

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

History Optional Other Strands in the National Movement

Paper 2 • Unit 11

Revolutionaries, the left, the trade unions and the INA: 70 marks
in four years, and the unit that outscores Gandhi in the recent
papers.

anantamias.com

UPSC SYLLABUS

Other strands in the national movement; the revolutionaries, Bengal, the Punjab, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, the Madras Presidency, outside India; the Left, the Left within the Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, the Congress Socialist Party; the Communist Party of India, other left parties.

Why this unit matters more than candidates think

Across the four papers, the Rise of Gandhi unit produced 50 marks and this one produced 70. The revolutionaries and the left are examined more, not less, than the mainstream, and most scripts have it the other way round.

- Questions asked have covered the Congress Socialist Party in 2023, the trade union movement in 2024, Bhagat Singh and his comrades in 2025, and Subhas Chandra Bose and the INA in 2026, which is one from a different strand each year.
- Analytically the unifying question is the relationship between these strands and the Congress mainstream: rival, pressure group, or reservoir of methods later absorbed.
- For most of this period **Congress was a front rather than a party**., containing liberals, socialists, communists at times, Gandhians and Hindu and Muslim traditionalists, which is why internal strands matter as much as external ones.
- **Bipan Chandra's** framing, that Indian nationalism was a hegemonic movement absorbing rather than defeating its rivals, is the standard interpretive line and it is worth naming before you illustrate it.
- A **counter-position**, from the left's own historians and from Subaltern Studies, holds that the Congress leadership deliberately demobilised radical energy at moments when it might have become uncontrollable, in 1922, in 1934 and after 1942.
- One **method** carries into any answer: state what each strand contributed that the mainstream did not, then state why it did not displace the mainstream.

The revolutionaries: the later phase

The 2025 paper asked about Bhagat Singh and his comrades expanding the meaning of revolution beyond political upheaval. That is a question about ideas, not about actions.

- A second phase of revolutionary activity followed the disillusion after the withdrawal of **Non-Cooperation in February 1922**, which convinced a section of youth that constitutional and mass methods alike had failed.
- In 1924 the **Hindustan Republican Association** was founded by Sachindranath Sanyal, Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee and Ramprasad Bismil, and the **Kakori conspiracy of 1925** led to the execution of Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan, Roshan Singh and Rajendra Lahiri.
- It was reorganised in 1928 as the **Hindustan Socialist Republican Association**, and the insertion of the word socialist is the single most important fact in this section, since it marks the shift from nationalism to a social programme.
- **Bhagat Singh's** writings are what the 2025 question is about: *Why I am an Atheist* (1930), the HSRA manifesto, and the court statements set out a vision of revolution as the end of exploitation of man by man, not merely the departure of the British.

- Deliberately designed to injure nobody, the **Assembly bomb of April 1929**, and Bhagat Singh and B. K. Dutt courted arrest in order to use the trial as a platform, which is a conscious propaganda strategy rather than terrorism in the usual sense.
- A **hunger strike** in 1929 for political prisoner status, and the death of **Jatin Das** after sixty three days, generated nationwide sympathy that no bomb could have produced.
- **Chandrashekhar Azad**, killed at Allahabad in 1931, and the executions of **Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru on 23 March 1931** made the group a permanent part of nationalist memory.
- In **Bengal**, the **Chittagong Armoury Raid of 1930** under **Surya Sen**, with **Pritilata Waddedar** and **Kalpana Datta**, and the shooting of the Comilla magistrate by **Santi Ghose and Suniti Choudhury** in 1931 brought women into armed action.
- Outside India, the **Ghadar Party** from 1913 and the Berlin Committee, and later Bose's work in Germany and Japan, extended the tradition, and the **Kirti Kisan** movement carried Ghadar veterans into Punjabi peasant politics.

KEY TERMS

HSRA — Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, the 1928 renaming that committed the revolutionaries to a socialist as well as a national goal.

The left within the Congress

The 2023 paper asked whether the Congress Socialist Party intended to leave the Congress or to redirect it, and the answer is unambiguous and well documented.

- At Patna in 1934 the **Congress Socialist Party** was founded by **Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Deva, Minoo Masani, Achyut Patwardhan** and **Ram Manohar Lohia**, immediately after the withdrawal of Civil Disobedience.
- It was explicitly constituted as a **group inside the Congress**, not a rival party, and its stated aim was to give the national movement a socialist direction, which is precisely the 2023 quotation.
- Its programme included the transfer of power to producers, the abolition of zamindari without compensation, state ownership of key industries, the right to work and adult franchise.
- **Nehru** was never a member but was the left's most important patron, and his presidential addresses at **Lucknow in 1936** and **Faizpur in 1937** put socialism and the peasant question into Congress language.
- Its achievements were real: it pushed the **agrarian programme** into Congress policy, supported the Kisan Sabhas and the trade unions, and supplied the organisation for the **1942 underground** after the leadership was jailed.
- Its constraint was equally real: Gandhi and the Congress right under **Patel** and **Rajendra Prasad** controlled the organisational machinery, and the socialists never captured it.
- **Subhas Chandra Bose** represented the other left pole, and his election as Congress president at **Tripuri in 1939** against Gandhi's candidate Pattabhi Sitaramayya, followed by his forced resignation and the founding of the **Forward Bloc**, is the clearest case of the mainstream closing ranks against the left.
- Socialists finally left the Congress in **1948** to form the Socialist Party, and the delay of fourteen years is itself the evidence for the 2023 answer.

