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IN FREEDOM'S QUEST

A BIOGRAPHY OF
NETAJI SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE

ORIENT LONGMANS
BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS NEW DELHI
AUTHOR’S NOTE

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I gratefully acknowledge the encouragement and assistance given to me by S. A. Ayer, G. S. Kalyanpur and, not least, by my wife Leela.
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introductory</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Child Mystic</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rusticated from College</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Resigns from the I.C.S.</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Disciple of C. R. Das</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chief Civic Officer</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Detenu in Mandalay</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Youth Leader</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Complete Independence</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>A Stormy Year</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Uneasy Truce</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Into Exile</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Activities in Europe</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Plea For Synthesis</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Congress President</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Pyrrhic Victory</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Non-violent Liquidation</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
18 The Forward Bloc .......................... 167
19 Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death .............. 183
20 The Great Escape .......................... 191
21 This Is Subhas Chandra Bose Speaking ............. 200
22 Everything Is Only Jai Hind Here .................. 211
23 Waiting for the Leader ........................ 219
24 A New Voice in Asia .......................... 234
25 On To Delhi ............................... 250
26 Freedom — His Last Word ....................... 262
27 Failure — And Achievement ....................... 273
28 Was Bose A Fascist? .......................... 285
29 Bose And Gandhi ............................. 298
30 Bose And Nehru ............................. 309
31 Bose The Man ............................... 324
32 Netaji ..................................... 333
    Chronology ............................... 343
    Select Bibliography ......................... 347
    Index ..................................... 349
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY

MORE than a score of years have elapsed since Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was involved in a fatal air crash at Taihoku (Taiwan, capital of Formosa) in 1945. But the question is still asked whether he really perished in it. Numerous people believe that Bose is still alive, and biding his time, somewhere. Not even the verdict of a committee appointed by the Government of India in 1956 to inquire into the matter has been able to scotch this belief; indeed one of the three members of the committee—Bose’s own elder brother, Suresh Chandra Bose—refused to sign its report, which confirmed Bose’s death, although he had subscribed to its preliminary findings.

There are persons who solemnly profess to have heard Bose’s voice on the radio, to have seen him and even talked with him. According to one of them, Bose was first held a prisoner in Russia; he then became a Chinese General; subsequently a Mongolian Trade Union Leader; and finally turned a Yogi! M. L. Thevar, then Deputy Chairman of the Forward Bloc, claimed in 1956 that he was in contact with Bose during the previous seven years. Bose, he said, was in Sinkiang leading the ‘Asian Liberation Army’ to free India from Anglo-American influence. Thevar appeared before the inquiry committee but refused to share his secrets with it.

An M.P. said in Parliament three years ago that “a person who resembled Bose 100 per cent” was present in Delhi at the time of Nehru’s funeral, and offered to lay his photograph on the table of the House.

There are still others who identify Bose with this swami or that sadhu, the most commonly held belief being that Swami Sharda Nandji of Shoulmari Ashram, on the West Bengal-Assam border, is none other than Bose. Uttam Chand Malhotra, who
sheltered Bose for several weeks in Kabul during his sensational escape to Germany in 1941, was convinced of this identity when he met Sharda Nandji in 1962. He bases his conviction on the bodily and facial similarity between the two, and on certain common mannerisms. A conference held in Calcutta in 1962 under the auspices of the Subhaswadi Janata Parishad, passed a resolution confirming the identity of Sharda Nandji with Bose. In fairness to the swami, it needs to be recorded that he has consistently repudiated this allegation. His denial, however, loses much of its force owing to the air of mystery with which he habitually surrounds himself in his ashram.

A former manager of the Shoulmari Ashram stood for election to Parliament from the Rae Bareli constituency in the last General Elections, his main plank being the Bose issue—that he was alive! His opponent was no less a person than Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

Prime Minister Nehru had more than once expressed his belief that Bose was dead, and Nehru’s successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, later scouted his alleged identity with the Shoulmari Swami. Despite their authoritative opinions, 350 members of Parliament belonging to all political parties submitted a memorandum to President Zakir Husain at the end of 1967, requesting a fresh inquiry into the ‘mystery’ about the death of Subhas Chandra Bose. For obvious reasons their demand was turned down by the President, but it shows how a large and responsible section of the people still refuses to believe the report of Bose’s death in the plane crash on August 18, 1945.

