



***Ireland, India and Empire: Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919-64.*
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In November 1943, *Netaji* Subhas Chandra Bose, Indian nationalist leader and advocate (unlike Gandhi) of physical force to eject the British from his homeland, received what he took to be a message of support for his Japanese-aligned Indian National Army (INA) and its provisional government,¹ newly declared in the Japanese-occupied Andaman and Nicobar Islands.² This message was said to have originated from the head of the government of Éire in Dublin, Eamon de Valera. As we learn in Kate O'Malley's compelling and authoritative study of Indo-Irish radical connections from 1919 to 1964, in broadcasts monitored by the British between late 1943 and early 1944 Bose personally thanked the Irish statesman several times for having sent this “congratulatory message” on the foundation of a free India, leading some—including former INA men during the so-called Red Fort Trial in Delhi late in 1945—to believe it had been genuinely issued and thus constituted official recognition by the Irish government.³

As scholars of the abundant literature on Irish policy during the Emergency now know, Irish “unneutrality”⁴ and its “certain consideration”⁵ for Britain utterly precluded official recognition by Dublin of a separatist, Axis-aligned government declaring itself liberator of British India under Japanese auspices. In fact, as O'Malley takes pains to make clear, de Valera had clung to careful neutralism regarding the INA and its declarations, stating in the Dáil in February 1944 that “recognition has not been given during the course of hostilities to any new State or regime which owes its existence to the changing fortunes of war”. It had actually been the Green Front, an obscure Republican organization, that had issued a resolution after its meeting in Dublin congratulating Bose “on his splendid efforts”, and which looked forward to his “emulation of the fight for freedom of the Army of the Irish Republic” against the hated common enemy, England.⁶ This insignificant resolution by an unofficial and marginal Republican body, duly forwarded to Bose and his sponsors by Tokyo's consular representatives in Dublin, managed somehow to assume the proportions of an official Irish statement of recognition in the mind of the *Netaji*, and subsequently in those of a number of postwar commentators as well.⁷

That this mistaken belief could gain traction even in recent historical works reveals much about the sympathies toward nationalists engaged in anti-British struggle commonly presumed by many outside commentators to have been harbored by Irish government, both before and during the Second World War. Many of these center on de Valera himself, owing to his personal history of involvement in armed struggle and the intransigent position he adopted during the Irish Civil War. O'Malley here adds significant color to our understanding of the global implications of Irish statehood and its inspiration to foreign nationalists, painting the rich array of connections that existed between Irish and Indian radicals from the end of the First World War (WWI) to the mid-1960s. Across five chapters spanning this time period, her work shows us that there was indeed a varied network of links, both on an individual and organizational level, between India and Ireland, and an even richer cross-pollination of ideas and inspiration—as well as, in some instances, direct imitation. These chapters move from the fixation of British intelligence with what it saw as communistic influence upon Indian nationalists and the Irish contacts with whom many of them associated, to the key role played by V.J. Patel in forging further links through the Indian-Irish Independence League (IIIL) in the 1920s and '30s. Chapter Three is given over entirely to Bose and his relationship with Ireland, both personal and inspirational, while Chapter Four explores the impact of the Second World War (WW2) and Britain's “vanishing Empire” upon Indo-Irish relations. The final chapter explores that crucial and perhaps somewhat neglected early postwar period which saw both former British possessions declare themselves republics, one within the British Commonwealth, the other not.

Connections, comparisons and contact between these two restive parts of the Empire seem natural in many respects, and indeed O'Malley takes pains from the beginning of her book to accentuate the many parallels between the two countries commonly drawn at the time by all parties concerned—Indian, Irish, and British.⁸ The author's stated focus is on radical connections, however, and thus we learn much more about Bose and similar individuals than the pacific Gandhi. This is itself illuminating, correcting perhaps as it does a common imbalance in the perception of the general reader, and placing Indian physical force nationalism in its rightful place alongside (and not entirely secondary to) Gandhi's non-violent *ahimsa*.

There are several reasons given for this focus on the radical. Although the *Mahatma* himself acknowledged the evident parallels between the Indian and Irish experience and expressed sympathy for the Irish struggle, Gandhi also saw in Sinn Féin and its tactics the violence he abhorred,⁹ comparing its methods to those employed by General Dyer, the British commander responsible for the massacre at Amritsar in 1919.¹⁰ While Jawaharlal Nehru, Indian Prime Minister upon independence in 1947, met personally with de Valera and later visited Ireland, Gandhi himself never did so. The majority of connections between Irish and Indians were therefore forged during the 1920s and '30s between those Indians who visited the Free State after 1921, such as V.J. Patel, whose visit prompted the establishment of the IIIL;¹¹ or between Irish and Indian exiles in London or the United States. It was said that the Indian Ghadr movement in the U.S. was riven by internal power plays, just like their Irish counterparts, and—as O'Malley makes clear through her use of documents from Indian Political Intelligence (IPI, the British secret service for India)—it is equally likely that Indian exile organizations were similarly penetrated by British agents.¹²