The Communist Party and the labour movement

The 2024 paper asked whether the trade union movement joined forces with nationalist politics to strengthen both, which requires the institutional history rather than a general claim.

- Founded at Tashkent in 1920, the **Communist Party of India** dates under **M. N. Roy** and from the Kanpur conference of 1925 within India, and it operated under near-continuous repression.
- Prosecution followed through the **Peshawar, Kanpur and Meerut conspiracy cases**, the last running from 1929 to 1933, were designed to decapitate the party, and the Meerut trial's length gave the accused an extended public platform.
- In **1920** the **All India Trade Union Congress** was founded with **Lala Lajpat Rai** as its first president and **Joseph Baptista** and later N. M. Joshi prominent, and its founding shows that nationalist and labour leadership overlapped from the start.
- That overlap is the core of the 2024 answer: nationalist leaders presided over AITUC, the Congress used strikes as political pressure, and unions gained legitimacy and legal protection from the association.
- A **strike wave in 1928**, including the Bombay textile strike led by the Girni Kamgar Union and the South Indian Railway and Tata Iron and Steel strikes, was the high point of independent labour militancy.
- Structural **tension** ran alongside it. Gandhi's **trusteeship** doctrine and the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association model favoured arbitration over class conflict, and the Congress feared that industrial militancy would alienate the Indian business support it needed.
- **AITUC split** in 1929 with the moderates forming the National Trades Union Federation, reflecting the same disagreement about whether labour should subordinate itself to the national movement.
- Party policy shifted repeatedly, since the **Communist line** moved, opposing the Congress in the sectarian period after 1928, supporting the united front from 1935, opposing Quit India as a people's war after Germany invaded the USSR in 1941, which cost the party heavily in nationalist credibility, and supporting the Tebhaga and Telangana struggles after the war.
- The balanced verdict: the alliance strengthened both in the 1920s and 1930s by giving nationalism a mass urban base and labour a political shield, and it constrained labour by subordinating economic demands to the national timetable.

Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army

Asked in 2026 on the INA awakening national consciousness in the armed forces and the masses. That question has a specific and verifiable answer in the events of 1945 and 1946.

- **Bose** resigned the ICS in 1921, rose through Congress and the Calcutta corporation, was twice Congress president in 1938 and 1939, and left after the Tripuri crisis to found the **Forward Bloc**.
- He escaped house arrest in January 1941, reached Germany, and moved by submarine to Southeast Asia in 1943 to take over the **Indian National Army**, first raised under Mohan Singh with Japanese encouragement and Rash Behari Bose's Indian Independence League.
- He proclaimed the **Provisional Government of Azad Hind** in Singapore in October 1943, and its recognition by nine governments gave the movement a claim to legitimacy in international law.

- The **Rani of Jhansi Regiment** under **Lakshmi Sahgal** was among the first women's combat units anywhere, and its existence is a strong point in any answer about mobilisation.
- The military campaign in **Imphal and Kohima in 1944** failed against terrain, supply and monsoon, and the INA's military significance was small.
- Its political significance was enormous and is the answer to the 2026 question. The **Red Fort trials from November 1945** of Shah Nawaz Khan, Prem Sahgal and Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, deliberately one Muslim, one Hindu and one Sikh, produced an unprecedented cross-community defence campaign.
- The Congress formed a defence committee including **Bhulabhai Desai, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Asaf Ali and Nehru**, and the trials generated demonstrations, strikes and student agitation across the country.
- The consequence in the **armed forces** is the crucial part: the **Royal Indian Navy mutiny of February 1946** in Bombay and Karachi, and unrest in the RIAF and among signals units, told the British that the loyalty of the Indian military could no longer be assumed.
- **Clement Attlee's** later remarks and the internal official assessments both indicate that the reliability of the Indian army weighed heavily in the decision to transfer power, so the INA's effect was indirect but decisive.
- The honest qualification: the INA collaborated with imperial Japan, its military record was poor, and Bose's authoritarian politics and willingness to work with fascist powers are a legitimate criticism that a top-band answer states rather than avoids.

Regional spread of the revolutionary tradition

The syllabus lists Bengal, Punjab, Maharashtra, the United Provinces, Madras and outside India, so it expects geographic range rather than a Bengal-only account.

