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ARTICLE

Indian Women, Refugees, and Decolonization across India, British Malaya, and China, 1940–1953

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Abstract

This article studies two refugee political communities, the Indian National Army (INA) and Faridabad, during the 1940s. It follows two Indian women who supported the refugees: the captain of the INA's women's regiment, Lakshmi Sahgal (née Swaminadhan, 1914–2012), and the socialist freedom fighter Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (1903–88). Indian and Chinese anti-colonialism and working-class protests in Malaya inspired the INA's war against British rule in India and Southeast Asia. This article conceptualizes the INA as a refugee polis, comprising Indians displaced by Japanese and British imperialism. Uprooted by the Partition of India, the refugees in Faridabad brought practices of state evasion from the Indo/Pak-Afghan borderlands. Kamaladevi and the Indian Cooperative Union helped organize them into a refugee polis. Thus, the INA and Faridabad, shaped by imperial crises and decolonization, emerged as two refugee poleis. They embodied political alternatives to the nation-state as an outcome of decolonization. The refugees advocated direct democracy, egalitarian redistribution of land, and co-operative economic management. The postcolonial Indian state saw this as a challenge. It transformed refugees into workers, whose labour would generate profits for the state. Although the refugees protested through unionization, strikes, and civil disobedience, ultimately, the Nehruvian state brutally suppressed these refugee poleis.

I

More than one hundred million refugees fled Japanese-occupied areas of China during the Sino-Japanese War (1937–45).[1] In 1942, more than half a million people from Malaya and Burma were displaced by the Japanese imperial invasion.[2] In 1945, the British Indian state classified members of the Indian National Army (INA) as 'genuine refugees' and forcibly repatriated them to India.[3] The departure of the British from India on 15 August 1947 left the country divided into Hindu-majority India and

[1]Barak Kushner, *Men to devils, devils to men: Japanese war crimes and Chinese justice* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), p. 2.

[2]Hugh Tinker, 'A forgotten long march: the Indian exodus from Burma, 1942', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 6 (2011), pp. 1–15, at p. 2.

[3]'Interrogation reports of INA', 1946, Indian National Army papers (INAP), National Archives of India (NAI), file no. 505/INA, parts II and XXII.

Muslim-majority Pakistan. 'Between 11 to 18 million' people fled the two new countries to escape majoritarian violence.[4] How did these developments of the long 1940s – characterized by clashes between British and Japanese empires in Asia, Indian decolonization and Partition, and the early Cold War – shape refugee politics? Across South and Southeast Asia many of these refugees emerged as political actors.

This article analyses refugee politics during the long 1940s – across Nanjing, Chongqing, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Faridabad – through the eyes of two Indian women who supported them. These were the captain of the women's regiment of the INA, Lakshmi Sahgal (née Swaminadhan, 1914–2012), and the socialist reformer and freedom fighter Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (1903–88).[5] During the interwar years, Lakshmi and Kamaladevi shifted towards communist and socialist politics respectively. On the eve of the Second World War, Lakshmi relocated from Madras to Singapore and Kamaladevi travelled across war-torn China. How did their transnational travels and their shift towards left-wing politics mould their involvement with refugee activism in China, Malaya, and India, over the course of the long 1940s?

This special issue explores the overarching theme of 'refugee political' formations during the 'age of imperial crisis, decolonization, and Cold War', and it asks how refugee politics moulded the future of British and Japanese empires in Asia. In response, I pursue the history of two refugee poleis: the INA, an army formed in Singapore during the Second World War, with the aim of liberating India from British rule; and Faridabad, a refugee township built on co-operative principles on the outskirts of Delhi in early postcolonial India. Lakshmi trained and led the women's regiment of the INA. Kamaladevi and the Indian Cooperative Union supported refugees in building Faridabad as a co-operative township. There were diverse kinds of refugee polis – that is, political communities of refugees. The INA was a mobile community of working-class refugees with a history of agitation in the plantations of Malaya; inspired in part by Chinese anti-colonialism, they took up arms against the British empire. In contrast, in early postcolonial India, the refugee polis of Faridabad was constituted from a community of state-evading refugees from the Pak-Afghan borderlands who chose to build a co-operative township. In the process, they often protested against the exploitative policies of the Nehruvian regime.

The editors of this special issue have acknowledged the complexity of centring refugee voices. Drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, they suggest that refugee agency must often be recovered through mediation. The memoirs and writings of Lakshmi, Kamaladevi, and other members of both refugee poleis, along with newspaper accounts of INA politics, have mediated refugee voices with empathy and solidarity. In contrast, the colonial and postcolonial state, while suppressing refugee insurgency, defined refugee politics through a 'prose of counter-insurgency', and their archives mediated refugee voices with antipathy.[6]

[4]Uditi Sen, *Citizen refugee: forging the Indian nation after partition* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 2.

[5]In some sources, Lakshmi's surname Swaminadhan is spelled 'Swaminathan'. I have used Swaminadhan, in keeping with her own usage in her published memoir.

[6]Ranajit Guha, 'The prose of counter-insurgency', in *The small voice of history: collected essays* (Delhi, 2002), pp. 194–238.

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Historians of Indian women and refugee rehabilitation have produced a rich tapestry of works documenting refugee women's agency in postcolonial India.[7] This article asks how global history perspectives can enrich our understanding of Indian women's involvement with refugee politics. In recent years, global refugee histories have emphasized the 'connected and global history of the forced migrations and of the resettlement regime that emerged in the 1940s, linking Europe, South Asia, East Asia, and South America'.[8] Taking a cue from this field, I show how Chinese anti-colonialism and working-class politics in Malaya and state-evading local democratic traditions from the Pak-Afghan borderlands shaped refugee politics in Southeast and South Asia. In uncovering the transnational political trajectories of Lakshmi and Kamaladevi, I learn, too, from global gender history. These works have analysed the ways in which women from diverse race and class positions undertook political activism across imperial and national frontiers.[9] In this special issue, Phillip Strobl shows how Australian women's organizations supported Austrian Jewish refugee demands for citizenship; Milinda Banerjee demonstrates the connections between Cold War organizations such as the Women's International Democratic Federation and Bengali refugee women's political activities. Similarly, this article highlights the links between refugee politics and Indian women's activism in China, Malaya, and India.

How can these intersecting methodologies of global refugee history and global gender history yield new understandings of the history of decolonization? We see that Lakshmi and Kamaladevi considered the Indian refugee question within a much wider set of political concerns about the nature of decolonization. By supporting the refugees, they wanted to redistribute land, secure workers' rights, ensure gender equality, and institute co-operative economic management. Alongside the refugees, they questioned the legitimacy of the postcolonial Indian state. They fought to preserve and forge non-state popular traditions of self-governance and democracy. Ultimately, they wanted to preserve and strengthen refugee poleis as alternatives to the postcolonial state.

[7]Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and boundaries: women in India's partition* (New Delhi, 1998); Urvashi Butalia, *The other side of silence: voices from the partition of India* (New Delhi, 1998); Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta, eds., *The trauma and the triumph: gender and partition in eastern India* (Kolkata, 2003); Gargi Chakravartty, *Coming out of partition: refugee women of Bengal* (New Delhi, 2005); Deepita Chakravarty and Ishita Chakravarty, *Women, labour and the economy in India: from migrant menservants to uprooted girl children maids* (Abingdon, 2016); Sen, *Citizen refugee*; Tista Das, *Unattached women, able-bodied men: partition, migration and resettlement in Bengal* (Abingdon, 2023).

[8]Milinda Banerjee and Kerstin von Lingen, 'Forced migration and refugee resettlement in the long 1940s: an introduction to its connected and global history', *Itinerario: Journal of Imperial and Global Interactions*, 46 (2022), pp. 185–92, at p. 188; Peter Gatrell, *The making of the modern refugee* (Oxford, 2013); Lauren Banko, Katarzyna Nowak, and Peter Gatrell, 'What is refugee history, now?', *Journal of Global History*, 17 (2021), pp. 1–19; Ria Kapoor, *Making refugees in India* (Oxford, 2022).