All this may be only a case of the wish being father to the thought, but such continued faith in Bose’s survival is most touching indeed. History records several instances of the masquerade of doubles and impersonators, but this is probably the first case where thousands of people pin their faith on the existence of a person who has not been heard of since 1945. Not a few of them cherish a fond hope that Bose may yet return to lead them. If this is not immortality, what is?

This biography is based on the commonsense conclusion that Bose is no more. So illustrious a person simply cannot disappear into the blue, and remain incognito for nearly a quarter of a century. Whatever good reasons there might have been for creat-
ing an elaborate hoax of his death then, they became invalid the moment the British departed from India in August 1947—exactly two years after Bose flew from Singapore on "an adventure in the unknown". On the other hand, there are reasons galore why he should return to the people he loved so well. If nothing else, the infirmities of age—he is past the Biblical span of life of three score years and ten, if alive—should induce him to be back among his kith and kin. At the very least, he should have communicated with his wife and daughter.

The inference is, therefore, inescapable, that Bose perished in the air crash, even if no conclusive proof of this is available. Only one fanciful possibility remains in view of the pronounced mystic strain in Bose's character—that he has finally turned his back on the world, that he has become a sanyasi (as he wanted to be in his young days), and that he may be 'somewhere in the Himalayas', like the legendary yogis who are said to dwell on its snow-clad heights, in defiance of the laws of nature.

Even in that case, his disappearance amounts to "civil death". For all practical purposes, therefore, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is no more, and it would be neither premature nor improper to attempt an assessment of his life and of the impulses and ideals that motivated his ceaseless quest for freedom.
CHAPTER 2

CHILD MYSTIC

EIGHTEEN-NINETY-SEVEN, the year in which Subhas Chandra Bose was born, was also the year of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria’s reign. The latter event marked the zenith of the British Empire; the former presaged its nadir. The joy of the Jubilee was scarcely shared by Queen’s Indian subjects.

“The most striking consequence of the utter violation of Her Majesty’s most sacred pledges and of Acts and Resolutions of Parliament,” Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man of India wrote to Queen Victoria, “are the extreme impoverishment of the people of British India and the infliction upon them of all the scourges of the world war, pestilence and famine.”¹ He might have added to these scourges the aftermath of plague which had struck India in 1897. The panicky, and at times brutal, measures taken by the Government to stamp it out provoked the murder of two British officers while they were returning from a jubilee celebration at the Government House, Poona. These terrorist acts indirectly led to the conviction and imprisonment of Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak on a charge of sedition—it being the first such conviction in India.

It was also in 1897 that Swami Vivekananda, whose teachings were later to exert great influence on young Subhas, returned to India after his triumph at the Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, and subsequent long sojourn in America and Europe. It was a significant occasion since no Indian before Vivekananda had been accepted on equal terms by Europeans and Americans.² The year was also notable for the return of

² See Christopher Isherwood: Ramkrishna and His Disciples, p. 324.
Gandhi to South Africa, where he was assaulted by a white mob as soon as he landed in Durban. Characteristically, Gandhi refused to prosecute his assailants.

All these events, however, had little impact on the sleepy little town of Cuttack, in which Subhas Chandra Bose was born in the first hour of noon on Saturday, January 23, 1897, the sixth son and ninth child of Janaki Nath and Prabhavati Bose. Cuttack is now a leading town in the State of Orissa on the eastern seaboard of India. Until 1905 Orissa with Bihar, formed part of the Presidency of Bengal. Cuttack had no rail links then, and a visit to it entailed an arduous journey by bullock cart or boat. However, it had a historic record since the days of the early Hindu kings of Kalinga (as Orissa was known in antiquity). It formed the headquarters of the British administration and, as such, of the numerous petty princes and jagirdars who were then found in Orissa, as elsewhere. Cuttack thus provided the virtues of both city and countryside, and afforded a congenial environment for a growing boy.