If Gandhi was repulsed by the inspiration provided by Irish Republicans, their violent tactics and strategies were embraced in Bengal. This is the region from which Bose hailed, and in her third chapter O'Malley builds upon previous work by Michael Silvestri and Manini Chatterjee¹³ in establishing Bengal as a particular locus of the kind of physical force militancy that challenges popular perceptions of Indian nationalist non-violence. The many parallels between Irish and Indian experience were felt keenly here, especially during the Chittagong Armoury Raid of 1930 in which a so-called Indian Republican Army chose the Christian holiday of Easter to attack government buildings in emulation of their heroes portrayed in Dan Breen's *My Fight for Irish Freedom*, newly translated into Hindi, Punjabi and Tamil¹⁴—just as Breton nationalists would later translate it into French.¹⁵

Committed nationalists were of course eager to replicate what they saw as successful formulae for liberation, especially by nations within the same imperial fold. But a good deal of earlier Indian ambivalence or even hostility toward the Irish had by this time been overcome, or perhaps redeemed, by those seminal events of 1916-21. In contrast to O'Malley's approach, we see in the work of Silvestri that the Irish contribution to the general oppression of India as an integral part of the British imperial apparatus receives more balanced treatment. O'Malley notes often the role of individual Irishmen in the British government of India and even IPI, it is true, but the many quotations she cites from both Irish and Indian figures extolling the “common cause”¹⁶ in which they struggled might have benefited from some of the contrary evidence Silvestri explores. For example he notes that, “for most Indian nationalists” prior to the outbreak of WWI, “the position of the Irish as a white, Christian race placed limits on their desire to imitate Irish tactics”. The *Bangali* newspaper of 1920 declared even after the Anglo-Irish War had commenced:

*Punjab was trampled underfoot by Sir Michael O'Dwyer, who is himself an Irishman and a Roman Catholic. Such is the difference between Ireland and India! [...] So no comparison should be attempted between Ireland and India. Nor should Indians imitate the Irish.*¹⁷

By the later 1920s, Silvestri concurs that the Bengali attitude to the Irish had begun to shift dramatically toward the line O'Malley fruitfully explores.¹⁸ Even so, some greater acknowledgement of this earlier ambivalence toward Ireland of at least one important section of the Indian nationalist movement would make for a compelling contrast to the favorable comparisons and declarations of fraternity with which we otherwise become so familiar throughout her text.

Interesting parallels for students of contemporaneous Celtic nationalist movements can also be found in O'Malley's work. Ireland, she observes, remained the “one consistent inspiration” for Bose while he oscillated between communistic and fascistic influences throughout the 1920s and '30s, for example.¹⁹ IPI was most consistent too, she argues in her first chapter, in its fixation upon perceived communistic influences on Indian radicals, and its general blindness to the emergence of streams of nationalist activism not directly influenced by Leninism or under Moscow's control.²⁰ In this there are strong parallels to French security reports on Breton nationalists of the 1920s, in which “the hand of Moscow” is claimed to have been detected by Paris in their every action.²¹ By the 1930s, of course, a new bogey had arrived on the

international scene, and Bose—like separatist Bretons, Flemings, Alsations and others—would eventually court the Nazi government in Berlin as well. Some Indians eventually donned the *feldgrau* of the Wehrmacht (or Japanese uniform), although it's fair to say that the cult of adulation which endures for the *Netaji* in Bengal today²² stands in stark contrast to the negative popular attitude toward wartime Axis collaborators in modern Western Europe.

Students of the intelligence atmosphere in Ireland during the Emergency will also find in O'Malley's fourth chapter familiar echoes of another obsession shared by G2 (Irish military intelligence) and British MI5: the level of interaction between Indian and Irish radicals in Ireland itself.²³ As Paul McMahon notes in his *British Spies and Irish Rebels*, there were fears voiced in Britain after 1921 that Irish Free statehood could become an “ugly sore” that would infect the rest of the Empire, particularly India.²⁴ These seemed particularly acute in the war years, when neutral Ireland was believed to provide an ideal haven for Axis diplomats and spies to conspire with various anti-British activists, and O'Malley puts forward the cautious but compelling suggestion that British intelligence may itself have established a front organization in Dublin, known as the Friends of India Society, as a means of sniffing out these suspected links.²⁵ Ironically, G2 put this organization under surveillance as well, for fear it might embarrass Dublin and imperil Anglo-Irish relations. Upon the end of the war in 1945, however, we learn somewhat tellingly that its activities “simply ceased”.²⁶