[9]Sumita Mukherjee, *Indian suffragettes: female identities and transnational networks* (New Delhi, 2018); Kirsten Ghodsee, *Second world, second sex: socialist women's activism and global solidarity during the Cold War* (Durham, NC, 2019); Lucy Delap, *Feminisms: a global history* (Chicago, IL, 2020); Arunima Datta, *Fleeting agencies: a social history of Indian coolie women in British Malaya* (Cambridge, 2021); Yulia Gradskova, *The Women's International Democratic Federation, the Global South and the Cold War: defending the rights of women of the 'whole world'?* (Abingdon, 2021); Rosalind Parr, *Citizens of everywhere: Indian women, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, 1920–1952* (Cambridge, 2021); Elisabeth B. Armstrong, *Bury the corpse of colonialism: the revolutionary feminist conference of 1949* (Oakland, CA, 2023).

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II

Born in Madras to a Tamil Brahmin family, Lakshmi Swaminadhan was introduced to communist politics through the Bengali communist activist Suhasini Chattopadhyay (1902–73) during the early 1930s. Their discussions made Lakshmi aware 'of the [difference between] exploiter and exploited'.[10] She began supporting the vision of an armed struggle against the British empire. After training as a doctor in Madras, she sailed to Singapore in 1940 and set up her medical practice. The ships which took people from various Indian ports to Malaya were divided into deck and first-class passengers. Lakshmi bought a 'first class ticket' and found that her co-passengers were 'middle class South Indians' who were lawyers, doctors, journalists, and teachers.[11] The deck passengers were labourers going to British Malaya in search of employment. They travelled in miserable conditions and 'were more dead than alive when [they] arrived'.[12] On this voyage, Lakshmi therefore faced the realities of class-segregated migration resulting from an imperialist capitalist economy.

While in Malaya, Lakshmi investigated the region's colonial capitalist economic structure. She noted that, from the early twentieth century, increasing portions of land had been 'given to cultivation of rubber and … food [mainly rice] was imported'.[13] Imported rice constituted 60 per cent of colonial Malaya's total consumption.[14] British plantation owners maximized their profits by transferring land to commercial cropping, importing food, and thereby putting the labouring classes at constant risk of food scarcity.[15] Between 1905 and 1910 the total area under rubber cultivation increased tenfold, from 20,000 hectares to 200,000 hectares. Consequently, Malaya became 'the most valuable tropical colony in the whole of the British Empire'. It 'supplied the majority of the American automobile industry's rubber … and was central to Henry Ford's revolution and the rise of an oil-hungry capitalism'. Most of this rubber was tapped by Indian migrants, whose numbers rose sharply – from 20,000 in 1880 to 100,000 in 1911.[16]

In the context of the Sino-Japanese War, Lakshmi witnessed a 'large influx of Chinese refugees' into British Malaya. She expressed her 'dislike of the Japanese because of their aggression against the Chinese'.[17] Chinese residents of Singapore, who critiqued Japanese imperialism, set up the Singapore Overseas Chinese Association for the rehabilitation of wartime Chinese refugees.[18] Lakshmi took interest in these rehabilitation initiatives, noting that the association allotted

[10]Lakshmi Sahgal, *A revolutionary life: memoirs of a political activist* (New Delhi, 1997), p. 7.

[11]Ibid., p. 11.

[12]Ibid., p. 12.

[13]Ibid., p. 34.

[14]Wu Xiao An, 'Rice traders and Chinese rice millers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the case of British Malaya', in Wen-chin Chang and Eric Tagliacozzo, eds., *Chinese circulations: capital, commodities, and networks in Southeast Asia* (Durham, NC, 2011), pp. 336–59.

[15]Paul H. Kratoska, 'The post-1945 food shortage in British Malaya', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 19 (1988), pp. 27–47.

[16]Sunil Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: the furies of nature and the fortune of migrants* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 117, 29, 118.

[17]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, pp. 34, 30.

[18]Sunil Amrith, *Migration and diaspora in modern Asia* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 102.

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agricultural land to the refugees.[19] They wanted to make Chinese refugees self-sufficient and also to help residents of Malaya by increasing local food cultivation. Lakshmi was convinced that the agricultural labour of Chinese war refugees had 'saved' British Malaya 'from starvation' during the war.[20]

The Second World War led to a 'war-time boom in the price of rubber', which greatly increased the profits made by British plantation owners.[21] Lakshmi pointed out that 'the labourers [both Chinese and Indian], barely benefitted out of this profit'.[22] Hence, from January 1941, a series of working-class protests erupted in Selangor, concentrating especially in the Klang district. Indian labourers, supported by middle-class Indians employed in clerical positions on the plantations, formed the Klang District Indian Union (KDIU).[23] Some leaders of the KDIU allied with the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and provided relief to wartime Chinese refugees.[24] Indians in the MCP formed the 'Friends of China Society' and produced English-language anti-Japanese propaganda.[25]

These anti-imperial and anti-capitalist solidarities between Indians and Chinese in Malaya revitalized working-class struggles.[26] 'Between 15 April and 3 May [1941] more than twenty-eight strikes occurred.'[27] In May, the colonial police killed a worker and arrested the leaders of the KDIU. In response, Indian and Chinese plantation workers undertook 'the biggest strike Malaya's plantations had ever seen'.[28] Lakshmi participated in a protest meeting condemning this atrocity and supported the plantation labourers.[29]

From January 1942, the possibility of Japanese invasion loomed large on the horizon of Singapore. As a result, the Chinese in British Malaya – including long-term residents as well as recently arrived refugees from China – faced the prospect of forced migration yet again. In February 1942, the Japanese army occupied Singapore and began systematically persecuting the Chinese, leading to the Sook Ching 'genocide'.[30] Lakshmi noted that the rest of the Chinese population 'went underground, mostly in the jungles … [and] they … organised the guerrilla force which harassed the Japanese throughout the occupation'.[31] The anti-Japanese Chinese guerrilla fighters had eight different women's regiments 'committed to fighting

[19]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, p. 34. See also Amrith, *Migration*, p. 102; Wu Xiao An, 'Rice traders', p. 339.

[20]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, p. 34.

[21]Ibid., p. 16; H. E. Wilson, *The Klang strikes of 1941: labour and capital in colonial Malaya* (Singapore, 1991), p. 12.

[22]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, p. 16.

[23]Wilson, *Klang strikes*, p. 6.

[24]Ibid., p. 5; C. F. Yong, *The origins of Malayan communism* (Singapore, 1997), pp. 241–68.

[25]Anna Belogurova, *The Nanyang revolution: the Comintern and Chinese networks in Southeast Asia, 1890–1957* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 194; Yong, *Malayan communism*, p. 204.

[26]Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, pp. 193–4.

[27]Wilson, *Klang strikes*, p. 16.

[28]Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, p. 195.

[29]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, p. 16.

[30]Lauralei Singsank, 'Massacre or genocide? Redefining the Sook Ching', *Oregon Undergraduate Research Journal*, 17 (2020), https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/25558, accessed 17 Aug. 2023.

[31]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, p. 24.

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the Japanese despite their small number'.[32] These anti-imperial militants deeply inspired Lakshmi.

Many Indian labourers lost their jobs due to wartime violence and were forced to flee Malaya. Lakshmi provided them with relief and provisions for their journey back to India.[33] From Malaya, these refugees traversed the jungles of Burma to reach India.[34] A British report observed: 'A very large number of labourers came on foot all the way' to Bihar.[35] Further, 'Refugees of the labouring classes continue to arrive at the rate of several thousands per day in Banaras and gradually disperse from there to their villages.'[36] Since these were largely working-class refugees, the British decided 'not to bring into effect any plan for refugee exodus'.[37]

Some middle-class Indian nationalists hoped that the Japanese would defeat the British.[38] They welcomed the Japanese capture of Singapore and they began to forge the INA in Malaya as an armed force of Indians 'against the British, in pursuit of India's freedom from imperial rule'.[39] As the largest producer of rubber during the Second World War, Malaya lay at 'the heart of global capitalism'.[40] Hence, it was also the site of constant working-class resistance to imperialism and capitalism. A large section of the INA's members came from working-class Indian families who refused to flee British Malaya as refugees.[41] According to a British report, 'illiterate [Indian] coolie girls from the Malayan rubber estates made up 60%' of the group.[42] These workers who joined the INA had previously agitated against exploitation of Asian workers (for example, during the Klang district strikes).[43] Simply put, working-class politics in Malaya shaped the INA's militant anti-colonialism.