The Bones are Kayastha by caste, and Subhas's family tree could be traced back for some 27 generations to Dasarath Bose, the founder of the Dakshin-Rarhi (South Bengal) clan of the Bones at Mahinagar, 14 miles to the South of Calcutta. Among Bose's more famous ancestors were Mahipati, Finance and War Minister to the King of Bengal, and Gopi Nath, Finance Minister and Naval Commander to a later king. Although the Bose family was Shakta by tradition, Subhas's grand-father Hara Nath was a Vaishnava by choice. He stopped the sacrifice of goats at the annual Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of Bengalis. That reform has been honoured by the family to the present day. Subhas's father Janaki Nath was educated in Calcutta and Cuttack. Joining the Bar at the latter place, he soon made his mark by dint of his legal acumen. He had climbed to the top rung of his profession by the time Subhas was born. He was elected the first non-official chairman of the Cuttack municipality in 1901 and appointed Government Pleader and Public Prosecutor in 1905. Janaki Nath was nominated to the Bengal

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1 It is amusing to recall that during his stay in India Gandhi had become a member of the Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee Celebration Committee at Rajkot.
Legislative Council in 1912 for his thorough knowledge of the Orissa tenancy laws. In the same year he was made a Rai Bahadur in recognition of his services to the Government. He was, however, a man of sturdy independence and owing to his differences with the District Magistrate, he resigned his official post in 1917.

Janaki Nath was a man of unbounded charity and there was not a poor relative who did not receive a regular remittance from him. There was no needy student in Cuttack who went away empty-handed from his house. For nearly a quarter of a century the poor people of Kodalia, his ancestral village, depended on his help. During the Pujas he would invariably visit the village and stay there for the celebrations. When he dispensed alms he made young Subhas sit near him and put the gifts in his hands for distribution. Subhas thus imbibed from his father sympathy for the poor and a genuine disposition towards charity, at a very young age.

Subhas's mother, Prabhavati, belonged to the family of the Dutts of the Hathkola, a northern part of Calcutta. In the early days of British rule the Dutts attained eminence by virtue of their wealth and their ability to adapt themselves to the changing political conditions. Prabhavati's father and grandfather had a reputation for wise selection of their sons-in-law, and they thus made alliances with leading aristocratic families of Bengal.

Like other young men of the time Janaki Nath had come under the influence of Keshav Chandra Sen and, to some extent, of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. The spiritual fervour of the latter's orations had cast a spell on the young generation of the day and Janaki Nath once thought of a formal conversion to Brahmoism. Keshav Chandra Sen’s portraits later adorned his house in Cuttack and he enjoyed cordial relations with the local Brahmo Samaj. For many years he was also the President of the local Theosophical Lodge. He was not interested in politics, although he was a regular visitor to the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress. Like his mentors he believed that the advent of the British in India was a divine dispensation. Much later in life, doubtless influenced by his sons, he began to take active interest in the constructive work of the Congress and in
1930 renounced the title of Rai Bahadur, as a protest against the repressive policy of the British Government.

Janaki Nath and Prabhavati raised a large family of 14 children—eight sons and six daughters. They kept an open house, with relatives and friends always dropping in for short or long visits. The Bose household consisted of numerous dependants and servants, not to mention a liberal sprinkling of domestic pets. It was a well-to-do middle-class family. The environment in which Subhas grew up was conducive to a cosmopolitan outlook. Though belonging to Bengal, his family had settled down among Oriyas. The Bose house was situated in a predominantly Muslim locality. Subhas's earliest play-mates were Muslim, and, later in school, English and Anglo-Indian children.

Janaki Nath had a cloak of reserve around him and had little time to spare for his children due to professional and public activities. Prabhavati's was the last word in family affairs. Gifted with a strong will and sound common sense, she dominated the domestic scene. The children were awed by their parents and no wonder that Subhas, with his sensitive and emotional temperament, felt like "a thoroughly insignificant being". He yearned for more intimate contact with his parents, for the attention which is so essential in childhood. So far as she could, Sarada, his nurse-cum-governess, who called her ward "Raja", made good the deficiency. Subhas was happy in her company and affectionately remembered her even after he had grown up. He often felt lost among his numerous relatives and became an introvert. On the other hand, the atmosphere of his home helped to broaden his mind and to develop a sociable outlook. He was saved from egoism and dogmatism, and, early in life, he learnt that "industry and good behaviour are the sole passports to success".

