

*Gandhi's Newspaperman: T. G. Narayanan and the quest for an independent India, 1938–46**

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Abstract

The expansion of the colonial public sphere in India during the 1930s and 1940s saw the nation's English-language press increasingly serve as a key site in the struggle for freedom despite British censorship. This article examines the journalistic career of T. G. Narayanan, the first Indian war correspondent and investigative reporter, to understand the role of English-language newspapers in India's quest for independence. Narayanan reported on two major events leading to independence: the Bengal famine of 1943 and the Second World War. Drawing on Michael Walzer's concept of the 'connected critic', this research demonstrates that Narayanan's journalism fuelled the Indian nationalist movement by manoeuvring around British censors to publicize and expand Mahatma Gandhi's criticism of British rule, especially in light of the famine and war. His one departure from the pacifist leader, however, was his support of Indian soldiers serving in the Indian National Army and British Army.

Introduction

In the archives of the Imperial War Museums in London, Mahatma Gandhi appears in a photograph with Sir Stafford Cripps after their first—and last—meeting arranged by the British government to secure

* The authors are grateful to Ranga Narayanan, Paul Greenough, and Sashi Kumar for their support and encouragement in this project.

India's cooperation in the Second World War.¹ Taken on 22 March 1942, the image captures the two leaders sharing a light moment while emerging from Delhi's Birla House into an awaiting throng of Indian pressmen. The laughter, however, is misleading given the seriousness of the mounting tensions between the nations during this period leading up to India's independence. If the tenor of the mood is deceptive, another significant detail of the photo is not. T. G. Narayanan, Gandhi's most ardent supporter, is fittingly the journalist positioned immediately behind the charismatic leader in the image. Among Indian journalists, none backed Gandhi and the freedom movement in India with more consistency and conviction than Narayanan, especially in the wake of the failed Cripps negotiations with the British government. The stalemate marked the beginning of a series of tumultuous events in Indian history, chiefly the Bengal famine of 1943 and the escalation of conflict in the Indo-Burmese theatres of the Second World War, of which Narayanan became a key witness and chronicler. His journalism promoted a sovereign India in a manner that deftly eluded a censorious English-language press.

Nearly 3 million perished during the famine in the East-Indian province of Bengal in 1943²; few events were more devastating in terms of human losses. The tragedy occurred within the context of the Japanese invasion of India's eastern frontier during the Second World War. When the famine ended, Narayanan moved to Northeast India, and then to Burma, where he reported on the war developments. His correspondence in *The Hindu* provided insight not found elsewhere in the press into the plight of Indian soldiers in the British Army and the Indian National Army (INA). During his reporting, Narayanan battled British propaganda, which acquitted the colonizers of any responsibility for the human losses incurred during both the famine and the war.

This article argues that T. G. Narayanan's journalism, which spanned eight years from 1938 to 1946, was instrumental in publicizing and

¹ Cripps was a government minister in the British War Cabinet. 'British political personalities, 1936–1945', *Imperial War Museums*, nd, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205194901> [Accessed 15 January 2016].

² A. Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 52. For more on the Bengal Famine, see M. Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II*, New York, Basic Books, 2011; J. Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of Empire*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2015; C. Ó Gráda, *Eating People Is Wrong, and Other Essays on Famine, Its Past, and Its Future*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2015; and R. Stevenson, *Bengal Tiger and British Lion: An Account of the Bengal famine of 1943*, New York, iUniverse, 2005.

expanding Gandhi's criticism of British colonial rule, while departing from the Indian leader by marshalling support for the INA. With emphasis on the role of critical discourse in public media, this study analyses several aspects of Narayanan's career: as a reporter of the Bengal famine voicing criticism of the British government for mismanaging India's agricultural market and grain supply; as a war correspondent registering his support for the INA through compassionate reportage taken directly from the battlefields; as a populist advocate writing on behalf of the plight of common soldiers and civilians on the ground. The subject is important because Narayanan, the first significant Indian war correspondent and investigative reporter in journalism history,³ was one of the leading voices advocating for independence in the English-language press. His populist perspective and activist political criticism aligned with, and expanded upon, Gandhi's political purview.⁴ Scholars such as Utsa Patnaik have identified Narayanan as 'an eminent representative of socially responsible journalism before independence', but have yet to

³ The operational definition of investigative journalism applicable to Narayanan is in-depth reporting about public affairs that involve wrongdoing, failure, or social problems brought to light by journalists. Gerry Lanosga employed investigative journalism as a historic genre to examine twentieth-century American journalism. Drawing on Lanosga, investigative journalism in the colonial Indian context is used as an analytical category that, among other things, provides a comparative perspective to the functioning of journalism. G. Lanosga, 'New views of investigative reporting in the twentieth century', *American Journalism*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2014, pp. 490–506. Indian investigative journalist, Narasimhan Ram, asserts that T. G. Narayanan's coverage of the Bengal famine is the earliest instance of investigative journalism in India, Narasimhan Ram, T.G. Narayanan Memorial Lecture, 13 January 2012. It is possible, though, that there were predecessors of Narayanan in the Indian-language press, but none of them worked on a national or international level. For a contemporary history of investigative journalism in India, see S. K. Aggarwal, *Investigative Journalism in India*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1990. For details of Narayanan as the first war correspondent, see R. Parthasarathy, *A Hundred Years of The Hindu*, Madras, Kasturi and Sons Ltd, 1978, p. 603.

⁴ Narayanan's populist bent is analogous to that of American Second World War correspondent, Ernie Pyle, who was dedicated to covering the anonymous soldiers in the field rather than celebrated generals and high-profile battles. Narayanan departs from his contemporary Pyle precisely in the politically subversive import of his reportage that stemmed from his pioneering work as one of the first investigative journalists in India. For more on Pyle, see J. Hohenberg, *Foreign Correspondence: The Great Reporters and Their Times*, New York, Columbia University Press, pp. 224–6; and J. M. Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2009, p. 315. Notably, neither of the above sources treats the topic of the English-language press in colonial India during the Second World War.

explicate the nuances of his work in relation to Gandhi. Further, Narayanan's accomplishments are situated within the larger set of problems facing the quest for a sovereign India, especially the publication of political criticism through the English-language press.

An examination of Narayanan's career sheds light on the infiltration of subversive reports in English-language publications such as *The Hindu* despite British government efforts to censor them. Narayanan's diplomacy played a key role in slipping his stories past censors. Useful in explaining his method is Michael Walzer's definition of the practice of a 'connected critic', which bears relevance to Narayanan's journalism. Specifically, Narayanan offers political analysis that 'is not intellectually detached'. As an extension of the prophetic philosophical dialectic of Gandhi, Narayanan conceived of journalism broadly as the work of 'priest and prophets; teachers and sages; storytellers, poets, sages, and writers generally'. He was a connected critic in the sense that he did '*intellectual work*' opening 'the way for the adversary proceeding of social criticism'.⁵ Close readings of Narayanan's reportage reveal his dual concern for rendering intimate portraits of the human subjectivity of common citizens and for incisive political analysis that included sharp criticism of British policy, all played out within the limitations of censorship. Without the benefits of First Amendment protection—a privilege enjoyed by journalists in the West—Narayanan practised his adversarial journalism under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. The censorious climate surrounding his journalistic practice presented a major obstacle to his transformation of the reporter role into that of a deeply engaged social activist in the mould of Walzer's connected critic. That obstacle was not insurmountable, however. He soon discovered the gaps of free expression through which he joined the larger movement to build an Indian nationalist press.