In May 1943, the Indian freedom fighter Subhas Chandra Bose (1897–1945) and Lakshmi wanted to train women in the 'art of warfare' so that they could join the INA. Bose was inspired by armies in China and Russia 'where differences of sex played no part'.[44] Lakshmi was especially inspired by the anti-Japanese Chinese guerrilla women warriors of Malaya. Hence, under her leadership, a women's regiment of the

[32]Mahani Musa, 'Malayan women and guerrilla warfare, 1941–89', in *Chapters on Asia: selection of papers from the Lee Kong Chian Research Fellowship* (Singapore, 2014), p. 207.

[33]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, p. 24.

[34]Tinker, 'Forgotten long march'; Amrith, *Migration*, p. 106; Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, p. 203.

[35]Report on the events in Bihar during the second half of December 1942, NAI, file no. 185/12/42, Home Department (Political Proceedings) (HD (PP)), 'Fortnightly report for the month of December 1942'.

[36]Report on the events in the United Provinces during the second half of December 1942, in ibid., file no. 185/12/42.

[37]Report on the events in Bihar, 1942.

[38]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, p. 28.

[39]Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, p. 199; for a history of the INA, see Leonard Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj: a biography of Indian nationalists Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose* (New York, NY, 1990).

[40]Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, p. 210.

[41]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, pp. 35–6; Sugata Bose, *A hundred horizons: the Indian Ocean in the age of global empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), p. 175.

[42]Interrogation report of Captain Lakshmi Swaminadhan, INAP, NAI, file no. 244/INA, 'Rani of Jhansi regiment records', 1945.

[43]Datta, *Fleeting agencies*, pp. 125–50.

[44]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, p. 140.

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INA was put together.[45] It was named after Rani Lakshmi Bai (1828–58), who had died fighting the British in 'India's first war of independence' in 1857–8.[46]

The women's regiment began marching towards India, hoping to fight the British forces at the Indo-Burma border in Imphal, in north-east India. They followed the route which the refugees had taken during their exodus to India, travelling through miles of forests from Singapore to Maymyo, along the Thailand–Rangoon railway, during the months of April and May 1944.[47] The 'early onset of monsoon on the Indo-Burmese border' bogged down Lakshmi's troops, however. Lakshmi recalled in her memoir that, during this time, the US army general Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964) started the 'Allied offensive against the Japanese'. As a result, the Japanese withdrew their forces from Burma and focused on warding 'off the invaders'.[48] The Rani of Jhansi regiment set up camp in Maymyo and waited for orders from the INA's commander, Subhash Chandra Bose.[49] From 26 June 1944, they began to retreat into the interior of Burma, moving from Maymyo to Mandalay to Zeyawaddy, then via Meiktila to Kalaw. On 1 June 1945, they were arrested in the Karen Hill area of northern Burma by four guerrilla soldiers of the British army.[50]

After interrogating members of the INA, the British classified them into three groups. Those without any record of participation in anti-British and working-class politics were labelled as 'white'. They were considered 'genuine refugees', were cleared of all charges, and were repatriated to refugee camps in Dinjan, Assam, in British India.[51] Colonial administrators debated the repatriation of those categorized as 'grey' and 'black'. They considered those marked 'black' as security threats to British India because of their 'Japanese contact'; those labelled 'grey' were seen as less threatening, but with prior histories of political activism.[52] Lakshmi's disapproval of the Japanese became visible during her interrogation. The reporting officer noted: 'she alleges that the Japanese could not abide the idea of women sepoys'.[53] As a result, Lakshmi was initially labelled 'grey', though later she was reclassified as 'black' for 'treason'.[54] The colonial state thus defined the 'genuine refugee' as a depoliticized figure.

Indian soldiers in the British Indian army publicly supported the INA refugees.[55] Nationalist newspapers, too, celebrated the exploits of the INA and its Rani of Jhansi regiment.[56] A colonial intelligence report from November 1945 noted that the INA

[45]Carol Hills and Daniel C. Silverman, 'Nationalism and feminism in late colonial India: the Rani of Jhansi regiment, 1943–1945', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27 (1993), pp. 741–60; Shompa Lahiri, 'Performing anti-colonial military identities in the Rani of Jhansi regiment, 1943–1945: war, diasporic women and decolonization', *Gender and History*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12677.

[46]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, p. 140.

[47]Ibid., pp. 77–101; Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, pp. 203–4.

[48]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, p. 83.

[49]Ibid., p. 80.

[50]Ibid., p. 101.

[51]'Interrogation reports of INA', 1946, INAP, NAI, file no. 505/INA, parts XXII and II.

[52]Home Department (Public Relations), NAI, file no. PR-1/82/46, 'Surveillance of INA men', 1946.

[53]Interrogation report of Captain Lakshmi Swaminadhan, NAI, file no. 244/INA.

[54]Peter Ward Fay, *The forgotten army: India's armed struggle for independence, 1942–1945* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1993), pp. 396–7.

[55]Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885–1947* (New Delhi, 1959), p. 419.

[56]HD (PP), NAI, file no. 1/8/45, untitled (containing Indian newspaper reports on the INA), 1946.

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received tremendous public 'sympathy'.[57] During the second half of 1945, leaders of the Indian National Congress, including Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), attended the trials of INA refugee soldiers in Delhi, and they donated 30,000 rupees for INA relief.[58]

At that point, Congress candidates were preparing for the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly, scheduled for December 1945. The Muslim League was the Congress's formidable opposition. Historians have analysed Congress's public appreciation for the INA within this context. Sumit Sarkar characterized it as 'election propaganda'.[59] William Kuracina has suggested that the Congress politicians 'appropriated' the patriotic legacy of the INA to mobilize mass support for themselves in the elections.[60] This strategy proved successful: ultimately, the Congress won a majority of seats in the Central Legislative Assembly.

By February 1946, British officials had become 'extremely nervous' that Lakshmi's delayed repatriation to India might cause further 'undesirable' disturbances, such as more public protests demanding her release from custody.[61] On 4 March 1946, after much deliberation, she was repatriated to India.[62] Back in Madras, Lakshmi became involved with the INA Relief Committee (INARC). The working-class members of the INA, forcibly repatriated to India, found themselves unemployed. Lakshmi helped the INARC to organize an 'exhibition-cum-fair' to raise relief funds. From these public donations, the committee provided food and clothing to the INA refugees, and covered the transportation costs of those who desired to return to their villages.[63]

I conceptualize the INA and its successor, the INARC, as a 'refugee polis' – a transnational political community that coalesced in Malaya around their shared commitment towards ending British imperial rule, whose members were eventually transformed into refugees by the British colonial state. They learned from the militant anti-colonialism of Chinese refugees and from wider working-class politics in the rubber plantations of Malaya. Lakshmi recollected that the INA members wanted men and women to jointly overthrow the shackles of British colonialism and capitalism. They wanted to secure 'the rights of workers in factories' and to ensure a 'just distribution of land' in India. After their repatriation to India, they continued their political activities through the INARC.[64] A British intelligence report noted that the INARC encouraged INA refugees to 'retain their INA insignia for future use'.[65]

Kuracina has observed that the 'revolutionary method for obtaining independence' espoused by the INA refugees was opposed to 'the Congress High

[57]Cited in Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 418–19.

[58]'Fortnightly summary of information registration regarding INA', 1946, HD (PP), NAI, file no. 21/21/45-Poll(i).

[59]Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 420.

[60]William F. Kuracina, 'Sentiments and patriotism: the Indian National Army, general elections and the Congress's appropriation of the INA legacy', *Modern Asian Studies*, 44 (2010), pp. 817–56.

[61]'Decision that there is no need to impede the return to India of Dr Lakshmi Swaminadhan', 1946, HD (PP), NAI, file no. ? (damaged).

[62]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, p. 111.

[63]Ibid., pp. 117–18.

[64]Ibid., pp. 57, 156–7, 117–18.

[65]Daily security summaries of political activities, HD (PP), NAI, file no. 21/6/45.

