on allied tasks. There were too many developments to catch up with in respect to his advisory functions vis-à-vis the *Gominsoku Kyowa-kai* and the Manchukuo administration. Nair devoted considerable attention to these but was involved at the same time in the newer political developments. The War Ministry in Tokyo and the Kwantung Army Headquarters were operating in high gear with the Japanese forces heavily committed in China.²⁷ An additional concern for the Japanese government was the possibility of Russian intervention in China, Manchukuo or perhaps both. The Kwantung Army Chief of Staff had warned Tokyo in 1936-37 that such a contingency could not be ruled out. In this context, attention also had to be given to the situation in Korea where Korean nationalism had become a force to reckon with. Manchukuo assumed high priority in the Japanese scheme of things given the circumstances.²⁸

Tokyo thus decided to step up both

economic development of the new state and its preparedness for military defense. On the economic front, a variety of large, heavy industrial projects were started with the assistance of the Japanese *zaibatsu*. This provided increased employment opportunities not only to the people in Manchukuo but also for Koreans who were recruited and sent to the new sites in large numbers. For expansion of the defense forces, several additional Army divisions were brought in from Japan, with many of them posted in areas close to the Chinese border.²⁹

Nair's Last Stint in Manchukuo

Early in 1939, the Manchukuo government requested Nair's services in several new administrative measures being introduced in the state. The government in Tokyo recognized that achievements in Manchukuo would assist them in easing tensions, and that administrative reforms were a vital need.³⁰ The first requisite in this context was the creation of a good cadre of administrators. For this purpose, the Manchukuo government decided to establish at Hsinking in early 1939 a *Kengoku Daigakko* (National Construction University) that would run a four-year curriculum for high-grade candidates specially selected from all the five races. There were specialist instructors from various faculties, including Military Science and Technology. General Itagaki from Tokyo as well as General Ishihara, Colonel Tsuji, Lt. Colonel Kataoka and Major Mishina were sponsors of the new institution, and they invited Nair to join the teaching faculty dealing with National and International Psychology.³¹ The institution was under the control of the Manchukuo government's Ministry of Education and

25 Ibid., p. 136.

26 Ibid., p. 137.

27 *Memoirs of A.M. Nair*, n. 1, Chapter 16: *Manchukuo Again*, p. 140.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., p. 141.

30 *Memoirs of A.M. Nair*, n. 1, Chapter 18: *Last Spell in Manchukuo*, pp. 152-153.

31 Ibid.

received technical support from the Kwantung Army. Nair accepted the position of visiting professor and held frequent get-togethers with his students at his home nearly every Sunday so that the students from the various races would get well-acquainted with each other. Although ordinarily no one at the time would dare to express his or her views freely for fear of being reported, the Kwantung Army's Chief of Staff had placed Nair's house off-limits for the military police. Students thus opened up without any fear. Nair noted that it was interesting to observe how students ventilated their individual opinions in a free atmosphere, often clashing vehemently on matters of principle.³² The Japanese students were liberal-minded and opposed to all colonial expansionism anywhere, although they all were in general agreement that Japan had a leading role to play in creating a new Asia. Even as efforts were being made to create a better class of Manchukuo administrators, the Kwantung Army was going through a difficult time throughout 1939, becoming increasingly bogged down in China as the situation on the China border was becoming critical. Moreover, the Soviet Union had reportedly placed about 250,000 men in eastern Siberia for action against the Kwantung Army.³³ Following the Soviet-German non-aggression pact of August 1939, there was a lull on the Manchukuo-Soviet border, although Japan never really ceased viewing the USSR as a threat. By the summer of 1940, Nair was continuing his engagements in Hsinking whilst also publicizing the Indian freedom movement and teaching at the *Kengoku Daigakko*.

The British establishment, by means of its extraterritorial rights in Shanghai and other areas in China, maintained an effective presence. Meanwhile, Japan had not been

able to neutralize Britain's secret service. Eric Teichman, the British consular representative in Beijing, was an intelligence expert with designs to map out an overland route from China via Tibet all the way to India across the Himalayas. Teichman once actually set out on a 'pathfinding' journey with several motor vehicles and other equipment. It was a grand and bold design.³⁴ The British consular services consisted of tenacious officers according to Nair's memoir, and they were apparently operating deep in Sinkiang and other Chinese areas and beyond. Teichman reportedly proceeded at least as far as Urumchi. Nair was told that the British consular officers had managed to chalk out an overland route all the way from China, partly traversing the Gobi Desert, and then traversing via Hami, Urumchi, Kashgar and Gilgit across the Karakoram Range into Kashmir in India. They had offices permanently established at all the important checkpoints on the way. Nair forever regretted that his ambition to undertake this journey never fructified.³⁵

Nair returned to Hsinking and submitted a report to General Yoshijirō Umezu, resulting in the latter convening a private meeting with Nair at the Army Club. Nair's candid approach enabled him to enjoy the confidence of the Kwantung Army Commander and establish good relations with General Jun Ushiroku of the China Command in addition to General Itagaki (then War Minister), General Ishihara (ex-Chief of Staff, Kwantung Army) and several others. Nair revealed that his report was circulated by the High Command in Tokyo to the military attachés in all the Japanese diplomatic missions abroad.³⁶

The strain of the never-ending China war began to tell on the War Office in Tokyo. With

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., p. 154.