At the age of five Subhas joined a missionary school in Cuttack run by the Baptist Mission, which was meant primarily for European and Anglo-Indian children. Mission schools were popular then, as they are even now, among upper middle class families. The Protestant European School was patronised by all the Bose children. Here Subhas spent seven formative years of his life (1902-1908). Though some aspects of mission schools did
irk and warp young Indian minds, on the whole Subhas was not unhappy in this school. It had a reputation for turning out well-behaved boys and girls and the Bose children tried to live up to it. The headmaster—a Englishman—was a stickler for discipline and the school was run on English lines so far as Indian conditions allowed. The curriculum was so framed as to make its pupils as English in their mental make-up as possible. Great store was laid by the learning of the Bible.

Students were taught more about the geography and history of Great Britain than of India. Racial discrimination was openly practised. Anglo-Indian students could join the volunteer corps, but not the Indians. The latter were also debarred from scholarship examinations although they usually came at the top in the annual tests. Though there was no open attempt to influence the social and religious ideas of Indian boys, they felt subtly divorced from their native milieu. Naturally many of them gravitated towards Indian schools, as did Subhas in January 1909. When the time came to say good-bye to his teachers and school-mates he did it without regret. In truth, he was glad to leave a school where he felt maladjusted, and where his feeling of insignificance grew more acute.

Subhas found the Ravenshaw Collegiate School, which he next joined in the fourth class, much more congenial. His better command of English put him high in the estimation of his classmates. His knowledge of his own mother-tongue, however, was extremely poor. He knew nothing of grammar and precious little of spelling, and felt "humbled to the dust" when his teacher read out his composition to the class with running comments, punctuated by laughter. The social standing of his father counted a lot with his new teachers. Unlike his previous school, the Ravenshaw Collegiate School did not lay much stress on sport, and this suited Subhas perfectly. He cultivated a love for gardening, and devoted his evenings to it. Later in life, however, he keenly felt that he should not have neglected sports in his young days.

His headmaster, Beni Madhav Das, made a tremendous impression on Subhas. There was an unmistakable appeal in his personality, and he instilled in his young disciple an awareness of moral values and social responsibilities. Subhas felt an agonis-
ing wrench when Beni Madhav Das was suddenly transferred from the school. He thereafter corresponded with him regularly, and his love and respect for him and his family continued in later life. Visitors to the Calcutta Congress in 1928 were astonished to see Bose, in his uniform of the G.O.C. of the Volunteer Corps, running towards the gate to touch the feet of his guru's wife, who happened to be standing there.

It was at the Ravenshaw Collegiate School that Subhas entered one of the difficult periods of his spiritual life, which was to last five or six years. "It was a period of acute mental conflict causing untold suffering and agony, which could not be shared by any friends, and was not visible to any outsider", he wrote in his autobiography. "The mental conflict was a two-fold one. Firstly, there was the natural attraction of a worldly life and of worldly pursuits in general, against which my higher self was beginning to revolt. Secondly, there was the growth of self-consciousness, quite natural at this age, but which I considered unnatural and immoral and which I was struggling to suppress or transcend." Subhas became acutely conscious of the sex instinct, as was natural at his age. He made unceasing efforts to suppress or sublimate it, since, in his view, conquest of sex was essential to spiritual progress, and without spiritual uplift human life had little or no value. He began to visualize the future in terms of a celibate life.

It was fortunate that at this stage Subhas stumbled on the works of Swami Vivekananda at a friend's house. Here was something he was subconsciously yearning for. For days, weeks and months he pored over the works of Vivekananda. They proved of the greatest help in his mental crisis, and provided him with an ideal to which he could devote his whole being. Vivekananda gave a new interpretation to India's ancient scriptures. *Atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha*—for one's own salvation as well as the welfare of humanity—was the essence of his teachings.

"I was barely fifteen when Vivekananda entered my life," wrote Subhas. "Then there followed a revolution within and everything was turned upside down. It was, of course, a long time before I could appreciate the full significance of his teach-

1 *An Indian Pilgrim*, pp. 31-2.
ings, or the greatness of his personality, but certain impressions were stamped indelibly on my mind from the outset. . . . Many of the questions which vaguely stirred my mind found in him a satisfactory solution.”¹

From Vivekananda to Ramkrishna, his master, was a logical step, and Subhas soon gathered round him a group of friends who were interested in the teaching of these two saints. At school or outside, whenever they had a chance, they would talk of nothing else but Ramkrishna and Vivekananda. Subhas’s eccentric behaviour did not fail to attract his parent’s attention. They questioned, warned and rebuked him. But all to no avail. He was rapidly changing, and was no longer the ‘goody-goody’ boy afraid of displeasing his parents. He had a new ideal before him which had inflamed his soul: to effect his own salvation and to serve humanity by abandoning all worldly desires, and breaking away from all undue restraints. He no longer recited Sanskrit verses inculcating obedience to parents; on the contrary, he took to verses which preached defiance.