Drawing on archival data and secondary sources, this study examines Narayanan's journalistic career within the context of the English-language press during the Second World War. Through cultural historical research methods dedicated to the analysis of primary- and secondary-source documents, this research examines material accessed through historical newspaper databases and the Papers of T. G. Narayanan. This private holding under the auspices of his surviving son, Ranga Narayanan, is accessible only by way of special

⁵ M. Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 40.

permission, which the authors obtained.⁶ Narayanan's *Famine over Bengal*, a collection of his articles published in various newspapers, also serves as a key primary source. International newspapers including *The New York Times*, *The Times (London)*, and *The Manchester Guardian* as well as secondary-source historical scholarship and documents on the Second World War have been consulted to establish a larger context for the discussion. No studies on Narayanan exist; only brief mention of him appears in several historical studies.⁷

Narayanan's work lends itself well not only to a richer understanding of the history of Indian nationalism, but also to critical discourse theory and post-colonial scholarship. As an exemplar of Walzer's notion of the connected critic, Narayanan offers a useful point of inquiry into perspectives on democratic discourse. On the one hand, Walzer has been criticized for overreaching his claims on behalf of the connected critic to the extent that he dismisses discourse theory as 'ideal talk' taking place in 'hypothetical conversations ... in asocial space'.⁸ Forst points out that this dichotomy—suggesting the 'real talk' of open unconstrained democratic discourse is usurped or replaced by ideal discourse that posits all participants have equal information in the process of establishing universal truths—underestimates the importance of normative categories of knowledge. 'Democracy', Forst argues, does not require the evacuation of 'philosophy', as Walzer has suggested in

⁶ This study is the first to benefit from these private papers, which contain a collection of what are now the only extant copies of Narayanan's articles from *The Hindu*. Microfilm versions of the articles previously available at the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago have been removed from the holdings due to damage, and are therefore now inaccessible to researchers.

⁷ These include J. Nehru, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 5, New Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1987, p. 498; P. R. S. Mani, *The Story of Indonesian Revolution, 1945–1950*, Madras, University of Madras, 1986, p. v; C. Chandrasekaran, *The Life and Works of a Demographer: An Autobiography*, New Delhi, Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited, 1999, p. 98; K. Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress: A First-hand Description and an Objective Study of the Indian Famine of 1943*, New Delhi, The Hindustan Times, 1943, p. 45; B. A. Ubani, *Indonesian Struggle for Independence*, Aundh, Aundh Publishing Trust, 1946, p. 129; Parthasarathy, *A Hundred Years*, pp. 603–4, 631–2; U. Patnaik, 'Capitalism and the production of poverty', *Social Scientist*, vol. 40, no. 1/2, 2012, pp. 3–20. The following studies mention Narayanan as a United Nations diplomat in his later years: M. Fröhlich, *Political Ethics and the United Nations: Dag Hammarskjöld as Secretary-general*, New York, Routledge, 2007; D. van Lente, *The Nuclear Age in Popular Media: A Transnational History, 1945–1965*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

⁸ Walzer, as quoted in R. Forst, *Contexts of Justice: Political Philosophy Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, p. 130.

his (perhaps over-) zealous advocacy of discourse as political engagement.⁹ Normative categories can and do serve the democratic process, as the work of John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas illustrates. Despite this shortcoming, Walzer's framework defining the role of the social critic is instrumental in understanding Narayanan's unique approach to journalism.

Post-colonial scholars such as Gauri Viswanathan consider the imposition of the English language and literary studies as a device for political control in British India.¹⁰ Accordingly, most English-language newspapers in India may appear to have been tools of the British government as an extension of their colonial rule. Some of them, however, also served the Indian nationalist agenda as Narayanan's career demonstrates. The newspapers Narayanan worked for resisted British media control, but operated to voice nationalist sentiments within those constraints. In the cases that the British media gave ground on their programme of censorship, newspapers such as *The Hindu* and *The Statesman*, ironically owned by a British publisher,¹¹ immediately seized it by voicing dissenting views. Narayanan's career illustrates how the relatively extensive reach of the English-language papers—which benefitted from superior financial resources compared to Indian-language papers¹²—could advance pro-nationalist views.

That process of resistance to British censorship within the English-language press is an apt illustration of how connected criticism can undermine social meanings produced by the dominant culture. To the extent that the English-language press was censored, it typified how 'members of the ruling class and the intellectuals they patronize', which

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁰ G. Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1989. See also, G. Spivak, 'The burden of English', in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, C. Breckenridge and P. van der Veer (eds), Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, pp. 134–57.

¹¹ *The Statesman* was founded by Robert Knight on 15 January 1875. In 1927, the newspaper was sold to Sir David Yule. Arthur Moore and Ian Stephens served as the editor of *The Statesman* in the 1930s and 1940s, respectively. E. Hirschmann, 'The hidden roots of a great newspaper: Calcutta's "Statesman"', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2004, pp. 141–60.

¹² The economic success of the English-language press depended to a large extent on their close following of the Indian bourgeoisie and their interests. For more on this, see D. Ray, 'Speculating "national": ownership and transformation of the English-language press in India during the collapse of the British Raj', *Media History Monographs*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2013, pp. 1–18.

might include functionary journalists, are 'in a position to exploit and distort social meanings in their own interest', as Walzer explains.¹³ Press censorship in this light is tantamount to not only controlling public discourse and opinion, but also regulating social criticism generated by a resistant intellectual culture. To operate as a connected critic, therefore, necessitates circumvention of these barriers through infiltration into the dominant system. In some conditions, 'it is handsomer to remain in the establishment better than [outside] the establishment and conduct that in the best manner', as Emerson noted of the radical social-reform writings of his protégé, Margaret Fuller, for the mainstream North American periodical press in the prior century.¹⁴ Just as Emerson saw distinct advantages in developing deeply connected and resistant intellectuals such as Henry David Thoreau, whose principle and method of civil disobedience influenced Gandhi, Narayanan exploited the considerable latitude he had as a reporter for the English-language Indian press. Indeed, the British government's assumption that repression of Indian voices in public media would safeguard against rebellion underestimated the resourcefulness of journalists such as Narayanan to leverage the medium as a mechanism of political criticism. Censorship is a form of distortion of social meaning, which invites resistance, as Walzer observes.¹⁵

Insofar as Narayanan operated from within the English-language press, he represented no immediate threat to British officials. In writing for these newspapers, he was not seen as a radical revolutionary reporter to an underground press. Instead, his employment in the English-language media implied cooperation with the British programme of cultural domination through English language and literature that Viswanathan identifies. Rather than establishing a centralized government, the British ruled India through more diffuse and surreptitious ways, such as through local functionaries in print culture. This was a means of 'drawing Indians into their hegemonic structure' by 'maintaining an alliance with those who formed the traditional ruling class' in order to both 'conciliate the indigenous elite for their displaced status' and 'provide a buffer zone for the effects of foreign rule' whereby to prevent

¹³ M. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*, New York, Basic Books, 2008, p. 9.

¹⁴ R. W. Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 10 vols. to date, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson, Joseph Slater, Douglas Emory Wilson, and Ronald A. Bosco, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1971, p. 3: 154.

¹⁵ Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 9.

mass revolt, as Viswanathan notes.¹⁶ In this context, Narayanan was thus capable of voicing political criticism in plain sight—one that advocated ‘a people’s culture’ defined by how ‘the common understanding of particular goods incorporates principles, procedures, and conceptions of agency that the rulers would not choose’, according to Walzer’s framework.

Narayanan’s terms of social criticism reflect how ‘the appeal to the “internal” principles against the usurpations of powerful men and women is the ordinary form of critical discourse’ in which he made significant contributions to political change through support of Gandhi and criticism of the British empire.¹⁷ As a member and advocate of the local culture, ‘The critic is one of us. Perhaps he has traveled and studied abroad, but his appeal is to local and localized principles’. Both emotionally and intellectually invested in the local culture, the connected critic does not patronize or condescend. ‘He does not wish the natives well, he seeks the success of their enterprise’, which Walzer notes was the style of Gandhi in India and George Orwell in Britain. ‘If he has picked up new ideas on his travels, he tries to connect them to the local culture building on his intimate knowledge.’¹⁸ Narayanan’s interpretive approach to his reporting is consonant with Walzer’s definition of the intellectual’s role as interpreter of pre-colonial social understandings and practices—especially those linked to farming, grain-supply management, and the establishment of Indian-run hospitals and militia—under threat by imperial control. This criticism of British understandings and practices inconsistent with Indian societal values is vital to that role, as seen in Narayanan’s exploitation of the English-language press as an instrument to educate the masses. As Walzer comments about religious oppression, ‘the smaller and more beleaguered the community, the less likely it is to offer resources to the connected critic’. As with Narayanan and the English-language press, ‘he will have to appeal to some wider political or religious tradition’, especially that embedded in the print culture of English language and literature, ‘within which his own is (uneasily) located’. With the relatively rich resources of English-language media, Narayanan gave voice to Indian nationalism.¹⁹

¹⁶ Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, p. 33.