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Command … [which] favoured … incremental and constitutional approaches'.[66] In 1946, Nehru confessed in a newspaper interview: 'it is not our intention to make politicians out of [the INA]'.[67] British officials felt similarly, lamenting that the 'soldiers had become political creatures'.[68] Nehru's reservations over the INA were recorded by colonial observers: 'Certain Congress leaders particularly … Nehru have … expressed … disapproval of … these bodies [the INA], because they fear violent action prejudicial to the Congress cause [of transfer of power].'[69] However, decolonization was not an exclusively 'Congress cause'. It should be emphasized that, in February 1946, INA refugees inspired the workers of the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) to revolt against the British state, and many people across India took to the streets in support of the INA and RIN revolutionaries.[70]

Following decolonization, Lakshmi observed: 'The fruits of independence were benefitting only a few – the white rulers had been replaced by darker ones.'[71] Historians, too, have noted that India's political decolonization in 1947 replaced 'British authorities … by Indian administrators without replacing the existing British structure'. The postcolonial state inherited its tools of governance – laws, courts, army, police, bureaucracy – from the colonial state. Kuracina has argued that, much like its predecessor, the postcolonial state sought to avoid the 'deterioration in … "discipline and obedience to authority" that the INA … had previously demonstrated'.[72]

Nehru declared that former INA members could join 'national activities which need not be political activity'. Arguably, he inherited the notion of a depoliticized refugee from the colonial state, which, as we have seen before, only categorized people without recorded political activity as 'genuine' refugees. Nehru proposed to absorb INA members into 'productive work'.[73] He found 'industry, village works … and public works' suitable for them.[74] To summarize, the colonial state had transformed INA working-class revolutionaries into 'refugees'. Following in their footsteps, the Nehruvian regime aimed to depoliticize them and channel them solely into economically 'productive work'. Nehru opportunistically claimed the INA's charismatic legacy but eventually marginalized the working-class members of the INA.

The Forward Bloc, a leftist political party which Subhash Bose had formed, remained influential in West Bengal. Speculations continued over the circumstances of Bose's demise. According to the historian Sugata Bose, these represented

[66]Kuracina, 'Sentiments and patriotism', p. 851.

[67]Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Press interview in Karachi (09.01.1946)', in *Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (*SWJN*), series 1, vol. XIV (June 1945–February 1946) (New Delhi, 1981), p. 326.

[68]Kuracina, 'Sentiments and patriotism', p. 855.

[69]'Congress-INA-private armies', 1946, HD (PP), NAI, file no. 21/19/45-Poll(i).

[70]Anirudh Deshpande, *Hope and despair: mutiny, rebellion and death in India, 1946* (Delhi, 2016), pp. 14, 65, 74–94.

[71]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, p. 127.

[72]Kuracina, 'Sentiments and patriotism', p. 853.

[73]Jawaharlal Nehru, quoted in ibid., p. 854.

[74]Nehru, 'Press interview (09.01.1946)', in *SWJN*, series 1, vol. XIV, p. 326.

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an enduring millenarian hope in Bose's radical politics, giving him an 'immortal life' in postcolonial India.[75] The Communist Party of India initially shunned Lakshmi's attempts to join them, given the INA's alleged associations with the Japanese. However, during the Vietnam War, Lakshmi's daughter Subhashini Ali (née Sahgal, b. 1947) became a 'convinced Marxist' and joined the Community Party of India (Marxist). Finally, in 1971, following in Subhashini's footsteps, Lakshmi was 'accepted by the party'.[76]

III

Born to a Saraswat Brahmin family in Mangalore in southern India, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay helped establish the Congress Socialist Party in 1934.[77] Together with her son Rama, she left India in 1939 to travel across Egypt, Britain, the United States, Japan, and China. Nico Slate has argued that, through her travels, Kamaladevi sought to build international 'solidarities of resistance … [to] combat sexism as well as other social and political injustices'. To that end, she delivered lectures, met politicians and activists, and participated in meetings and conferences. In these gatherings, she attacked 'imperialism – both the British and Japanese varieties … [but also] fascist aggression'.[78] She critiqued the 'population shifts' to Germany – from Italy, Russia, and parts of eastern Europe – 'taking place under the Nazis'. [79]

In 1941, Kamaladevi arrived in Shanghai from Japan, and took the train to Nanjing, the Japanese-occupied former capital of China.[80] She noted that the Nanjing Massacre of 1937 had transformed Nanjing into a 'Ghost City'.[81] In her book *In war-torn China*, published in 1942, she wrote:

> The route between Shanghai and Nanking … [was] … deserted … dismal … The land is fertile … But … farms lie abandoned. … It is inconceivable that peasants … should have willingly left it … The story of … Chinese migration is … unprecedented in History … roughly 30 to 40 millions moved across this vast continent … The devastation everywhere was great.[82]

Kamaladevi returned from Nanjing with a desire to further understand the realities of the ongoing Sino-Japanese War. When the Japanese army annexed

[75]Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's struggle against empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), pp. 304–25.

[76]Sahgal, *Revolutionary life*, pp. 128, 129.

[77]Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Inner recesses, outer spaces: memoir* (New Delhi, 1986), p. 186.

[78]Nico Slate, *The art of freedom: Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and the making of modern India* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2024), p. 125.

[79]Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, 'Pakistan and the shifting of population', in *At the cross-roads*, ed. Yusuf Meherally (Bombay, 1947), p. 78.

[80]'Anti-British activities of Mrs. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay in the USA and Japan question of the action to be taken under Defence of India rules against her on her return to India', 1941, HD (PP), NAI, file no. 1/3/41-Poll(I).

[81]Ellen Carol DuBois and Vinay Lal, eds., *A passionate life: writings by and on Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay* (New Delhi, 2017), unpaginated.

[82]Extract from Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *In war-torn China* (Bombay, 1942), reprinted in DuBois and Lal, eds., *Passionate life*, unpaginated.

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Nanjing, approximately three hundred thousand refugees had flocked to Chongqing, Nationalist China's wartime capital. Its population increased from '474,000 people in 1937 … to over 700,000 by 1941'.[83] Subsequently, Kamaladevi travelled to Chongqing, where she met Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975), the head of the Chinese Nationalist government, and his wife, Soong Mayling (1898–2003), in their 'well-guarded secret spot'.[84] The couple had fled Nanjing in 1937. Kamaladevi was inspired by how they had become refugees 'for national freedom's sake'.[85]

Kamaladevi then sailed to Hong Kong, where the British authorities arrested her. They feared that 'a dangerous anti-British extremist and Communist' like her would ally with Chinese leaders and threaten Britain's imperial interests in Asia.[86] Indian families in Hong Kong, as well as the Chinese Nationalist politician and social reformer Song Qingling (1893–1981), intervened with the British on Kamaladevi's behalf.[87] 'A compromise was worked out' and Kamaladevi was lodged in a hotel under surveillance.[88] As Song Qingling was involved with humanitarian organizations in Hong Kong that rehabilitated Chinese refugees escaping mainland China, Kamaladevi learned from her about refugee relief and rehabilitation.[89]

In 1947, the British partitioned India into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. Between August and December 1947, 'about 7.5 million Hindus and Sikhs left western Pakistan for India'.[90] Nehru felt that the refugee 'problem is important enough for us to have a special Minister in charge of it'.[91] Accordingly, the government of India set up the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation in September 1947.[92] Meanwhile, Kamaladevi began the Indian Cooperative Union (ICU), to organize refugees into cooperatives.[93]

Kamaladevi had inherited anti-colonial Indian traditions of co-operative building.[94] Ramalingam Chettiar (1881–1952), a pioneer of the co-operative movement in the Madras Presidency, was a close friend of Kamaladevi's family and initiated her 'into the organising and running of cooperatives'.[95] She visited the Bengali poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's (1861–1941) rural co-operative in

[83]Rana Mitter, *Forgotten ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945* (Boston, MA, 2013), p. 175.

[84]Nico Slate, 'Becoming a coloured woman: Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and the African American freedom struggle', in DuBois and Lal, eds., *Passionate life*, unpaginated.

[85]Extract from Chattopadhyay, *In war-torn China*, reprinted in DuBois and Lal, eds., *Passionate life*, unpaginated.

[86]'Anti-British activities of Mrs. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay', 1941, HD (PP), NAI, file no. 1/3/41-Poll(I).

[87]Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay to Mary Van Kleeck, 5 Sept. 1941, in DuBois and Lal, eds., *Passionate life*, unpaginated.

[88]Chattopadhyay, *Inner recesses*, p. 270.

[89]Helena F. S. Lopes, 'The impact of refugees in neutral Hong Kong and Macau, 1937–1945', *Historical Journal*, 66 (2022), pp. 210–36; Chattopadhyay, *Inner recesses*, pp. 270–1.

[90]Joya Chatterji, *The spoils of partition: Bengal and India, 1947–1967* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 105.

[91]Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Letter to Lord Mountbatten, 31.08.1947', in *SWJN*, series 2, vol. IV (August–December 1947) (New Delhi, 1986), p. 45.

[92]Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The long partition and the making of modern South Asia: refugees, boundaries, histories* (New York, NY, 2007), p. 21.