“I doubt if I have passed through a more trying period in my life than now. Ramkrishna’s example of renunciation and purity entailed a battle which raged with all the forces of the lower self. And Vivekananda’s ideal brought me into conflict with the existing family and social order. I was weak, the fight was a long-drawn one in which success was not easy to obtain, hence tension and unhappiness with occasional fits of depression.”²

Subhash soon took, somewhat surreptitiously, to yogic exercises. Concentration was sought in different ways, including gazing at the sun. Self-mortification was also practised.

The craving for higher values and spiritual uplift was evident in the letters he wrote to his mother in 1912-13. He had scarcely entered his teens then but his mystic traits were all too clear.

Subhas wrote to his mother: “I am most anxious to know what you would like your son to be. Merciful God has given us this life, a sound body, intelligence and strength, which are all so precious, but why? He has given us so much, of course,

¹ ibid., pp. 33-4
² ibid., p. 35
for His worship and His work, but Mother, do we do His work?"1

This exalted note was struck again and again. "Without realization and divine revelation, life is in vain. Worship, meditation, prayer, contemplation etc. that man engages in have only one aim—realization of the divine. If this purpose is not fulfilled, all this is in vain. One who has tasted this heavenly bliss once will never turn to the sinful material world."2

Subhas was not unmindful of the duty to one's motherland. In another letter to his mother he wrote: "India is God's beloved land. He has been born in this great land in every age in the form of the Saviour for the enlightenment of the people, to rid this earth of sin and to establish righteousness in every Indian heart. He has come into being in many centuries in human form, but not so many times in any other country. That is why I say India, our motherland, is God's beloved land."3

Despite his earnest pursuit, Subhas gradually became dissatisfied with his spiritual progress, and began to feel the need of a guru. It is the accepted belief in India that a guru is essential to guide one on the path to salvation. Accordingly Subhas's group began to interest itself in the numerous sadhus who came to Cuttack. One of them was a ninety-year-old sanyasi, the head of an ashram of all-India repute, who gave the young seekers a printed copy of his teachings. Subhas and his colleagues put them into practice to the best of their ability, but failed to derive any solace. Soon, Subhas returned to Ramkrishna and Vivekananda. "No realization without renunciation"—he reminded himself. He also took to heart Vivekananda's maxim that social service is an essential part of spiritual development.

Apart from giving aims to beggars, fakirs and sadhus, Subhas and his group began to visit nearby villages to render such social service as they could. Their experience was sometimes disconcerting. Far from welcoming the city boys, the villagers avoided them. The boys were shocked to find that they were regarded not only as strangers but as undesirable characters or enemies. It did not take them long to find out that well-dressed

1 ibid., p. 120
2 ibid., p. 129
3 ibid., p. 122
men had gone to the villages earlier only as tax-collectors, or in some such capacity, and had created a gulf between themselves and the rural people.

As the spiritual urge grew in intensity, Subhas took less and less interest in his studies. He appeared wayward, eccentric and obstinate to his teachers as much as to his parents, whose instructions he sometimes defied: had not Vivekananda taught that revolt was necessary for self-fulfilment? Curiously Subhas then took little interest in politics. This was partly due to his natural proclivity which pointed in a different direction, partly to the fact that Orissa was a political backwater, and partly also to lack of example in his family. In 1912, however, he came into contact with a students' group in Calcutta which was devoted to the twin ideal of spiritual uplift and national regeneration. This happened at a psychologically opportune moment and once an interest in politics was aroused, it dominated Subhas's life.