¹⁷ Walzer, *Interpretation of Social Criticism*, p. 65.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

The climate of the press at Narayanan's journalistic debut

T. G. Narayanan served as a correspondent at a time when India was in a state of turmoil yet inching closer to its independence. As the Cripps Mission ended in a stalemate, the Congress party intensified its demand for independence. Gandhi started a civil-disobedience uprising called the Quit India movement, demanding immediate independence from the British rule. Due to increased opposition, the British government jailed Gandhi and several political leaders and imposed press censorship.

At this time, several Indian-owned newspapers came into being to express a point of view and, with the spread of education and the development of representative institutions, there were many perspectives clamouring to be heard. With the exception of *The Hindu*, which adopted professionalism, most Indian-owned newspapers neglected the commercial side and concentrated on developing ideas.²⁰ Indian-language newspapers, however, were limited to specific geographic regions; only English-language newspapers came close to having a national audience.²¹ Because British companies owned many of the English-language newspapers, few journalists attempted to challenge the status quo. Writing for *The Hindu*, an Indian-owned English-language newspaper, Narayanan was one of the few journalists who combined caution with courage to write the first draft of history. The English-language press experienced a steady expansion in the years leading to up to India's independence in 1947. While the Indian-language press played a comparatively larger role in pitching for the nation's freedom, English-language newspapers such as *The Hindu* adopted a more measured approach in criticizing the British.

On the other hand, the British had periodically employed censorship to keep dissenting opinions under control. Censorship was tightened in the war years. After the outbreak of the Second World War, the Defense of

²⁰ S. Natarajan, *A History of the Press in India*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1962, p. 171.

²¹ The years leading to the independence saw a steady expansion of English-language newspapers from city-based to a Pan-Indian readership, but this transformation was completed only after the independence. Nonetheless, *The Hindu* was an influential newspaper beyond Madras and even used as a 'model' by other publications. For example, Madan Mohan Malaviya, the owner of *Hindustan Times*, directed his editor in the 1930s to keep *The Hindu* and *The Leader* as models for editorial commentary. J. N. Sahni, *Truth about the Indian Press*, Bombay, Calcutta, and New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1974, p. 37; Ray, 'Speculating "national"', pp. 10–11.

India Act was passed, which, among other things, provided for censorship of news relating to certain subjects, the omission of information useful to the enemy, and controlled the publication of prejudicial reports.²² The laws also required the registration of district correspondents and prohibited the publication of the civil-disobedience news and other stories that might affect the war effort. British officials suppressed 92 journals in August 1942.²³

In addition to censoring the nationalist press, the British tightened its grip on foreign correspondents who were increasingly drawn towards India. The Cripps Mission was preceded by American and Chinese interest in India. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor had quickened interest in India, as it was near the centre of Asian events. President Roosevelt's personal representatives, Col. Johnson and William Philips, added to the American interest and consequently to the presence of foreign correspondents on Indian soil.²⁴ With the growth of foreign press in India, the colonial government waged a campaign against *The Statesman*, *The Times (London)*, and the American wire services to persuade them to report news of the Quit India movement in a pro-government light.²⁵

In 1940s India, the most prominent English-language newspapers included *The Times of India*, *The Statesman*, *The Hindustan Times*, and *The Hindu*. While the first two newspapers were British-owned, the last two were Indian-owned and sought to provide an indigenous viewpoint. In contrast to the proliferation of the Indian-owned press, the British-owned newspapers in India entered a phase of contraction. *The Pioneer* was the first to pass into Indian hands when the landowning interests of Uttar Pradesh brought it over.²⁶ *The Englishman* of Calcutta merged into *The Statesman*. Publications such as Ramananda Chatterjee's *Modern Review*, Tilak's *Kesari*, Surendranath Banerjee's *Bengalee*, Swaminath Sadanand's *Free Press Journal*, G. A. Natesan's *Indian Review*, Kamakashi Natarajan's *Indian Social Reformer*, Motilal Nehru's *Leader*, and Gandhi's *Young India* and *Harijan* voiced nationalist concerns,

²² Natarajan, *A History of the Press in India*, p. 16.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁵ V. P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, Vol. 2, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 153.

²⁶ In July 1933, *The Pioneer* was sold to a syndicate and moved from Allahabad to Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. Natarajan, *A History of the Press in India*, p. 223.

with the publishers often submitting themselves to the curious, often 'naïve probings of foreign correspondents from Europe and America'.²⁷ In addition, several multilingual newspapers including *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Kayastare Hinda*, *Congress Gazette*, and *The Tribune* provided nationalistic fodder in English and regional languages. All these newspapers contributed to the emergence of a public sphere in India. Being an 'empire-within-an-empire' before independence, India's public sphere was formed in relation to the British as well as to its own ethnic, religious, linguistic, and geographical differences.²⁸ Educational institutions, debating societies, social organizations, and literary clubs established during colonial rule were institutional bases for this public sphere.²⁹ In these public sites, the Indian intelligentsia critiqued the traditional order and challenged colonial domination. Publications such as *Modern Review* acted as an all-India forum to publicize a wide array of issues—widow remarriage, Adivasi rights, conservation of natural resources, land reform—and played a vital role in the process of national awakening.³⁰ A bourgeois public sphere thus came into being in Indian society, which consequently ushered in modernity in this context within the limits set by colonialism.

For the participants of this nascent yet growing public sphere, Indian journalists like Narayanan grew accustomed to writing within the constraints of censorship. Although newspapers thrived during the war years, there was a shortage of reporters in the English-language press.

²⁷ P. R. Greenough, 'Political mobilization and the underground literature of the Quit India Movement, 1942–44', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1983, pp. 353–86. Other notable newspapers included *Dyan Prakash*, *The Quarterly Journal of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha*, *The Maratha*, *The Nababibhakar*, *The Indian Mirror*, *The Nassim*, *The Hindustani*, *The Indian Union*, *The Spectator*, *The Indu Prakash*, *The Crescent*, *The Madras Mail* and *The Madras Times*. Cited from *How India Wrought for Freedom* (1915) in B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Madras, Working Committee of the Congress, 1935, 1:26–7.

²⁸ S. B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1989. See also P. Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, London, Zed Books, 1986; P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993; V. Belair-Gagnon, S. Mishra, and C. Agur, 'Reconstructing the Indian public sphere: newswork and social media in the Delhi gang rape case', *Journalism*, vol. 15, no. 8, 2014, pp. 1059–75.

²⁹ K. N. Panikkar, 'Imperatives of a left public sphere', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 50, no. 44, 2015, p. 15.

³⁰ R. Guha, 'The independent journal of opinion', *Seminar* 481, September 1999, <http://www.india-seminar.com/1999/481/481%20guha.htm> [Accessed 28 March 2017].

Nine-tenths of the editors in North India were 'semi-literate' and major newspapers sought talent in Bengal and South India—centres of Indian journalism.³¹ There were a few itinerant journalists ready to serve the handful of papers that seemed appropriate to their interests and would allow them to make a living.³² Narayanan was one among those who heeded the call from nationalist editors and worked for multiple newspapers at the same time.

Born on 9 June 1911 at Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu, Narayanan received a Master of Arts degree from the Madras Christian College and a graduate degree from the Teachers' Training College, University of Madras. He was a lecturer in English at the Union Christian College of Alwaye, Kerala, from 1932 to 1934. For the next two years, he pursued research on child education at the University of Madras and then lectured at the Madura College in Madurai. The next course of his career he always recalled as 'one of the most rewarding' of his life³³; Narayanan started his journalistic career with *The Hindu* in 1938. That year, he became the India correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian*—a post he held for two years.³⁴ His stint as a reporter for two of the most prominent English-language newspapers in the country brought him into contact with other newspaper editors who solicited his contributions to their regional and national newspapers. Narayanan wrote for the *Svadesamitran* and *The Forward*.³⁵ His reporting of the Bengal famine was also published in two prominent Calcutta newspapers: *The Statesman* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. Narayanan adopted an immersive approach, closing the gap between him and his subjects to illuminate the misery of famine-induced starvation. His developmental journalism also illustrated how journalists could serve as 'warning systems' against aggravating the famine.³⁶

Narayanan's war correspondence utilized literary journalism methods to voice such warnings. Literary journalistic features distinguishing his

³¹ M. Israel, *Communications and Power: Propaganda and the Press in the Indian National Struggle, 1920–1947*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 52.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³³ 'Mr. T.G. Narayanan', *The Times*, 27 March 1962.

³⁴ 'Berlin Talks Deadlocked', *The Guardian*, 27 March 1962.