[93]Chattopadhyay, *Inner recesses*, p. 307; Lakshmi Chand Jain, *The city of hope: the Faridabad story* (New Delhi, 1998), unpaginated.

[94]Nikolay Kamenov, 'The place of the "cooperative" in the agrarian history of India, c. 1900–1970', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 79 (2020), pp. 103–28.

[95]Chattopadhyay, *Inner recesses*, p. 28.

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Santiniketan in Bengal and was deeply inspired.[96] She worked closely with the anti-colonial Indian statesman Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948). Gandhi believed that, through co-operatives, sustained by local communities, Indians could become self-reliant and free from British rule.[97] Kamaladevi's shift towards socialism reinforced this interest. She argued that 'there is … democracy in … a co-operative, for it is operated by the members for their own benefit and all vital decisions are taken by the entire membership'.[98] She created the ICU to embody this form of 'democratic decentralization'.[99]

Tragically, the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation regarded the ICU as a 'challenge to [its] authority'.[100] The anti-colonial freedom fighter and ICU member Lakshmi Chand Jain (1925–2010) wrote that 'ministers and bureaucrats … [were] … hostile' to the organization.[101] At this time, socialists like Kamaladevi were critiquing the Congress for adapting 'several reactionary features' of colonial rule in independent India.[102] Nehru alleged that, during the refugee crisis, 'It is wrong of Socialists … to sidetrack the country' by opposing the government.[103] Hence, Kamaladevi noted that he dismissed the ICU as 'Utopian … one of these impractical new fangled plans the socialists would think up'.[104]

In June 1949, the ICU planned a dairy co-operative in Gandhinagar in Delhi to rehabilitate twenty-five refugee widows.[105] They sought a short-term loan of 28,000 rupees from the Prime Minister's Fund for this project, arguing that, given the 'desperate mental condition' of the refugees, it was necessary to expedite their rehabilitation. Kamaladevi wrote to Nehru on 9 June 1949: 'We … shall pay your loan back as soon as we receive the money from the Ministry of Rehabilitation.'[106]

Nehru recommended this project to Mohanlal Saxena (1896–1965), minister of rehabilitation in the government of India. Nehru informed Saxena that he found the ministry's ongoing projects to be 'radically wrong'.[107] He advised that the ministry should not at least publicly show 'callousness to human suffering'.[108] Even though

[96]Ibid., pp. 99–107.

[97]Taylor C. Sherman, 'A Gandhian answer to the threat of communism? *Sarvodaya* and postcolonial nationalism in India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 53 (2016), pp. 249–70; Chattopadhyay, *Inner recesses*, p. 28.

[98]Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Socialism and society* (Hyderabad, 1950), pp. 35–6, and see also pp. 33–41 more generally; Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, 'A simple case for democratic socialism', in Chattopadhyay, *At the cross-roads*, pp. 7–14.

[99]Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.

[100]Chattopadhyay, *Inner recesses*, p. 308.

[101]Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.

[102]Shalini Sharma, 'Yeh azaadi jhooti hai!': the shaping of the opposition in the first year of the Congress raj', *Modern Asian Studies*, 48 (2014), pp. 1358–88, at p. 1369.

[103]Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Appeal to the citizens of Delhi (04.10.1947)', in *SWJN*, series 2, vol. IV, p. 124.

[104]Chattopadhyay, *Inner recesses*, p. 307.

[105]Note on the rehabilitation of widows and their dependants on co-operative lines sent by the ICU to the Prime Minister's Secretariat, 1949, Special Branch File, Prime Minister's Secretariat, NAI, file no. 29 (130)/49-PMS, 'Refugee co-operative societies Indian Co-operative Union Ltd'.

[106]Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay to Jawaharlal Nehru, 9 June 1949, NAI, file no. 29 (130)/49-PMS, letter no. ICU/14/200/W.

[107]Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Letter to Mohanlal Saxena, 6.06.1949', in *SWJN*, series 2, vol. XI (May–June 1949) (New Delhi, 1991), p. 84.

[108]Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Letter to Mehr Chand Khanna', in ibid., p. 91.

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the ICU project might not 'fit in with … governmental approach … [they] should [still] … take advantage of every effort made … for rehabilitation'.[109] Saxena was reluctant and insisted that the dairy co-operative run by the ICU in Chhatarpur, a refugee camp near Delhi, was 'not a success'.[110] Kamaladevi insisted to Nehru that 'the ICU [shall] … not … proceed … until the matter has been cleared up by the Ministry'.[111] On 18 June 1949, Nehru communicated confidentially to Saxena that the 'ICU … [may] fail, but it will be far greater failure on our part if the news spreads that we are reluctant to help them'.[112]

In February 1948, the Communist Party of India had called for a revolution to overthrow the postcolonial Indian state. In spite of tremendous suppression, resistance to the Nehruvian regime increased over the course of the year.[113] Milinda Banerjee has shown that, in January 1949, when Nehru visited West Bengal, he faced opposition from the refugees. In retaliation, the police had 'opened fire on refugee marches, killing two and injuring ten' refugees. With the looming general election of 1951 implementing universal adult franchise in India, Nehru and Saxena were forced to deliberate on the public perception of their engagement with the refugee question. Hence, Nehru finally loaned the ICU 18,000 rupees and convinced Saxena's ministry to contribute the remaining 10,000 rupees.[114]

In 1949, refugees from the north-western borderlands of British India (now in the Afghanistan–Pakistan borderlands) stationed in Delhi began mass protests against the Indian state's refugee rehabilitation policies. In response, the government shortlisted a few locations for a refugee township to rehabilitate them. Ultimately, the refugees chose Faridabad on the outskirts of Delhi.[115] From its very conception, Faridabad was constituted by refugee agency and constructed by refugee labour. I therefore characterize it as a 'refugee polis'. Sandip Kana has described the making of Faridabad 'as mobilisation of ordinary people to further … development'.[116] I take an alternative approach and ask: what does the history of Faridabad as a refugee polis tell us about the making of Nehruvian state capitalism during the early Cold War?

The historians Sunil Purushotham and Aditya Balasubramanian have described Nehru as the 'maker of … state capitalism' in India.[117] In 1941, the German-Jewish refugee thinker Friedrich Pollock characterized the political economy of National Socialist Germany and the Soviet Union as state capitalism. He showed that, as

[109]Nehru, 'Letter to Mohanlal Saxena', p. 84; Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.

[110]Minister for rehabilitation, Mohan Lal Saxena, to Jawaharlal Nehru, 18 June 1949, Special Branch File, Prime Minister's Secretariat, NAI, file no. 29 (130)/49-PMS.

[111]Chattopadhyay to Nehru, 9 June 1949, NAI, file no. 29 (130)/49-PMS, letter no. ICU/14/200/W.

[112]Jawaharlal Nehru to Mohan Lal Saxena, 18 June 1949, NAI, file no. 29 (130)/49-PMS, letter no. 815-PM, published in *SWJN*, series 2, vol. XI, pp. 92–4.

[113]Sharma, 'Yeh azaadi jhooti hai!', p. 1382.

[114]Jawaharlal Nehru, Note to Prime Minister's Secretariat, 21 June 1949, NAI, file no. 29 (130)/49-PMS.

[115]Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.

[116]Sandip Kana, 'Voluntarism in partition's aftermath: the Faridabad story', *Contemporary South Asia*, 31 (2023), pp. 1–18.

[117]Sunil Purushotham, 'World history in the atomic age: past, present and future in the political thought of Jawaharlal Nehru', *Modern Intellectual History*, 14 (2017), pp. 837–67, at p. 853; Aditya Balasubramanian, *Toward a free economy: Swatantra and opposition politics in democratic India* (Princeton, NJ, 2023), p. 30.

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a capitalist organization, the state owns the means of production – for example, land, factories, and heavy machinery – and appropriates the profit. State capitalism removes the unpredictability of the 'economic laws of the market', such as demand and supply, through planning.[118] Nikhil Menon has suggested that Nehruvian state capitalism hollowed out democracy – leaving it 'participatory and ground-up in theory, but … paternalist and top-down in reality'.[119] I analyse Nehruvian state capitalism from the vantage point of the refugee polis. I draw attention to the dialectical contestations between state capitalism and refugee democracy that shaped the refugee polis. Ultimately, I illustrate how, in search of profit, Nehruvian state capitalism unmade the refugee polis and suppressed refugee democracy.