Subhas sat for the matriculation examination in March 1913 and came second in the university. His parents were delighted. They decided to send him to Calcutta for higher education in the belief that the atmosphere there would help to round off his eccentricity and turn him towards activities suitable to his age. They were soon to be disillusioned.
CHAPTER 3

RUSTICATED FROM COLLEGE

ALTHOUGH Subhas had barely completed his sixteenth year when he arrived in the eastern metropolis, his mind had become precociously mature. The mental conflict in which he was caught in his later years in school was gradually being resolved. Standing on the threshold of his college career, he knew that life had a meaning and a purpose. "I had by then made certain definite decisions for myself. I was not going to follow the beaten track, come what may. I was going to lead a life conducive to my spiritual welfare and the uplift of humanity. I was going to make a profound study of philosophy so that I could solve the fundamental problems of life. In practical life I was going to emulate Ramkrishna and Vivekananda as far as possible, and, in any case, I was not going in for a worldly career."

It was this high-souled boy who entered the portals of the Presidency College, Calcutta, in 1918. It was then regarded as the premier college of the Calcutta University with eminent professors like Sir J. C. Bose and P. C. Ray on its staff. Although a government institution, its students were anything but loyalist. This was because, as a rule, the more promising students alone were admitted to the college regardless of their family background. In the eyes of the police, however, the Presidency College students had acquired a bad name. The main hostel of the college, known as the Eden Hindu Hostel, was considered a rendezvous of revolutionaries and was frequently subjected to police searches. The college fraternity was divided into several groups—from loyal sons of Rajas and zamindars to budding revolutionaries. Subhas adhered to the group with which he had come in contact earlier in Cuttack. It was called the "Neo-

1 ibid., p. 45
Vivekananda Group", and its main object was to bring about a synthesis between religion and nationalism, not merely in the theoretical sphere but in practical life as well. The emphasis on nationalism was inevitable in the political atmosphere of the Calcutta of those days.

The activities of the group were conducted in three directions. To quench the thirst for new ideas books on philosophy, history and nationalism were studied, and the knowledge gained from them was passed on to others. The group was also active in recruiting members from other colleges in Calcutta and elsewhere, with the result that before long it had established wide contacts. The group also kept in touch with prominent personalities in various spheres. Some of its members visited holy cities such as Banaras and Hardwar in the hope of gaining spiritual light from the sadhus who congregated there.

The group generally spent its weekends away from home—often without permission—and it sometimes held camps at different places, where its members lived as monks wearing ochre robes. Politically the group was not popular since it was against secret conspiracy and terroristic activity which had then a peculiar fascination for the youth of Bengal. Aurobindo Ghose was their idol despite his voluntary exile in Pondicherry. When Subhas came to Calcutta in 1918, Aurobindo had already become a legendary figure about whom people talked with enthusiasm. Subhas was greatly attracted by his writings in the *Arya*, the monthly journal which Aurobindo was then editing. His occasional letters to a few friends in Bengal were passed from hand to hand, especially in circles interested in religion-cum-politics. Aurobindo's writings supplemented the teachings of Ramkrishna and Vivekananda and helped to work out a reconciliation between spirit and matter, God and creation and the various methods of attaining the truth—a synthesis of yoga as he called it.

Gradually Subhas began to shed his introvert tendencies and to take a more active part in social service. He joined a society which collected money and food-grains every Sunday, by begging from door to door. The collections consisted mainly of rice and each volunteer had to bring in a certain quantity at the end of his round. The first day Subhas went out with a bag in
hand to collect rice he was overcome by a strong sense of shame. But he persisted in his mission, resolutely jogging along with a bag slung across his shoulders, without looking to the right or to the left whenever any acquaintance chanced to cross his path.

During a vacation in Cuttack, Subhas joined a party of friends which was on a nursing mission in a cholera-stricken locality. What the party lacked in medical knowledge or equipment was more than made up by its spirit of service and enthusiasm. The boys hardly took any precautions against infection and devoted themselves to their task with more courage than discretion. No wonder then that when his family came to know the purpose of Subhas's mission, it sent a servant post-haste to fetch him.

On his return to Calcutta, Subhas was again seized by the craze of sadhu-worship and one day he quietly left his home with a friend, on a pilgrimage, without informing his parents. The boys visited well-known centres of pilgrimage such as Rishikesh, Hardwar, Banaras, Mathura and Gaya, taking in their stride historical places also. During the tour, which lasted nearly two months, Subhas and his friend gained valuable experiences, which, apart from opening their eyes to realities, helped to wean them from their craze for ascetics and anchorites. They discovered that the so-called holy men indulged in intoxicants, observed caste taboos and distinctions and that their search for the Absolute was not without taints of selfishness and greed. Although the tour as such proved an exciting experience, the guru they had set out to find remained as elusive as ever.