34 Ibid., p. 157.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p. 158.

the increased muscle provided to Chiang Kai-shek by the British and the Americans, Japan was sinking ever deeper into the China quagmire. Its efforts were confined to maintaining the status quo rather than attempting to work any administrative wonders. Moreover, this was also the time when World War II had started in Europe, and Japan was heavily engaged in planning ways and means of utilizing the situation to its own advantage. At the instance of the Emperor, Prince Konoe formed what was known in select circles as the 'War Cabinet' in July 1940. Yosuke Matsuoka was appointed Foreign Minister, Lt. General Hideki Tojo became War Minister, and Admiral Zengo Yoshida was appointed Minister of the Navy. As it became clear that there would be no accommodation with the United States, Matsuoka concluded a military pact with the German representative Heinrich Stahmer in September 1940 in Tokyo. According to Nair, Matsuoka scored perhaps his most prized diplomatic goal when he succeeded in concluding a five-year neutrality agreement with Stalin on April 13, 1941.³⁷

Nair's last major activity in Manchukuo centred on an offshoot of the war in Europe that had begun in September 1939. Nair's gains during his China tours were the knowledge of the devious espionage measures utilized by Britain and the US. He accepted that with practically no financial resources or manpower, there was hardly anything that one could do by way of counter-intelligence work on any systematic basis.³⁸

Conclusion

The memoirs of A. M. Nair reflect a life of navigating through autobiographical narratives and throwing new light on the leadership of the Indian Independence League and the Indian National Army as well as political figures

including Rash Behari Bose and Subhash Chandra Bose. With Japan's entry into World War II, Nair joined the Indian Independence League in Japan and the Southeast Asian countries under the leadership of Rash Behari Bose, the legendary revolutionary in exile in Tokyo. He served as co-founder of the League and a chief link between the Indian freedom movement and the Japanese government. His entry into Japanese politics came in the form of being a follower of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. Nair joined Netaji Bose as his interpreter in Japan and traveled with Bose across Japan. During WWII, Nair joined the Indian Independence league in Japan under Rash Behari Bose. Covering these facets, Nair's memoir constitutes a valuable contribution to the history of India's freedom struggle in Asia. Japan as a nation and its people were greatly admired by Nair and his family as they remained impressed by General Maresuke Nogi's victory in the Russo-Japanese War, and how Marshal-Admiral Heihachirō Tōgō won the Battle of Tsushima against the Baltic Fleet. In fact, the Japanese did become the first Asians to win a battle against the 'whites', something that was being studied closely across Asia at the time.

Following the end of World War II and India achieving its independence in 1947, an entrepreneurial business venture in the form of a restaurant named Nair's Restaurant was founded by A. M. Nair in 1949. Serving as the ideal public relations window, no visitor, especially from South Asia, could have missed this landmark Indian restaurant located in Tokyo's Higashi-Ginza area, right across from the Kabuki theatre. Famously serving delicious savory curries from India, the restaurant gradually became very successful in the ensuing decades and went on to being a popular destination for tourists and locals equally. The restaurant proudly displays Indian landscape paintings and other art manifestations. Especially noteworthy

³⁷ Ibid., p. 159.

³⁸ Ibid.

is a painting titled ‘Krishna and Cowherd Women Gopis’, a work by Karyo Chiba.³⁹

In recognition of his dedicated and sustained contribution to the strengthening of friendly and cordial relations between India and Japan, Nair was awarded the exalted decoration of the Order of Merit of the Sacred Treasure (*Zuihoshō*) by Emperor Hirohito in November 1984. The Nair family continues to reside in Bunkyo-ku, an area currently in Honko-magome. Although Nair-san lived to tell his fascinating story in the form of this autobiography, which he authored with the help of a senior Indian diplomat, he ultimately passed away in April 1990.

39 For more details on the story of Nair’s Restaurant, see “The people who created Ginza’s India, “Nair’s” in Higashi-Ginza,” available at <https://www.ginza.jp/en/column/11898>