Partition along religious lines makes for another compelling parallel between the Irish and Indian experiences upon independence. In this respect, O'Malley's fifth chapter suggests, Indian nationalists had perhaps not studied their avowed Irish example as closely as they should, quoting as she does a member of the Indian Civil Service who noted, “The lesson of Ireland for India can be summed up in one word—Ulster.”²⁷ Both countries became republics, too, within a year of each other in 1949-50, and the manner in which India maintained its membership in the British Commonwealth while Ireland did not makes for especially interesting reading. The actions of the Interparty government in declaring the Republic of Ireland outside of the Commonwealth simply “copper-fastened” its partition from the North, it has been argued,²⁸ and de Valera fought strongly but in vain (outside government as he then was) for the Indian approach to be studied and perhaps imitated. In an indication of the rugged economic path Ireland was to tread in the early decades of independence, we also learn that while India posted an ambassador, V.K. Krishna Menon, to Dublin in July 1949, Ireland could not afford to reciprocate until 1964.²⁹

Upon Menon's appointment, Irish President Séan T. O'Ceallaigh spoke again of the many links between the two countries, and the “ideals and values which we hold common”.³⁰ Much can shift in 25 years, both on an international and a personal level, but some greater color of that profound evolution in the Indo-Irish relationship of which mention was made above might have been found by O'Malley in O'Ceallaigh's own statements on this very theme back in 1924, as quoted elsewhere by Silvestri:

*Until Ireland has taken some very definite steps to win back her good name and relieve herself of the odium that attaches to the race by reason of scandalous work done for England's benefit in India... we Irish have every reason to hang our heads in shame when the name of India is mentioned.*³¹

Notwithstanding this minor deficiency, O'Malley's is a very informative and detailed work which explores the many practical and inspirational impacts of Irish independent statehood upon Indian nationalism, rightly situating the former as one of the most profound and far-reaching political developments of the 20th century.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Kate O'Malley, *Ireland, India and empire: Indo-Irish radical connections, 1919-64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 113.
 - ² Peter Ward Fay, *The forgotten army: India's armed struggle for independence, 1942-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 212-13.
 - ³ O'Malley, *Ireland and India*, pp.111-13.
 - ⁴ Robert M. Smyllie, "Unneutral Neutral Éire." *Foreign Affairs*, 24 (2) January 1946, pp. 316-326.
 - ⁵ Eduard Hempel quoted in Trevor C. Salmon, *Unneutral Ireland: an ambivalent and unique security policy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 117.
 - ⁶ O'Malley, *Ireland and India*, pp. 112-13.
 - ⁷ O'Malley cites two examples of works which perpetuate this misapprehension at *Ibid.*, p. 117.
 - ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
 - ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.
 - ¹⁰ Michael Silvestri, "'The Sinn Fein of India': Irish nationalism and the policing of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal", *The Journal of British Studies*, 39 (4) Oct. 2000, pp. 454-486: p. 456.
 - ¹¹ O'Malley, *Ireland and India*, p. 60.
 - ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.
 - ¹³ Manini Chatterjee, *Do and die: the Chittagong Uprising 1930-34* (New Delhi: Picador, 1999).
 - ¹⁴ Silvestri, "Sinn Fein of India", pp. 470-71.
 - ¹⁵ Dan Breen, *Mon combat pour l'Irlande*. Translated by Robert Kadig. (Rennes: Imprimerie Centrale de Rennes, 1939).
 - ¹⁶ O'Malley, *Ireland and India*, pp.138, 4.
 - ¹⁷ Quoted in Silvestri, "Sinn Fein of India", p. 459.
 - ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 466.
 - ¹⁹ O'Malley, *Ireland and India*, p. 181.
 - ²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 7. For more on the threat to British India believed posed by the Indian Communist M.N. Roy, see Michael Hopkirk, *Setting the East ablaze: on secret service in Bolshevik Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

²¹ Daniel Leach, “‘A sense of Nordism’: the impact of Germanic assistance upon the militant interwar Breton nationalist movement”, *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire*, 17 (4) August 2010, pp. 629-646: p. 637.

²² O'Malley, *Ireland and India*, p.90.

²³ See, for example, Eunan O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland: the Irish state and its enemies since 1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 240.

²⁴ Paul McMahon, *British spies and Irish rebels: British intelligence and Ireland, 1916-1945* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2008), p. 185.

²⁵ O'Malley, *Ireland and India*, pp.148-151. See also Eunan O'Halpin, *Spying on Ireland: British intelligence and Irish neutrality during the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 271.

²⁶ O'Malley, *Ireland and India*, p. 151.

²⁷ Hugh Trevor Lambrick quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 157.

²⁸ Troy D. Davis, *Dublin's American policy: Irish-American diplomatic relations, 1945-1952* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), p. 170.

²⁹ O'Malley, *Ireland and India*, pp. 169, 174. Menon was simultaneously accredited to the UK as well.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³¹ Quoted in Silvestri, “Sinn Fein of India”, pp. 485-486.