Meanwhile the Bose family had become extremely anxious over the disappearance of Subhas and they tried frantically to find him. Telegrams were sent to friends and relatives everywhere and inquiries set afoot all over the country. His parents had almost given up hope of seeing him again, when one day Subhas turned up unexpectedly, somewhat crestfallen but scarcely repentant. He wrote to a friend about the return of the prodigal: “I got off the street-car, braced myself up and entered my home. I met Saytenmama and another acquaintance in the front room. They were surprised. Mother was informed. Halfway up I met her. I made pranams to her — she could not help weeping on seeing me. Later, she only said, ‘it seems you have come into this world to kill me. I would not have waited so long
before drowning myself in the Ganges; only for the sake of my
daughters I have not done it.' I smiled within myself. Then I
met father. After I had made my pranams he led me to his room.
On the way he broke down, and in the room he wept for quite
some time holding on to me... Then he lay down and I
massaged his feet—it appeared as if he was feeling some heavenly
pleasure. Thereafter both of them went on enquiring at length
where I had been. I told them everything frankly. They only
asked me why I had not written at all."

Father and son had long discussions about sadhus, sanyasis
and the various ways of realising God. On the whole he
found Janaki Nath reasonable: "When I go away next time,"
Subhas concluded his letter, "he will probably give up the idea
and the effort to get me back... (But) mother is a fanatic and
says that next time I go she will also leave with me and not
return home again."

Two days later Subhas had repented enough to write to the
same friend: "I have become so callous. I really do not know
why I have turned so stony-hearted. I do not feel at all for my
parents—they wept and I could not help smiling." His sadhu-
intoxication, however, was cut short by an attack of typhoid—
the penalty for pilgrimage and guru-hunting. Not even the soul,
he discovered, could make the body defy the laws of nature with
impunity. And as he lay in bed disillusioned about yogis and
ascetics, he began to re-examine his ideas and to re-assess the
accepted values. His thoughts ranged from self-realisation to
political emancipation. Freedom meant to him complete in-
dependence from foreign control and tutelage. The First World
War which had just broken out showed that a nation that did
not possess military strength could not hope to preserve its
independence.

Two years of college life quickly ended, and Subhas passed
the Intermediate examination in the first division although he
was placed rather low down the list. He had a momentary feel-
ing of remorse and resolved to score better at the degree exa-
mination. For his B.A. he took the honours course in philo-
sophy. For the first time in his college career he took genuine
interest in his studies. Western philosophy, he found, regarded

1 ibid., p. 139
everything with a critical eye and took nothing on trust. It taught one to argue logically and to detect fallacies. It emancipated the mind from preconceived notions. Subhas's first reaction to this was to question the truth of the *Vedanta* on which he had taken his stand so long. He began to write essays on materialism purely as an intellectual exercise. He soon came into conflict with the atmosphere of his group. It struck him that it was somewhat dogmatic in its views and took certain things for granted.

While Subhas was thus settling in the scholastic groove for the first time in his career, what is known as “the Oaten incident” rocked the Presidency College, and had a far-reaching effect on his life.

When E.F. Oaten first came to India to join the Presidency College as a professor of history, he took keen interest in his students and generally in things Indian. But like other Englishmen of his days, he soon developed a superior air and adopted a haughty attitude not only towards his students but also towards his Indian colleagues. He was critical of their national aspirations. Bickerings and unpleasant incidents naturally followed. One day, while some students were walking along the corridor adjoining the room where Oaten was lecturing, he suddenly rushed out and forcibly pushed them away. As the elected representative of his class, Subhas took up the matter with the Principal and suggested, among other things, that Prof. Oaten should apologise to the students whom he had insulted. The Principal’s reply was not satisfactory and a general strike was declared by the students. It was an unprecedented occurrence in those days and created excitement throughout the city. On the second day of the strike, sufficient pressure was brought to bear on Oaten to make him settle the dispute amicably with the students. As a disciplinary measure, however, the Principal imposed a fine on the students—an imposition which rankled in their minds.