- **Bengal** produced Anushilan and Jugantar, the Alipore case, the Chittagong raid and the largest number of participants, and the Bengali revolutionary tradition was the deepest and longest-lasting.
- **Punjab** produced the Ghadar movement and its returning veterans, the Kirti Kisan Party, the Babbar Akalis, and the Lahore-centred HSRA network around Bhagat Singh.
- **Maharashtra** began the tradition with the Chapekars in 1897 and Savarkar's Abhinav Bharat, and Savarkar's Nasik conspiracy of 1909 and subsequent transportation to the Andamans belong here.
- The **United Provinces** was the base of the HRA and HSRA, with Kakori, Ramprasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan and Chandrashekhar Azad.
- The **Madras Presidency** produced **V. O. Chidambaram Pillai** and the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company, **Subramania Siva**, the Tirunelveli disturbances of 1908, and **Vanchi Iyer's** assassination of Ashe in 1911.
- **Outside India**, the India House in London, the Berlin Committee, the Ghadar headquarters in San Francisco, and the wartime Hindu-German conspiracy formed a genuine international network.
- The **Andaman Cellular Jail** is the institution that connects all these regions, since revolutionaries from every province were transported there, and it became a site of shared political education.

Assessment: what the strands contributed

Close every answer in this unit with an assessment, because the questions are all evaluative rather than descriptive.

- The revolutionaries contributed **martyrdom and moral pressure** rather than military effect, and Bhagat Singh in particular contributed an explicitly socialist and secular definition of freedom that the mainstream had not offered.
- Socialists and communists contributed the **agrarian and labour programme**, and zamindari abolition, the right to organise and the language of economic justice entered Congress policy because the left pushed them there.
- The **INA** contributed the demonstration that the Indian army's loyalty was contingent, which mattered more to the timing of independence than any battle it fought.
- Fragmentation was the **cost** of these strands, and the failure of the left to unite, across CSP, CPI, Forward Bloc and the Royists, is the standard explanation for why radical politics did not capture the movement.
- The **Congress absorbed** what it could use, including the socialist rhetoric, the agrarian programme and the memory of the martyrs, while marginalising the organisations that produced them.
- After independence the consequence is visible in the Constitution's Directive Principles, in zamindari abolition and in planning, all of which carry the left's imprint even though the left never held power at the centre.

Last-mile revision

- HRA 1924, Kakori 1925, HSRA 1928; Assembly bomb April 1929; Jatin Das dies 1929; Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru executed 23 March 1931; Azad killed 1931.
- Chittagong Armoury Raid 1930 under Surya Sen, with Pritilata Waddadar and Kalpana Datta.
- CSP founded Patna 1934 by JP, Narendra Deva, Masani, Patwardhan and Lohia; inside the Congress; socialists leave only in 1948.
- Nehru's Lucknow 1936 and Faizpur 1937 addresses; Bose elected at Tripuri 1939, resigns, founds Forward Bloc.
- CPI Tashkent 1920 and Kanpur 1925; Meerut conspiracy case 1929-33; AITUC 1920 with Lajpat Rai; 1928 strike wave; AITUC split 1929.
- INA: Mohan Singh, Bose takes over 1943, Azad Hind proclaimed October 1943, Rani of Jhansi Regiment under Lakshmi Sahgal, Imphal and Kohima 1944, Red Fort trials November 1945, RIN mutiny February 1946.
- Regional: Bengal Anushilan and Jugantar, Punjab Ghadar and Kirti Kisan, Maharashtra Chapekars and Abhinav Bharat, UP Kakori, Madras VOC Pillai and Vanchi Iyer.

Common errors to avoid

- Saying the Congress Socialist Party was a breakaway. It was constituted inside the Congress in 1934 and the socialists left only in 1948.

- Calling Bhagat Singh a terrorist without engaging his writings. The 2025 question is specifically about how he redefined revolution.
- Overstating the INA's military achievement. Its effect was on the loyalty of the Indian army and on public opinion, not on the battlefield.
- Omitting the CPI's opposition to Quit India. It cost the party severely and it must be stated in any honest account.
- Treating labour and nationalism as simply allied. Gandhi's trusteeship, the fear of alienating business, and the 1929 AITUC split all show the tension.
- Writing the revolutionary story from Bengal alone when the syllabus names five regions and the diaspora.

Mains Practice

'Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army awakened an unprecedented sense of national consciousness among both the Indian armed forces and the masses.'

20 marks · 250 words · 2026

The trade union movement joined forces with the mainstream of nationalist politics to strengthen each other in their struggle against colonial rule. Comment.

20 marks · 250 words · 2024

The Congress Socialist Party agenda was not to cut off from the Congress, but 'intended to give the Congress and the national movement a socialist direction'. Analyse.

20 marks · 250 words · 2023

“Bhagat Singh and his comrades significantly expanded the meaning and scope of revolution, redefining it beyond mere political upheaval.”

10 marks · 150 words · 2025