³⁵ T. G. Narayanan, *Famine over Bengal*, Calcutta, The Book Company, 1944, p. viii.

³⁶ D. Banik, 'India's freedom from famine: The case of Kalahandi', *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1998, pp. 265–81; N. Ram, 'An independent press and anti-hunger strategies: the Indian experience', in *The Political Economy of Hunger*, Vol. 1: *Entitlement and Well-being*, Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen (eds), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991, pp. 146–90.

work included an emphasis on 'immersion reporting, the craft and artistry in the writing, the recognition of complicated problems in representing reality'.³⁷ These methods have been identified in the work of other historical figures of the mid-twentieth century and earlier, as John Hartsock has demonstrated through analysis of the writings of John Hersey, a contemporary of Narayanan, and others.³⁸ Literary journalistic features reflected his unique 'ability to portray characters with real emotions and the drama of everyday life', particularly within the international context of war.³⁹ These methods empowered Narayanan to produce politically efficacious stories despite harsh conditions and editorial barriers.

Reporting Gandhi's prophecy of the famine

Narayanan's reportage of the Bengal famine is remarkable not only for its insights into the causes of this devastating tragedy, but also for the range of journalistic techniques deployed, including literary journalistic 'immersion reporting, accuracy, voice, structure, responsibility, and symbolic representation'.⁴⁰ Narayanan's sense of responsibility stands out in elevating the journalistic role to that of a 'connected critic', as defined by Michael Walzer. Insofar as he saw his subjects through a critical and prophetic lens, his reportage of the famine situates itself in the category of interpretation. His writings illustrate how 'interpretation does not bind us irrevocably to the status quo—since we can only interpret what already exists—and so undercuts the possibility of social criticism', as Walzer explains.⁴¹ Interpretation becomes an act of political resistance in Narayanan's writings. The function of the prophet as social critic was central to the role Gandhi embraced through his own journalistic endeavours, beginning with the founding of *Indian Opinion* in 1903 in

³⁷ N. Sims, 'The evolutionary future of American and international literary journalism', in *Literary Journalism Across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (eds), Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2011, p. 90.

³⁸ J. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Form*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2000, p. 186.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁰ N. Sims, 'The art of literary journalism', in *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction*, Norman Sims and Mark Kramer (eds), New York, Ballantine Books, 1995, p. 9.

⁴¹ Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, p. 4.

which he forwarded the concept of Satyagraha, the principle behind non-violent social revolution.

Although he travelled widely through rural Bengal, Narayanan was deeply connected 'to the local culture', according to Walzer's theory, 'building on his intimate knowledge; he is not intellectually detached'. As an Indian citizen invested in the nation's liberation from British colonialism, Narayanan was a compassionate observer in such a way that 'extends beyond the "needs" of the social structure itself and its dominant groups'. As with Gandhi, Narayanan's journalism reflects an abiding conviction in 'morality as potentially subversive of class and power'.⁴² Through the inspiration of Gandhi, Narayanan follows in the tradition of civil disobedience established in Western culture by nineteenth-century author, Henry David Thoreau, upon the philosophical tenets of his mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Narayanan was not the only journalist covering the Bengal famine. *The Statesman's* Ian Stephens, *the Hindustan Times's* K. Santhanam, and *Saka's* Ramesh Bose were some of the journalists with whom he rubbed shoulders.⁴³ Yet Narayanan was the first and only journalist to highlight Gandhi's prophecy regarding the onset of a food crisis. Giving voice to his warnings in the press in a way that only an eyewitness to the calamity could have expressed, Narayanan disclosed the extensive political efforts to silence Gandhi by way of his imprisonment. He laments that 'this great and wise man who loved his people so much that he saw distinctly the troubles inevitably coming on them in the not so distant future was clapped into prison on the 9th of August 1942'. His silencing meant that 'from then on his sage counsel was denied to his people'.⁴⁴ Narayanan emphasizes Gandhi's warning that 'there were just sufficient stocks throughout the country in 1943, which if they could have been taken in hand and distributed equitably, would have staved off the famine'.⁴⁵ Such a strategy would have allowed enough time for imports of provisions from abroad to arrive to provide relief to the

⁴² Quoted in S. M. Worley, *Emerson, Thoreau, and the Role of the Cultural Critic*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 2001, pp. 27–8.

⁴³ In fact, it was *The Statesman* that first defied the government to acknowledge the impact of the famine in print. Ray, 'Speculating "national"', p. 10; Narayanan, *Famine*, p. 208; Santhanam, *Cry of Distress*, p. 45. See also R. Mitra, 'The famine in British India: the quantification rhetoric and colonial disaster management', *Journal of Creative Communications*, vol. 7, no. 1–2, 2012, p. 167.

⁴⁴ Narayanan, *Famine*, p. 105.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

starving. Narayanan reaffirms and amplifies Gandhi's central arguments that rationing would have solved the crisis. Although rationing would have reduced previous levels of consumption, it would have allowed citizens to avoid suffering the effects of acute starvation.

In his piece on Gandhi, Narayanan's rhetoric freely vacillated into first-person to convey his sense of intimacy with the subject and also moves into more analytical modes of discourse describing political causes. Although this form of writing—driven primarily by personal insights, opinions, essays, and literary passages—was quintessential of the journalism practised during the 1930s and 1940s, Narayanan was arguably leveraging these devices more aggressively and purposively than any other journalist covering the Bengal famine.⁴⁶ He wrote that 'the forward vision to see clearly coming events is given to poets and prophets, to saints and a few statesmen', elaborating on how 'India's statesman-saint, Mahatma Gandhi, warned his countrymen and their rulers in the first issue of the resumed *Harijan* on the 18th of January 1942'. Narayanan highlighted Gandhi's anticipation of failed efforts at government intervention in resolving 'questions of dealing with scarcity of food and clothing, looting and bread riots'. From this accurate diagnosis of the problem, Gandhi then went on to argue 'mere Government effort cannot deal with crises affecting millions of people, unless there is voluntary response from them'. Thus, the moral crisis at stake laid bare the authoritative imposition of government protocols as not only misguided, but destructive; British policy toward amassing surplus at that stage drastically diminished provisions. The devastating result, Gandhi urged, could have been averted if 'every village had become a self-sufficient government' rationing the 'sufficient stock' available to them. Such self-sufficiency is reflected in the iconic spinning wheel that became the symbol of the independence leader's quest for India's sovereignty from Britain.⁴⁷

By emphasizing Gandhi's call for local self-governance at the level of Bengal's tiniest villages, Narayanan takes a radical nationalist stand. 'The well-to-do live on the poor' by way of corrupt dealing in the grain trade, Narayanan claimed.⁴⁸ Gandhi's nationalist fervour voiced in his

⁴⁶ There was a steady departure in news-writing style from that of earlier decades. Date-driven news stories were becoming important in newspapers and the arrangement of news had set in. There was a commercial page and a sports page, and general news pressed heavily on these columns. Natarajan, *A History of the Press in India*, p. 224.

⁴⁷ Narayanan, *Famine*, p. 102.

⁴⁸ Instances of hoarding were common during the famine; Narayanan, *Famine*, p. 110.

South African newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, is echoed in Narayanan's coverage of the Bengal famine.⁴⁹ Social revolution, according to Gandhi, 'would probably have been impossible without *Indian Opinion*'. That newspaper and the weekly *Young India*—later renamed *Harījan*, meaning 'Children of God', which promoted his views on economic self-sufficiency, religious tolerance, and political reform—were his main outlets from 1903 to 1948. As editor of four other journals, journalism constituted Gandhi's life's work at this time and was the primary means of publicizing his activist agenda. 'Week after week I poured my soul in columns expounding my principles and practices of Satyagraha,' he wrote.⁵⁰ William L. Shirer of *Chicago Tribune*, another journalist like Narayanan who covered Gandhi, testified to the Indian leader's brilliant use of the media during the early 1930s to spread his nationalist message. Through his own papers, and later through journalists like Narayanan, Gandhi transformed from political leader into iconic human rights activist. Meeting 'his greatness' as a member of the press, Shirer attested, was 'an experience that enriched and deepened our lives as no other did'.⁵¹

Shirer's *Tribune* reportage from the early 1930s on India's vulnerability to famine in light of British colonial intervention anticipates Narayanan's nationalist argument. Without the interference of Britain, 'India spun and wove in her millions of cottages just the supplement she needed for adding to her meager agricultural resources', Shirer observed.⁵² A decade later, Narayanan pointed out that 'Famine was just one problem on one point in the circumference of our subjection. The central problem was that of achievement of freedom and democratic self-government in India'. He went on to explain that 'The problem of Bengal was not one that was entirely her own creation'. As with Gandhi's drive toward economic autonomy as the larger force behind the prevention of famine, Narayanan declared that Britain's contribution to the crisis 'must be studied', he insisted, 'in the larger context of India's subjection to alien rule'.⁵³

⁴⁹ Although Narayanan's coverage of the Bengal famine has an imprint of Gandhi's voice in *Indian Opinion*, there is a lack of archival evidence on whether Narayanan had read that newspaper.