The Faridabad Development Board (FDB) ran the administration of Faridabad.[120] It included state as well as non-state actors, among them Rajendra Prasad (1884–1963, the president of India), Jawaharlal Nehru (as the representative of the United Council for Relief and Welfare, a voluntary organization), Sudhir Ghosh (deputy secretary in the Ministry of Rehabilitation), Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (the president of the ICU), Lakshmi Jain (assistant to Sudhir Ghosh and a member of the ICU), and Asha Devi Aranayakam (a member of Nai Talim, Sevagram, a voluntary group for basic education).[121] Its advisers included the American architect Albert Mayer (1897–1981), the German-Jewish refugee architect Otto Koenigsberger (1908–99), and the Michigan-trained Indian engineer Sudhir Dey.[122] Ghosh, Jain, and Kamaladevi had earlier faced obstacles from the state (in the form of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Rehabilitation) in carrying out their co-operative-based rehabilitation initiatives. Hence, the FDB was formed as an 'autonomous board'. According to Ghosh, it was modelled on the Tennessee Valley Authority.[123]

Thus far, from Nehru's correspondence and speeches, we have seen the general hostility between his regime's policies and the popular politics practised by the refugees, communists, and socialists. Let us now see how these differences panned out in the context of the refugee polis in Faridabad. In May 1949, Nehru declared that, in Faridabad, 'we should set an example of rapid … work … done in war'.[124] In this special issue, Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang argues that the Taiwanese state, guided by a 'wartime developmental logic', failed to take into account the material needs and aspirations of refugees from the Dachen Islands. Similarly, Nehru resorted to

[118]Friedrich Pollock, 'State capitalism: its possibilities and limitations' (1941), in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, eds., *The essential Frankfurt School reader* (New York, NY, 1990), p. 72. See also Frederick Pollock, 'Is national socialism a new order?', *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 9 (1941), pp. 440–55.

[119]Nikhil Menon, *Planning democracy: modern India's quest for development* (Cambridge, 2022), p. 209.

[120]E. S. Krishnamoorthy, Faridabad report, 1950, Special Branch File, Prime Minister's Secretariat, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS, 'Faridabad Development Board'.

[121]Sudhir Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary* (Boston, MA, 1967), pp. 232–3; Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.

[122]Eleanor Roosevelt, 'My day', 6 Mar. 1952, https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1952&_f=md002162, accessed 12 June 2024; Nicole Sackley, 'Village models: Etawah, India, and the making and remaking of development in the early Cold War', *Diplomatic History*, 37 (2013), pp. 749–78; Jack Loveridge, 'Between hunger and growth: pursuing rural development in Partition's aftermath, 1947–1957', *Contemporary South Asia*, 25 (2017), pp. 56–69; Rachel Lee, 'Engaging the archival habitat: architectural knowledge and Otto Koenigsberger's effects', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 40 (2020), pp. 526–40.

[123]Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary*, p. 232.

[124]Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Letter to Bhimsen Sachar (13.05.1949)', in *SWJN*, series 2, vol. XI, pp. 104–5.

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war-related measures and entrusted the Indian army to build mud huts for refugee housing when the temporary tents proved 'to be inadequate'. However, the refugee residents did not want mud-hut housing since the houses would be damaged annually by monsoon rains. They were also apprehensive that, 'once mud huts were built, the scheme for permanent houses may never see the light of the day'. There was clearly a mismatch between Nehru's top-down plans for quick and cheap mud-hut building and the refugees' demand for permanent shelter.

Nevertheless, the army personnel in charge of the construction works in Faridabad disregarded these objections. Hence, on 23 June 1949, residents of Faridabad held a public assembly and elected Sukhram, a refugee from Bannu (in Pakistan), to be their leader in resisting the army. This was the refugee polis's direct democracy in action. They undertook a Gandhian *satyagraha* (a form of non-violent resistance) in front of Nehru's residence in New Delhi. Kamaladevi, Sudhir, and Lakshmi Chand supported these protestors. After lengthy negotiations, the protestors won and the army was dismissed.[125]

The refugees now aimed to join the FDB and directly stake a claim to their co-operative's administration. They wanted to govern themselves. Accordingly, in June 1950, the FDB expanded to include refugee representatives. Residents of Faridabad elected from among themselves Sukhram, Mansaram, an unnamed 'school mistress', and other refugees. Ghosh argued that this was a pioneering 'experiment in [universal] adult franchise … eighteen months before the first general elections … in independent India'.[126]

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the mountainous borderlands between Afghanistan and British India (what was then the North-West Frontier Province) constituted an 'autonomous tribal zone'.[127] Its residents opposed British 'colonial encroachment'; Daniel Haines and Elisabeth Leake have described them as peoples who resisted 'state intervention'.[128] Ghosh observed that the Faridabad refugees from the 'North West Frontier Provinces [were] very spirited people'.[129] Jain, too, noted that refugees from these areas were 'politically the most wide awake and active' in Faridabad.[130] Their histories of state evasion arguably strengthened refugee democratic politics in the settlement. Interestingly, Milinda Banerjee has shown that in postcolonial West Bengal refugee democracy similarly drew on 'tradition[s] of state-avoiding … self-government' prevalent earlier among villagers in East Bengal.[131]

Finally, the Ministry of Finance gave a 'loan' of 43,200,000 rupees to the FDB. The FDB wanted to use the loan

[125]Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.

[126]Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary*, pp. 240–1; Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.

[127]Elisabeth Leake and Daniel Haines, 'Lines of (in)convenience: sovereignty and border-making in postcolonial South Asia, 1947–1965', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 76 (2017), pp. 963–85, at p. 971.

[128]Christian Tripodi, 'Negotiating with the enemy: "political" and tribes 1901–47', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39 (2011), pp. 589–606, at p. 590; Leake and Haines, 'Lines of (in)convenience', p. 978.

[129]Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary*, p. 231.

[130]Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.

[131]See Milinda Banerjee's article in this special issue.

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> to create work for the working population among them and invest this capital in such a manner that out of their work would grow a new town which would be their permanent home, with industries that would provide permanent means of livelihood for them; then integrate this urban-industrial nucleus with a rural-agricultural community of 200 villages around the town; the annual return from the investment would amortize the community's debt to Government in about twenty or twenty-five years.[132]

Nehru wanted the FDB to buy building materials like brick, cement, and tin sheets from the Central Public Works Department (CPWD), and he hoped that the CPWD would employ 'able-bodied' refugees in Faridabad, for constructing roads and houses.[133]

Lord Dalhousie (1812–60), governor-general of India, had formed the CPWD in British India in 1855. The historian Nivedita Nath has argued that the department extracted labour from convicts and famine victims. For a minimal wage, these workers were forced to build roads, railways, post offices, and canals, in projects that 'were crucial for colonial profit making'.[134] Taking my cue from Nath, I would argue that, in early independent India, Nehru wanted the CPWD to similarly deploy refugee labour and maximize the postcolonial state's profit. Nehru in fact underlined that 'we [should have] … conscripted … refugees … and … discipline[d] this refugee population'.[135]

In radical contrast, Kamaladevi, Ghosh, and Jain did not want 'the [C]PWD and … other profit-makers' of the state to exploit the refugee polis.[136] Rather, they wanted the refugees themselves to reap the benefits of their labour. Following the ICU's co-operative model, they organized refugee workers into co-operative groups. The refugees began by making the bricks with which they later built their houses in Faridabad. The FDB gave wages and building materials to them. The refugee workers set aside a part of their wage for a collective fund with which their co-operative ran hospitals and schools. They also collectively owned the electric power plant and a diesel engine manufacturing unit.[137]

There were other refugees in Faridabad who did not work for a wage. The state classified them as 'aged, infirm, widows, unattached women and children', and they relied on their 'breadwinner' kin and the state for sustenance. Unfortunately, in August 1951, the minister of rehabilitation ordered the removal of 'unproductive refugees to a distant place … where they could no longer rely on friends and relations' for survival. By doing so, he wanted to differentiate those 'who were *truly* a responsibility of the government' from those who were just 'lazy' and refusing to become wage labourers.[138] Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang has argued that the

[132]Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary*, p. 232.

[133]Nehru, 'Letter to Bhimsen Sachar', p. 106; Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.

[134]Nivedita Nath, 'The Public Works Department', https://southasia.ucla.edu/history-politics/colonial-epistemologies/public-works-department/, accessed on 12 June 2024.

[135]Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Letter to premier', in G. Parthasarathi, ed., *Letters to chief ministers, 1947–1964*, vol. I (New Delhi, 1985), pp. 437–8.