⁵⁰ S. N. Bhattacharyya, 'Mahatma Gandhi: the journalist', *Indian Literature*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1966, p. 93.

⁵¹ W. L. Shirer, *Gandhi: A Memoir*, New York, Pocket Books, 1986, p. 62.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁵³ Narayanan, *Famine*, p. 231.

Narayanan's critique of Britain's political subjugation of India dovetailed with his attack of ancient social structures that became evident during the food crisis in Bengal. Where the caste system was strong, he found in his reporting that 'the famine was working a silent revolution. I could see in the long queues a Caste Hindu lined up behind a Namasudra [Untouchable] and himself followed by a Muslim'.⁵⁴ In addition to the recalibration of the social structure, ancient religious beliefs to which Gandhi himself had been wedded had come under question under the immense pressure of famine. Aryan invaders from Central Asia had proclaimed the cow sacred according to early Hindu belief as a measure for survival given the profound dependence on the creatures for pulling ploughs and providing milk for peasants and infants. But, over the centuries, the population of cattle grew out of control, given their sacred status, soon wandering throughout the country consuming food 'dearly needed by millions of human beings'.⁵⁵ Many Hindus believed they should be destroyed. Yet, a larger contingent vied for their protection, citing God's will—a position that has only intensified in contemporary India.⁵⁶ The Bengal famine thus unhinged India from its social fabric to its core beliefs, challenging even Gandhi's own commitment to protecting the sacred animals.

During the last six months of 1943, approximately 60 million people felt the pinch of acute hunger. Narayanan reported that the cause, according to Gandhi, was due to government incompetence for executing massive shipments of grain out of the country. 'The charge was true', Narayanan affirmed, citing how they 'sent out grain to Iran, Iraq, Arabia, the Middle East, and South Africa, and of course, Ceylon'. Such huge exports yielded little in return from the countries receiving them, particularly at the brutal cost of widespread starvation. Narayanan bitterly revealed that 'none of these countries has been grateful enough ... to the Indian people for helping them with foodstuffs at tremendous sacrifice'.⁵⁷ Both of these points form the cornerstone of Narayanan's reportage on the Bengal famine. The reversal of these exports that Gandhi insisted upon came only after famine struck. Narayanan observed that, by then, the decision came

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 152.

⁵⁵ Shirer, *Gandhi*, p. 67.

⁵⁶ See, for example, G. Nair, 'The bitter aftertaste of beef ban: "choice," caste and consumption', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 51, no. 10, 2016, pp. 14–6.

⁵⁷ Narayanan, *Famine*, p. 106.

tragically too late: 'It took a famine to make the Government of India to realize that India must stop food exports and must become a net importing country to the extent of 1.5 million tons a year.'⁵⁸ Self-sufficiency, as Gandhi's spinning wheel so poignantly symbolized, was more than a spiritual precept—it was the key feature of a political economy essential to the nation's sustenance and survival.

Writing the Second World War in India and Southeast Asia

Narayanan's coverage of the Bengal famine distinguished him as one of India's leading journalists. In an attempt to distinguish itself from other newspapers, *The Hindu* chose Narayanan in an unprecedented move to cover the Second World War in India and Southeast Asia. The assignment made Narayanan the first Indian war correspondent.⁵⁹ *The Hindu* saw his assignment as an opportunity to garner a nationalist readership and elevate its own status by covering an international event in which India was a participant. Narayanan benefitted from the appointment as correspondent to the Indian and Southeast Asian theatre by becoming a recognized authority not only as a reporter, but also as a commentator and critic of government affairs. He gave voice to the plight of Indian soldiers in the British Army, which other non-Indian papers did not. Narayanan and his friend, P. R. S. Mani—a journalist commissioned as a captain in the British Army Public Relations unit and with whom Narayanan had attended Madras Christian College—made significant inroads toward exposing this otherwise invisible Indian constituency in the British Army.⁶⁰ As Narayanan's celebrity rose in the wake of his coverage of the Bengal famine, his stock rose in the eyes of *The Hindu* editors. *The Hindu* thus granted Narayanan a platform with the freedom to do more than reporting, but to criticize and comment—as a connected critic—on the state of affairs.

Narayanan's ascendance to the status of a celebrity journalist and political commentator rather than an anonymous reporter is illustrated

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵⁹ Parthasarathy, *A Hundred Years*, p. 603.

⁶⁰ H. Goodall, 'Writing conflicted loyalties: an Indian journalist's perspectives on the dilemmas of Indian troops in Indonesia, 1945', in *Writing the War in Asia: A Documentary History*, Mark R. Frost and Daniel Schumacher (eds), April 2014, www.uni-konstanz.de/war-in-asia/goodall/ [Accessed 9 November 2015].

in his move to Northeast India to report on the war with the Japanese. In the spring of 1944, the battle between the Japanese and the Allied forces, which mainly comprised Indian soldiers, had turned into guerrilla warfare in the hilly, forested terrain. The epicentre of the battle was Imphal, the capital city of the state of Manipur bordering Burma. Imphal was crucial to the battle, as it could be a 'strategic base' for further infiltrations into both India and Burma. Stationed at Imphal, Narayanan frequently undertook jeep journeys on ramshackle roads to report on the war. In *The Hindu's* history, never before was a correspondent sent to exclusively cover a war.⁶¹ The newspaper deviated from its previous practice of printing its stories anonymously by identifying its author with a byline and including a photograph of its correspondent, T. G. Narayanan.⁶²

Often, during his reporting, Narayanan came dangerously close to the enemy ambushed in the thickly wooded hills: 'From where I am typing this dispatch a small group of enemy is entrenched on this hill feature some 5,000 ft. high and roughly six miles away.'⁶³ On another occasion, he wrote:

Late this forenoon, I almost ran into the packet of enemy shells ... then an explosion and then a column of smoke and dust as the shell burst were the first indication that shells were landing a furlong away. The next shell burst was a hundred yards further and nearer to where I was.⁶⁴

This proximity to the event authorizes his larger comments on the political situation at hand, especially from the sympathetic perspective of Indian soldiers. His reportage did more than paint vivid visual details, but made an argument on behalf of the Indian soldiers, highlighting their bravery. As the rains fell, Narayanan bore witness to the persistence in fighting between the two sides despite the difficulty in transporting gear and equipment in muddy conditions. He credits both sides for their commitment and dedication: 'Monsoon operations on

⁶¹ Parthasarathy, *A Hundred Years*, p. 603.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ T. G. Narayanan, 'Maj.-Gen. Lentaigne—new commander of the Chindits', *The Hindu*, 20 April 1944. From the Papers of T.G. Narayanan, courtesy of Ranga Narayanan. T. G. Narayanan's articles from *The Hindu* were previously available in microfilm at the Center for Research Libraries, Chicago. The microfilm, however, is damaged and is no longer accessible.