[136]Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated; Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary*, p. 239.

[137]Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary*, p. 235.

[138]NAI file, quoted in Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.

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Chinese Nationalist state and allied American actors separated Dachen refugee families and transformed the refugees into 'human resources to be utilized by the state' for development.[139] In Faridabad, the postcolonial Indian state-capitalist government similarly alienated refugees from ties of kinship and mutual interdependence, transforming them into individualized sources of profitable labour.

Kamaladevi, along with the refugee representatives on the FDB, vehemently opposed this action. They emphatically declared that 'segregation of such persons from the community which … accepted … responsibility for them was hardly human'. In spite of continuing protests, however, by the end of 1951, the Ministry of Rehabilitation had removed all 'male destitutes', leaving only 'productive refugees' in Faridabad. Even then, the minister of rehabilitation admitted that 'a number of unattached women refuse to [leave] … and … are now agitating to have cash doles in Faridabad'. He completely rejected their plea for state support.[140]

By early 1952, the refugees had built Faridabad. Consequently, many 'able-bodied refugees' were left without a wage and also without any relief from the state.[141] Ghosh observed that the Ministry of Finance wanted to sell factory plots for high sums of money. Ironically, industrialists could not afford them so, despite the intentions of the state, big industries did not immediately develop there. The state as the landowner had used refugees to build Faridabad. Now that the township was built, it pushed them towards mass unemployment and food scarcity. Ghosh lamented that 'the nature of the Government's machine and the rules [by] which it functions are exactly as they were' during British rule.[142] In other words, the postcolonial state functioned like the colonial state in extracting the labour of the common people to make profits.

Supported by Ghosh, Jain, and Kamaladevi, the refugees protested against the Nehruvian state.[143] Nehru described how 'thousands of refugees from … Faridabad marched up and occupied the garden' in his house.[144] In response to these protests, the Ministry of Rehabilitation offered the refugees temporary employment under the CPWD in other refugee colonies such as Kalkaji near Delhi. At first the refugees refused this offer. They feared that, once the CPWD projects were completed, they would again be left to starve. Further, in Faridabad, their labour was invested in building their own homes. They did not conceptualize it as purely waged work. Eventually, however, Nehruvian state capitalism compelled the starving refugees to sell their labour and work for the CPWD.[145]

To help the protesting refugees, Ghosh invited Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962), the former first lady of the United States, and Chester Bowles (1901–86), the American ambassador to India, to visit Faridabad.[146] In March 1952, Roosevelt wrote that Faridabad as a model 'must be multiplied … in thousands all over India'. She hoped

[139]See Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang's article in this special issue.
[140]Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.
[141]Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary*, p. 249.
[142]Ibid., p. 253.
[143]Ibid., p. 250; Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.
[144]Nehru, 'Letter to premier', p. 437.
[145]Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.
[146]Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary*, pp. 233, 251.

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that 'the help … the United States … or any other agencies can bring … [would be] of lasting value'.[147] Meanwhile, Chester Bowles 'put forward to the U.S. Administration, for the first time in Indo-American relations, an ambitious programme of American financial and technical assistance to India'. The president of the World Bank, Eugene Black (1898–1992), and the Republican senator Owen Brewster (1888–1961) also visited Faridabad to evaluate the pros and cons of US investment.[148] As a result, in April 1952, the Foreign Relations Committee of the US senate invited Ghosh to visit Washington.

During the early Cold War, Nehru remained determined to minimize American aid. He feared that US support would breed 'moral obligation' and 'involuntary dependence'. From this standpoint, he informed Ghosh that, as a bureaucrat employed by the Indian state, Ghosh could not receive American aid. David Engerman has shown, however, that 'Nehru's reluctance … did not halt … Indian officials' who wanted American aid to industrialize India.[149] In this case, Ghosh was determined to mitigate the crisis in Faridabad by securing American funding to industrialize the township and secure jobs for the refugees. He therefore resigned his position in the ministry, travelled to Washington, and secured '50 million dollars of US aid'.[150]

The Indian state replaced Ghosh with another bureaucrat, S. G. Barve (1914–67), who found Faridabad to be an 'anarchy'. He angrily claimed that it contained a 'huge proportion of troublemakers'. Refugee protests were 'chronic grousing and squealing without reason' to him.[151] As a bureaucrat who sided with the refugees, Ghosh had maintained a precarious balance between the state and refugee interests – or, in other words, between coercive state capitalism and refugee democracy. With Barve's arrival, this balance decisively tipped against the refugees.

Based on Barve's deeply negative reports on refugee behaviour, the Ministry of Rehabilitation and the Ministry of Finance decided to look into the FDB's expenses. At Nehru's request, a team from the Ministry of Finance investigated the matter, concluding that the FDB had exceeded 'sanctioned estimates' by approximately 500,000 rupees. Mahavir Tyagi, the minister of revenue and expenditure in the Ministry of Finance, informed Nehru that the FDB was 'absolutely out of the control of the Ministry'.[152] Tyagi, along with Barve, and the minister for rehabilitation, Ajit Prasad Jain, wanted to discontinue the FDB altogether. They conspired to directly take over the administration of Faridabad.[153] Nehru agreed.[154]

[147]Roosevelt, 'My day'.

[148]Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary*, pp. 246, 254 (quotation), 256.

[149]David C. Engerman, *The price of aid: the economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), pp. 51–61 (quote at p. 57).

[150]Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary*, pp. 252–60 (quote at p. 258).

[151]Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.

[152]E. S. Krishnamoorthy, 'Report of an enquiry into the budgetary excesses of the Faridabad Development Board', undated, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS.

[153]Minister of revenue and expenditure in the Ministry of Finance, Mahavir Tyagi, to Jawaharlal Nehru, 25 Nov. 1952, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS.

[154]Prime Minister's Secretariat (signed by Jawaharlal Nehru) to minister for rehabilitation, 28 Jan. 1953, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS.

As creditor, the Indian state dismissed the FDB, 'liquidated' Faridabad, and expropriated the refugees. Having proved that the FDB had exceeded its financial allowance, the creditor-state took over all that had been built by the refugees. Each house constructed by the refugees had cost the FDB 1,933 rupees. The government now sold each house to the refugees for 5,000 rupees, making an astounding profit of 3,067 rupees per house. Further, the state sold the community-owned industrial units, including the diesel engine factory, to a private individual. The Ministry of Finance 'gifted' collectively run schools and hospitals to the Punjab government. The state thus not only fully recouped the initial loan but made a huge profit. Finally, it now possessed 250 acres of unused land in Faridabad.[155]

This was a tragedy of epic proportions. Kamaladevi condemned the Indian state and bitterly regretted that Faridabad had 'lost its original character' as a co-operative society and had been 'deflowered'.[156] In January 1953, the ICU formally withdrew as a member of the FDB.[157] Wary of public scrutiny over this radical transition, Nehru, Jain, Tyagi, and Barve recommended that the formal announcement should say that 'the FDB having [built] the township … [voluntarily] handed over its charge to the Ministry'.[158] This was, of course, a distorted interpretation of the actual events.

From early 1953, refugee workers resumed their agitation over unemployment at Faridabad. The Labour Union, led by Gurbachan Singh, a refugee resident of the town, petitioned the Ministry of Rehabilitation for jobs for the refugees.[159] A ministry note on the question written in March 1953 pointed out that 'the situation further deteriorated with the withdrawal of the ICU. Another 400 persons were thrown out of work.'[160] The ministry estimated that there were approximately three thousand unemployed persons in Faridabad who were 'obviously half-starved'.[161] Faridabad had now become a public relations disaster for the postcolonial state. *The Times of India* published a report glaringly titled 'Futureless Faridabad'. This celebrated Indian newspaper compared the government's apathy to refugee problems with the infamous Roman emperor Nero, who, 'it is said, fiddled while Rome burnt'.[162]

In a last-ditch attempt to 'save Faridabad', Kamaladevi requested Nehru to meet a group of four refugee representatives from Faridabad and directly listen to their 'enormous distress'.[163] However, the Prime Minister's Secretariat condemned these refugee protests as 'trouble making'.[164] Mehr Chand Khanna, an adviser to the

[155]Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary*, p. 260.

[156]Chattopadhyay, *Inner recesses*, p. 322.

[157]M. L. Sodhani to Ajit Prasad Jain, 5 Jan. 1953, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS.