⁶⁴ T. G. Narayanan, 'Activity in Bishenpore area', *The Hindu*, 4 May 1944. From the Papers of T.G. Narayanan, courtesy of Ranga Narayanan.

both sides this year have completely destroyed the general idea that the monsoon will render warfare on the Assam-Burma front static and that everything and everyone will stay put.⁶⁵

Narayanan, furthermore, tracked the movements of the Japanese and the Allied forces. He obtained news from Tokyo Radio and triangulated it with his own observations from the war zone. This practice of triangulation was important because the war was an environment of many layers of communication—official military dispatches, government policies, newspapers, photographs, radio, newsreel film, and rumours—and the information had to be verified from multiple sources and his own field observations to produce ‘reliable’ news, particularly in the conditions of censorship.⁶⁶ (Rumour was integral to the British propaganda machine at this time in India, because the majority of the population was illiterate.⁶⁷) Mass communication in this sense was powerful without the use of media technology. This presents a striking example of the broad spectrum spreading propaganda from the most sophisticated media technology of film to the most basic word of mouth and oral storytelling networks. As an example of British propaganda, historian Philip Woods explains how the British used newsreels to depict Indian soldiers willingly participating in the war.⁶⁸ Narayanan’s reporting fought this British propaganda in limited ways. Whereas the British newsreels valorized the Indian soldiers as opponents to Fascism and the Axis powers, and thus implicitly aligning them with the imperial cause, Narayanan instead highlighted the difficult conditions they faced in order to underscore his Indian nationalist message. He was receptive to the predicament of Indian soldiers in the British Army who received lower status and lower rates of pay than British officers or troops.⁶⁹ Narayanan was writing as

⁶⁵ T. G. Narayanan, ‘Jap objectives in India fail’, *The Hindu*, 12 June 1944. From the Papers of T.G. Narayanan, courtesy of Ranga Narayanan.

⁶⁶ Goodall, ‘Writing conflicted loyalties’, p. 6.

⁶⁷ For a detailed discussion of rumour, see R. Guha, ‘Transmission’, in *The Indian Public Sphere: Readings in Media History*, A. Rajagopal (ed), New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 31–48. For a case study of the transfer of news and information from ‘elites’ to ‘masses’, see G. Pandey, ‘Mobilization in a mass movement: congress “propaganda” in the United Provinces (India), 1930–34’, *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1975, pp. 205–26.

⁶⁸ P. Woods, ‘“Chapattis by parachute”: the use of newsreels in British propaganda in India in the Second World War’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2000, pp. 89–100.

⁶⁹ Goodall, ‘Writing conflicted loyalties’, p. 7.

the advocate of Indian soldiers, much less appropriating their presence on the front line for propaganda as the British had. In this manner, Narayanan was producing what Indian nationalists would consider 'reliable' news, especially in the context of an English-language newspaper published in India.

By July 1944, the Allied troops defeated the Japanese forces in Imphal. Yet, the battle continued in several theatres in Southeast Asia, which was known by the name Southeast Asia Command (SEAC). Defined as a military zone in 1943, the SEAC originally included Burma, Ceylon, Siam, the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, and parts of what is now Indonesia.⁷⁰ Of these, northern Burma, because of its proximity to India, was considered crucial and it was to this region that Narayanan turned next as the war correspondent. In February 1942, the Japanese forces captured Burma's capital Rangoon and the Allied forces continued their efforts to win back the capital. The war had drawn a wedge between northern and southern Burma. Northern Burma, where the battle took place, was traditionally dependent on the southern part of the country for rice. The battle, therefore, made it difficult for the civilians of northern Burma to acquire food.

During his investigation, Narayanan noted very few cattle and the few people that stayed on did not engage in farming. According to estimates, more than 400,000 Indians left Burma during the British evacuation of 1942, leaving behind a large number of agricultural labourers and unskilled workers. Many others were evacuated as refugees. In the Myitkyina district, for instance, about 8,000 people, mostly Indians, were stationed in a refugee camp, where they were given 'just enough ration to exist'.⁷¹ The condition in these refugee camps was not very different from some of the relief centres in Bengal during the famine. Narayanan's main focus, as in the coverage of the Bengal famine, was on the civilians: 'Of all people hit by war in North Burma, the civilians were the worst hit. The Japanese had taken away what they wanted and they paid in Japanese currency. But it was of no use and inflation was terrific and even rice remained in short supply.'⁷²

Moreover, in a bid to recapture Burma, the Allied bombing had destroyed Burma's infrastructure: buildings, power stations, and water

⁷⁰ L. Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010.

⁷¹ T. G. Narayanan, 'Myitkyina', *The Hindu*, 29 October 1944. From the Papers of T.G. Narayanan, courtesy of Ranga Narayanan.

⁷² *Ibid.*

works. On 3 May 1945, the Allied forces recaptured Rangoon from the Japanese as the latter departed after looting banks and machinery. Moving in and out of first-person narration, Narayanan reported on the problem of water shortage in the city. Narayanan, however, remarked that the condition of Rangoon was better than that of some of the other cities in North Burma. He wrote:

Considering the dearth of water—we, war correspondents were rationed two gallons a day for all purposes—the clogging of sewers due to lack of flooding and the huge accumulations of refuse on roadsides due to civic services not functioning for a week and more, the health of Rangoon was pretty good.⁷³

Narayanan and the INA

If Narayanan's reporting shed light on the condition of common soldiers during the war, he also carefully omitted certain stories. The most marked of these omissions is of the INA. With well-organized regiments, the INA was an army of Indian soldiers who fought for Indian independence alongside the Japanese.⁷⁴ As the British waged war against the Axis forces including Japan, calls for Indian independence intensified back at home. Departing from the Gandhian non-violent approach, the INA was more militant and revolutionary. The INA consisted of ex-Indian Army men as well as of soldiers who were captured by the Japanese forces. Under the leadership of the Indian revolutionary leader and former Congress president Subhas Chandra Bose, the INA often collaborated with the Japanese forces in fighting the Allied forces. But historian, Heather Goodall, contends that relationships between the Japanese and the INA were uneasy.⁷⁵ The INA, furthermore, not only adopted a militant approach to gaining independence from the British, but also supported war-displaced Indians by undertaking relief work in Northeast India and Burma.

⁷³ T. G. Narayanan, 'Battle-scarred Rangoon', *The Hindu*, 22 May 1945. From the Papers of T.G. Narayanan, courtesy of Ranga Narayanan.

⁷⁴ H. Toye, *The Springing Tiger: A Study of a Revolutionary*, London, Cassell and Company Ltd., 1959. See also H. Toye, 'The first Indian National Army, 1941–42', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, September 1984, p. 365; J. C. Lebra, *Jungle Alliance: Japan and the Indian National Army*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008; C. V. Belle, *Tragic Orphans: Indians in Malaysia*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015.

⁷⁵ Goodall, 'Writing conflicted loyalties', p. 1.

When the Japanese retreated from Burma to Malaya, the INA oversaw the safe transference of power, ensuring safety to the Indian population in Burma. Similar instability occurred when the departure of the British in 1942 from Rangoon, the capital of Burma, created a power vacuum in which a few armed Burmese thrived.⁷⁶ Narayanan captured how 'Indian interests in the city and its suburbs were safeguarded by units of the Indian National Army that stayed behind for this specific purpose'. Drawing attention to civilian sentiment, he noted how 'Indians in Rangoon were very grateful to the I.N.A. for having prevented a recrudescence of violence which would have inevitably broken out between the 27th of April and the 3rd of May, the period during which no capable government was in power in Rangoon'.⁷⁷

Historians such as Kalyan Ghosh acknowledge the INA's participation and cooperation with the Japanese in the war against the Allied forces even in Imphal—a fact that Narayanan and other journalists kept undercover.⁷⁸ It was not until the summer of 1945, with the fall of Rangoon, that Narayanan wrote a news story on the INA.⁷⁹ What were the reasons for this systematic omission? British-imposed press censorship played a crucial role in suppressing news on the INA. The British government feared pro-INA coverage in the press, as it would add to public dissent against colonial rule. Stories on the INA were particularly threatening to the British government because of their potential in making colonial control appear unstable and highly contested. News of a nationalist uprising that was not only uncooperative and resistant to the British government, but also militant would have unveiled a defiant rather than a complicit India and thus eroded British public support of colonial rule. Therefore, the British not only forbade any reporting on the INA, but also engaged in propaganda to portray the INA as a 'puppet in the hands of the Japanese ruling rump'.⁸⁰ By casting the INA as an extension of the Japanese army, Britain in effect suppressed the actual autonomous nationalist intent behind the INA, as media played down its vulnerability to the troops as a viable revolutionary force.

⁷⁶ Narayanan, 'Battle-scarred Rangoon'. These Burmese ruffians obtained weapons left behind by the Allies and robbed and murdered several Indians until the Japanese Military Administration took control; K. K. Ghosh, *The Indian National Army: Second Front of the Indian Independence Movement*, Meerut, Meenakshi Prakashan, 1969, p. 191.

⁷⁷ Narayanan, 'Battle-scarred Rangoon'.

⁷⁸ Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, p. 191.

⁷⁹ Narayanan's first news report on the INA was published in *The Hindu* on 22 May 1945.

⁸⁰ Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, p. 191.

Moreover, the British advanced the view that, even if the INA came out of the war successful, it would carry the baggage of Japanese militarism, which would be equally as bad as, if not worse than, the British imperialist rule. The INA, of course, intended to liberate India from British rule rather than acquire land for Japan. The British propaganda was challenged by the Japanese news agency as it reported on the INA, affirming that Japan had ‘no political, economic, military or territorial ambitions in India’.⁸¹

Meanwhile, Narayanan researched on the INA, often seeking contacts in territories beyond the control of British forces.⁸² His friend, Mani, who, like Narayanan, grew up in Madras on India’s south-east coast, accompanied him on the field investigations. As Goodall notes, Mani’s internationalist purview drew from his early fascination with theosophy, to which European visitors to Madras had exposed him. But he later espoused a nationalistic fervour as his relationship with Narayanan developed. ‘His great passion was for Indian nationalism’, which he shared with Narayanan, visible in his 1939 ‘extended homage to Jawaharlal Nehru, whose commitment to grappling with real world problems seemed to Mani to embody the socialism to which he himself adhered’.⁸³ Based on Narayanan and Mani’s research over several months, the former compiled an extensive report on the INA, which was delivered to Nehru. Yet, the report itself has not yet been found among the Nehru papers held at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. According to Goodall, Mani successfully delivered the report to Nehru.⁸⁴ Narayanan’s son, Ranga Narayanan, indicated that the report may be at the archives of India Office in London. But a preliminary search was not able to trace the report.⁸⁵ In the absence of the actual report, we can only speculate on the findings of Narayanan and Mani’s investigation on the INA. The episode, though, does show that the duo covertly worked beyond the limits set by the British authorities. What Narayanan and Mani witnessed in the INA went unpublished until 1945 precisely because they understood that such reports might deter or undermine their revolutionary purpose. Covert operation in this case could lead to a more powerful and

⁸¹ “‘Government’ formed by Indian quisling’, *The Times*, 22 October 1943.

⁸² Goodall, ‘Writing conflicted loyalties’, p. 2.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸⁵ The preliminary search was conducted by a librarian at the India Office upon the authors’ request.

potentially successful nationalist uprising that both Mani and Narayanan backed.

Among Narayanan's articles on the INA from 1945 to 1946, his story dated 29 May 1945 in *The Hindu* is ostensibly the first ever detailed news report on the INA to be published in any newspaper.⁸⁶ While his articles support the INA, they also voice criticism of the armed forces' connection to 'fascist' Japan. Given Narayanan's loyalty to the Indian nationalist cause, such criticism can be construed as a strategic attempt to evade the scrutiny of British censors, who would have expected that critique to surface, since it had been firmly established in imperial rhetoric designed for public consumption. Narayanan touts the INA's noble cause and groundswell of support from Indian citizens in response to the army's respect and service to the local communities in Rangoon. There he observed them keeping 'perfect discipline', as troops operating 'under their own officers were unloading ships, cleaning up streets and helping in any manner demanded of them'.⁸⁷ Narayanan inserts himself into the scene as privileged observer, noting how 'the I.N.A. hospital, housed in a big school, seemed to me to be as well-run as any military hospital in India, and not only troops of the I.N.A., but also local citizens were receiving treatment'. He goes on to assemble a sympathetic portrait of the INA as an independent national army 'completely officered and trained by Indians and that in this respect it has neither sought nor received any aid from the Japanese Army'.⁸⁸

In the article entitled 'Indian National Army in Burma', Narayanan was mindful of British censors and thus cast key passages in the passive voice. 'Claims made,' he reported, 'are that all caste and communal distinctions have been abolished in the I.N.A., especially as regards food, and that training has been given completely through the medium of Hindustani.' Readers, both Indian nationalists and British imperialists alike, would have been surprised that 'the I.N.A. has also got an anthem of its own and its salutation is "Jai Hind" (Victory to India)'—a sure sign of

⁸⁶ A search in the historical archives of *The Times (London)*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times*, and *The Statesman* confirms Parthasarathy's assertion that 'He [Narayanan] was probably the first correspondent to unveil the mystery surrounding the Indian National Army (I.N.A.)'. Parthasarathy, *A Hundred Years*, p. 603.

⁸⁷ T. G. Narayanan, 'Indian National Army in Burma', *The Hindu*, 29 May 1945. From the Papers of T.G. Narayanan, courtesy of Ranga Narayanan.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

solidarity behind a sovereign nation. He immediately follows this telling sign of the army's cohesion and momentum with the revelation that 'some of the officers of the I.N.A. are from the regular Indian Army, a number of them either Sandhurst or Dehra Dun trained', with 'some of them coming from families well known in India and for their traditional loyalty to the Crown'. The prospect of loyalists to the Crown migrating into the ranks of the INA, most astute readers would interpret, signalled momentum toward independence. The factions from which the INA drew its members, his article argues, were vast and diverse, indicative of its viability as a force to subvert imperial British rule.⁸⁹

But two major events in August 1945 marked the sudden end of the INA: the atomic bombing of Japan and the death of the INA leader, Subhas Chandra Bose, in a plane crash.⁹⁰ With the surrender of Japan by Emperor Hirohito, the INA 'lay defeated, scattered, caged', according to historian, Peter Ward Fay.⁹¹ A few months later, reporting on the crestfallen INA from Singapore and Indonesia, Narayanan asserted, 'the British Military Administration's attitude towards the I.N.A. personnel however is not yet clear'. But the British position, although not officially stated, speaks louder than words in the next fact Narayanan divulges: 'here still remain in four Malayan camps many I.N.A. prisoners, little cared for and almost in a state of neglect. Neglect in many cases can become more cruel punishment than rigorous incarceration.' Their abuse under such conditions is evident in how 'Most of these I.N.A. personnel who either belonged to the Indian Army or whose permanent homes are in India want to be repatriated

⁸⁹ He also notes that 'In its ranks it also counts a small regiment completely composed and officered by women, the Rani of Jhansi Regiment', named after the queen of Jhansi in Central India who was one of the leading fighters against the British during the Indian Rebellion of 1857; Narayanan, 'Indian National Army in Burma'. For more on Rani of Jhansi Regiment, see V. Hildebrand, *Women at War: Subhas Chandra Bose and the Rani of Jhansi Regiment*, New Delhi, Harper Collins, 2016; J. C. Lebra, *Women against the Raj: The Rani of Jhansi Regiment*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008; C. Hills and D. C. Silverman, 'Nationalism and feminism in late colonial India: the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, 1943–1945', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1993, pp. 741–60.

⁹⁰ More specifically, Bose died of third-degree burns that he suffered in the plane crash on 18 August 1945; Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, p. 197. See also N. Sengupta, *A Gentleman's Word: The Legacy of Subhas Chandra Bose in Southeast Asia*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012; M. Bose, *Raj, Secrets, Revolution: A Life of Subhas Chandra Bose*, London, Grice Chapman Publishing, 2004.

⁹¹ P. W. Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942–1945*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1993, p. 1.

quickly'.⁹² Because 'The British Military Administration in Malaya is not willing to harbor non-Malaya I.N.A. troops, it is unlikely that other countries in South-East Asia ... will be willing to take them back'. His compassion for these troops is couched in his criticism of British policy, as he points out that 'These men who were denied even the elementary privileges that other former Indian Army I.N.A troops possessed are utterly helpless and without hopes of repatriation, either to India or their countries of domicile'. His suggestion is reflective of his diplomatic acumen. 'It is felt here among such men,' he urges, 'that India owes them a duty of placing no obstacles in the way of their returning home, if such be their desire.'⁹³

Indian leaders, including Gandhi, decided to accept the INA troops in 1945. Gandhi selectively found virtue in the INA leader Bose that resonated with his own non-violent credo. Those virtues included patriotism and discipline. It was no coincidence that Narayanan also became more vocal in amplifying his support for the INA precisely in 1945. With Gandhi's support of the INA troops to be 'assimilated into his nonviolent army',⁹⁴ Narayanan felt he could submit his unqualified support of the INA. This is instructive regarding the pattern of Narayanan's journalism, which took Gandhi's latest views as the keynotes of his ideologically freighted reportage. We know this from the evidence of Gandhi's prediction of the famine, which prompted Narayanan's own criticisms of the British government's handling of the food crisis. But, rather than simply being Gandhi's votary, Narayanan had views of his own that were distinct from the charismatic leader's. He was more flexible than Gandhi because, in his reporting of the British Army and the INA, he in fact praises the soldiers for fighting bravely and acting nobly. Gandhi, for example, praised Bose in tones that Narayanan would never use, backhandedly complimenting him in describing him as 'undoubtedly a patriot though misguided'.⁹⁵ We can see this revolutionary fire in Narayanan that was so obviously absent in Gandhi and that reflected in his journalistic partner and friend, Mani.