[158]Tyagi to Nehru, 25 Nov. 1952, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS.

[159]Application from the Labour Union, Faridabad, concerning the difficulties and anxieties of the people living in the Faridabad Township, 14 Oct. 1952, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS.

[160]Ministry of Rehabilitation, Brief note on employment in Faridabad, 2 May 1953, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS.

[161]Jawaharlal Nehru to minister for rehabilitation, Ajit Prasad Jain, 6 May 1953, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS.

[162]'Futureless Faridabad', *Times of India*, 21 Jan. 1953, p. 6.

[163]Jain, *Faridabad*, unpaginated.

[164]B. N. Kaul, Enquiry about Faridabad from the Prime Minister's Secretariat, 1 Sept. 1953, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS.

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Ministry of Rehabilitation, suspected 'Communist involvement'.[165] The Nehruvian state feared that politically involved refugees would not provide the easy labour it required for profit-making from Faridabad.

Refugee resistance escalated to a climax. Hence, on 3 September 1953, the government of India imposed section 144 of the Indian Penal Code on Faridabad. This resulted in the suspension of public meetings of more than four people.[166] On 6 September, the police arrested the leaders of the unrest who had adapted the Gandhian strategy of a non-violent hunger strike to protest against the failures of the ministry.[167] Just as the British colonial state often arrested Gandhi for his hunger strikes, so the postcolonial state, equipped with the same form of judiciary and police, systematically silenced the resistant refugees.[168]

Sarah Knoll's article in this special issue shows how the American state helped American industrialists by providing cheap Hungarian refugee labour, with Camp Kilmer being turned into a refugee-labour recruitment camp.[169] The Indian government similarly lured industrialists by offering cheap and easily available refugee labour. By 1954, 'new [industrial] enterprises moved into Faridabad'.[170] According to *The Times of India*, these included 'a cycle factory … an auto lamp factory … and drainage pipe manufacturer', among others.[171] In 1960, refugees constituted more than half of the total workforce employed by private industries in Faridabad.[172] In 1966, the town became a part of the state of Haryana. The Haryana government's agencies, such as 'the Haryana Industrial Development Corporation, [and] the Haryana Financial Corporation, further aided industrialists with finance, land, essential inputs and technical assistance'. In 1973, Faridabad had '150 large and medium-scale units'.[173] These included industrial giants like the Czechoslovak-origin Bata Corporation and the American-origin Whirlpool India, as well as medium factory units belonging to Havells India and the American-origin GE Motors.[174] Thus, taking advantage of low-waged refugee labour, the postcolonial state turned Faridabad into one of the 'largest industrial' towns in northern India, housing American and European as well as Indian businesses. The anti-state co-operative

[165]B. N. Kaul, Note, undated, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS.

[166]Report of a telephone conversation between Mehr Chand Khanna, Ministry of Rehabilitation, and B. N. Kaul, Prime Minister's Secretariat, sent to Jawaharlal Nehru, 3 Sept. 1953, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS.

[167]Report of a telephone conversation between Mehr Chand Khanna, Ministry of Rehabilitation, and B. N. Kaul, Prime Minister's Secretariat, sent to Jawaharlal Nehru, 6 Sept. 1953, NAI, file no. 29(197)/50-PMS.

[168]Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Socialists: a bunch of reactionaries? Reply to Pandit Nehru* (Hyderabad, 1949), in DuBois and Lal, eds., *Passionate life*, unpaginated.

[169]See Sarah Knoll's article in this special issue.

[170]Taylor C. Sherman, *Nehru's India: a history in seven myths* (Princeton, NJ, 2022), p. 94.

[171]'New plants in Faridabad: full employment in two years', *Times of India*, 12 Feb. 1954, p. 5; 'Eight new industries to be started in Faridabad', *Times of India*, 5 July 1954, p. 1.

[172]L. R. Vagale, B. M. Bhuta, and M. S. V. Rao, 'A critical study of the new town', *Ekistics*, 10 (1960), pp. 156–65, at p. 159.

[173]M. N. Panini, 'Networks and styles: industrial entrepreneurs in Faridabad', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 11 (1977), pp. 91–115, at pp. 92, 93.

[174]Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, *Brief industrial profile of the Faridabad district, 2012–13* (New Delhi, 2013), pp. 9–10.

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politics of Faridabad's refugee residents was in this way dramatically suppressed. Sudhir Ghosh epigrammatically claimed that Faridabad became 'the revolution that did not come off'.[175]

IV

The INA and Faridabad, the two refugee political communities supported by Lakshmi and Kamaladevi, took shape during and after the Second World War. The INA remained mobile, moving from Malaya via the forests of Burma towards Delhi. Chinese as well as Indian working-class anti-colonialism shaped its politics. The refugee residents of Faridabad, too, had come a long way. From the White Mountains lying to the south of the Hindu Kush mountain range in the north-western borderlands of British India, they arrived in Delhi as 'refugees'. They brought with them traditions of self-governance which avoided state intervention. INA members protested against colonial capitalist exploitation in Malaya; subsequently, they remained critical of the postcolonial Indian state. Refugees in Faridabad undertook civil disobedience in the face of state-capitalist oppression. Both refugee poleis met the same fate. The colonial state and the Nehruvian regime alike deprived the INA members of their political rights and sought to exploit them for their labour. In postcolonial India, the Nehruvian government meted out similar treatment to the residents of Faridabad. Postcolonial state capitalism made profits by brutally suppressing refugee practices of political and economic democracy.

In spite of this tragic ending, what can we glean about the history of decolonization from the global histories of the two Indian women and the refugee poleis that they fostered and supported? These histories indicate that the postcolonial nation-state was by no means the only natural outcome of decolonization. Indian women like Lakshmi and Kamaladevi, Indian working classes in Malaya, and refugees from British India's north-west frontier all shared non-statist visions of self-rule as the outcome of decolonization.

In 1909, Mahatma Gandhi in *Hind swaraj or Indian home rule* argued that to have an Indian government with an army and law courts would be to have 'English rule without the Englishman'.[176] In order to attain true self-rule, independent India would have to abolish British institutions like the army, police, and judiciary. Gandhi wanted, instead, to build 'self-governing political associations'.[177] Milinda Banerjee has shown that the Rajavamshis, a lower-caste peasant community in India wanted to 'negate … servitude … imposed by the state'.[178] And Maia Ramnath has placed Indian anti-colonial activists like Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble, 1867–1911), Dhan Gopal Mukerji (1890–1936), and Har Dayal (1884–1939) within global anarchist networks. Against the rule of colonial state and capital, these anarchists sought to strengthen autonomous communities and local self-governance.[179]

[175]Ghosh, *Gandhi's emissary*, pp. 234, 229.

[176]M. K. Gandhi, *Hind swaraj or Indian home rule* (Madras, 1921), p. 15.

[177]Mira Siegelberg, *Statelessness: a modern history* (Cambridge, MA, 2020), p. 78.

[178]Milinda Banerjee, 'How a subject negates servitude: a peasant dialectic about mastery and self-rule from late colonial Bengal', in Rafael Klöber and Manju Ludwig, eds., *HerStory: historical scholarship between South Asia and Europe. Festschrift in honour of Gita Dharampal-Frick* (Heidelberg, 2018), p. 80.

[179]Maia Ramnath, *Decolonizing anarchism* (Oakland, CA, 2011).

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Lakshmi, Kamaladevi, and the refugees of the INA and Faridabad were heirs of this non-state anti-colonial tradition. In contrast, the postcolonial Indian state replicated the structures of the colonial British state. By juxtaposing these two political traditions, this article has conceptualized India's decolonization in terms of the Hegelian lord–bondsman (*Herr–Knecht*) dialectic.[180] The ruling classes of state capitalism – the *Herr* (lord) – were formed by merging the highest 'strata of state bureaucracy and the [leaders] of the victorious party'.[181] These included Congress party leaders like Nehru and Saxena, as well as state bureaucrats like Barve. They aimed to reduce the working classes and autonomous self-governing peoples to mere 'refugees' – the *Knecht* (bondsman), from whom labour could be extracted. By placing the *Knecht*-refugee at the heart of decolonization – as this special issue's introduction does – this article has shown that the formation of the nation-state was not the inevitable outcome of anti-colonial resistance. Rather, the postcolonial state legitimized itself by violently suppressing non-state pathways of decolonization.

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[180]G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford, 2000), pp. 112–20.

[181]Pollock, 'State capitalism', p. 73.

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