⁹² T. G. Narayanan, 'Indian detenus in Malaya', *The Hindu*, 18 January 1946. From the Papers of T.G. Narayanan, courtesy of Ranga Narayanan.

⁹³ T. G. Narayanan, 'Civilians members of I.N.A. from Siam', *The Hindu*, 17 February 1946. From the Papers of T.G. Narayanan, courtesy of Ranga Narayanan.

⁹⁴ L. A. Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 552.

⁹⁵ M. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi 81* [n.e.], New York, Read Books, 2008 [Letter to Amrit Kaur, 24 August 1945], p. 67.

In his war memoir, Mani confessed that Gandhi stirred his ‘patriotism deeply but since it was a new technique unlike the classical revolution’, it did not evoke an active response in him.⁹⁶ Although Narayanan’s support of significant issues such as the Bengal famine and the plight of the INA distinctly paralleled Gandhi’s own views, they departed significantly, occupying a more complex position situated on an ideological continuum between Mani and Gandhi. Unlike Mani, Narayanan’s praise for Gandhi was typically unqualified. Further, Narayanan’s future career as a peace advocate for the United Nations bears out his affinity for Gandhi’s method of diplomacy, if not his inflexible views toward active resistance.

As for the INA, it faded from public memory in proportion to the ‘quiet efforts of self-regeneration initiated by Mahatma Gandhi’, despite the contribution to independence owing in part to ‘the military daring of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose’.⁹⁷ Narayanan’s report on the INA countered British official memory of India’s independence, especially in Philip Mason’s *India: The Transfer of Power*, which insisted that, as Fay describes it, ‘the instruments of governance were not won, they were delivered, in the manner of the father handing the car keys to his son’.⁹⁸ Streets named after Bose course through virtually every city in India today. The soldiers of the army itself, however, have been largely forgotten: ‘No holiday honors the army, no statue preserves an officer’s face; there is no archive, no museum.’⁹⁹ It is thus understandable that Narayanan’s investigative article on the INA is no longer extant in the historical archive, despite his efforts to report on the significance of the INA and its common soldiers.

The INA was a troop of firebrand nationalists, much less an official national army, which in part suppressed it from view in the press. Most British and American historians have been loathe ‘to admit it was reasonable for Indians to take up arms against the British’, especially as a reasonable tactic to mount ‘in wartime, at a moment of great difficulty and peril for Britain elsewhere in the world’.¹⁰⁰ The rise of the INA in the early 1940s suggests that India could fight for and win

⁹⁶ More compelling to Mani were the struggles led by Guiseppe Giribaldi and Simon Bolivar—the charismatic leaders of the nineteenth-century Italian and Venezuelan populist revolutions; Mani, *The Story*, p. v.

⁹⁷ Gyanendra Pandey, ‘The revolt of August 1942 in Eastern UP and Bihar’, in *The Indian Nation in 1942*, Calcutta, K.P. Bagchi, 1988, p. 159.

⁹⁸ Fay, *Forgotten Army*, p. 520.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 522.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

its independence. The INA might have taken it from the British had they crossed the Burmese border and returned safely to India toward the close of the conflict. Narayanan's journalism defied British officials like Philip Mason of the Central Legislative Assembly, who characterized the INA as a nuisance for Britain to dispose of or a puppet of the Japanese army. Many INA soldiers faced trial for treason—a circumstance that Fay speculates led to the Bombay Mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy and other similar uprisings in 1946 that eventually led to India's independence in 1947.¹⁰¹

Conclusions

Narayanan's nationalism was versatile enough to pair well with Gandhi's warning against the famine, as well as to venture into the forbidden and largely unreported territory of the INA. At a time when most journalists and doctors were hesitant to travel into Bengal's hinterland to address the famine, Narayanan seized the opportunity to report in detail the impact of the famine on the poor. Moreover, without Narayanan's reportage, the British government's flawed management of India's agricultural industry would not have been exposed in a timely manner. In this way, Narayanan laid the foundation for both investigative and developmental journalism in India. More than seven decades later, agriculture continues to be the main occupation in India and Narayanan's reporting constitutes precisely what is lacking in contemporary media coverage: India's rural communities. English-language newspapers today typically focus only on urban areas, giving short shrift to agricultural problems, including farmer suicides.¹⁰² Narayanan's journalism can therefore be instructive for today's editors.

Narayanan's concern for commoners also distinguished his war correspondence. Rather than allowing overseas Indians to remain invisible—particularly those in Burma who went unnoticed in India

¹⁰¹ The INA trials were conducted between November 1945 and May 1946 in Delhi. Narayanan did not cover these trials, as he was in Malay during that period; *ibid.*, pp. 496–9.

¹⁰² V. Mudgal, 'Rural coverage in the Hindi and English dailies', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 46, no. 35, 2011, pp. 92–7; S. Sosale, 'Envisioning a new world order through journalism lessons from recent history', *Journalism*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2003, pp. 377–92; P. Sainath, *Everybody Loves a Good Drought: Stories from India's Poorest Districts*, New Delhi, Penguin Books India, 1996.

because the war effort focused mainly on soldiers—he registered their experience with sympathy. Among the otherwise neglected subjects he brought to light were Indian soldiers in the British Army, who received his greatest emphasis, along with soldiers in the INA (whose work he strategically chose not to report until 1945). Foot soldiers and civilians took on a humanized presence in his reportage highlighting war's impact on their rights and dignities from imprisonment to dispossession to famine.

Narayanan's coverage of these crucial developments publicized India's suffering and literal starvation under the British Crown as much as its willingness to fight for economic and political self-sufficiency signified by Gandhi's spinning wheel. Narayanan's contribution to Indian and twentieth-century-journalism history is his willingness to venture beyond both the conventional parameters of the geographical territory defining his beat as a war correspondent and the journalistic conventions defining hard-news reporting. His accomplishment is remarkable given the restricted, censorious environment constraining his geographic and rhetorical reach. His nationalist fervour, inspired by Gandhi, led him to risk covering the British Army and to transcend the limitations of objective (inverted-pyramid) breaking-news reportage.

Narayanan's work as connected critic in his journalism was the foundation upon which he developed into an international relations scholar.¹⁰³ He was both intellectually engaged and intimately connected to the local culture by virtue of his participation in it as an Indian citizen. His criticism thus took on the urgency of a stakeholder in the contingent events he reported upon. His advocacy of the INA and Indian nationalism is analogous to the connected criticism of Gandhi—a figure who expressed his civil disobedience both in his writings and in his resistance to political and cultural hegemony. After working as a journalist, Narayanan co-founded the Indian Council of World Affairs and eventually became a diplomat of the United Nations, where he served the remainder of his career.¹⁰⁴ As the deputy and personal representative to the UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, Narayanan played an important role in establishing negotiations toward

¹⁰³ Narayanan's scholarly articles appeared in journals such as the *India Quarterly*. See, for example, T. G. Narayanan, 'Some problems of reconstruction in Burma', *India Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1945, pp. 210–7.

¹⁰⁴ 'T.G. Narayanan of India dies; UN Representative in Geneva', *The New York Times*, 27 March 1962.

a United States of America–Soviet nuclear peace treaty in the late 1950s.¹⁰⁵ Beginning with discussion regarding test bans for nuclear weapons, the ambitious goal of the prospective treaty was mutual nuclear disarmament. Narayanan defended peace against the seemingly insurmountable rising tide of the Cold War until his final days in March 1962. Despite ideological differences, his influence on negotiations inspired talks to continue between the nations long after his death. T. G. Narayanan's legacy on the United Nations, finally, was an extension of the diplomatic mission that began with his journalistic work on behalf of Indian nationalism.

¹⁰⁵ 'Mr. T.G. Narayanan', *The Times*; Fröhlich, *Political Ethics*, p. 45.