About a month later, the students were further provoked when another incident occurred in which Oaten was again involved. For no apparent reason he manhandled a student of the first-year class. The students felt that constitutional measures would only invite another disciplinary fine. Some of them
decided to take the law in their own hands and gave a sound thrashing to the bully of a professor. Subhas had full sympathy for this action and was, in fact, an eye-witness to it, although he did not take any actual part in the beating.

This incident naturally created commotion in Bengal. The Government summarily closed the Presidency College and appointed a commission of inquiry. The protest of the Principal who felt that the Government’s order was issued over his head, only led to his suspension. But before that he sent for all those students, including Subhas, who were in his black-list. “To me,” he said — or rather snarled — in unforgettable words: “‘Bose, you are the most troublesome man in the college. I suspend you.’ I said, ‘Thank you,’ and went home.”

Needless to add, the order was confirmed by the governing body of the college. Subhas appealed to the Calcutta University for permission to join some other college, but it was refused. He was thus in effect rusticated from the university as well.

Subhas appeared before a commission of inquiry presided over by Sir Asutosh Mukherji, former Vice-Chancellor of the University and a Judge of the Calcutta High Court. He was asked whether the assault was justified. His reply was that though it was not, the students had acted in the face of grave provocation. He then detailed the various sins of omission and commission of Oaten and other English professors in the Presidency College. Attack, he probably thought, was the best form of defence, but it sealed his fate.

Meanwhile, the political atmosphere in Calcutta had changed from bad to worse. Wholesale arrests were made and among the victims were some rusticated students of the Presidency College. Subhas’s continued stay in the city was considered risky by his family and he was whisked away to the relative safety of Cuttack.

“Lying on the bunk in the train at night,” wrote Subhas Bose in his autobiography, “I reviewed the events of the last few months. My educational career was at an end and my future was dark and uncertain. But I was not sorry — there was not a trace of regret in my mind for what I had done. I had, rather, a feeling of supreme satisfaction, of joy that I had done

1 ibid., p. 69
the right thing, that I had stood up for our honour and self-respect and had sacrificed myself for a noble cause. After all, what is life without renunciation, I told myself. And I went to sleep.

"Little did I then realise the inner significance of the tragic events of 1916. My Principal had expelled me but he had made my future career. I had established a precedent for myself from which I could not easily depart in future. I had stood up with courage and composure in a crisis and fulfilled my duty. I had developed self-confidence as well as initiative, which was to stand me in good stead in future. I had a foretaste of leadership — though in a very restricted sphere — and of the martyrdom that it involves. In short, I had acquired character and could face the future with equanimity."¹

The boy who returned to Cuttack in March 1916 was not the same one who had left it three years earlier. Although he was rusticated from college, he was regarded with sympathy and respect by fellow-students and also the public at large. His family did not in any way blame him, and strangely enough his father did not question him at all on the happenings in the college or even refer to his part therein. Subhas’s relations with his group in Calcutta, however, had become somewhat strained because he had not sought its advice and had acted on his own. Apparently it did not entirely approve of what he had done. Subhas did not care much for this dis-approbation, since he had now gained a new confidence and moral certainty. His shyness and diffidence had disappeared and he had developed a new social awareness.

What was Subhas to do now? The expulsion was for an indefinite period and there was no knowing when the university would relent and allow him to resume his studies. His father did not want to send him abroad for further studies until the blot on his escutcheon was removed. Characteristically, Subhas plunged himself forthwith into social work. In those days epidemics like cholera and small-pox were of frequent occurrence in Cuttack, so he joined a band of students who visited different parts of the town to help in nursing patients. They also volunteered for duty at the cholera ward

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 70-71
of the local civil hospital, which was without trained nurses. The boys took great interest in their work but were grossly negligent in observing elementary precautions. They did not care even to disinfect their own clothes. "About cholera patients," wrote Subhas, "I never had a feeling of repulsion even when I had to handle soiled clothes, but I could not say the same of small-pox in an advanced state of suppuration. It required all my strength to force me to attend such a patient. However, as a schooling, this sort of voluntary work had its value and I did not shirk it."

Nursing led to allied fields of service. What about those poor people who died in spite of medical attention? The boys were equal to the challenge and started carrying unclaimed bodies to the cremation ground and performing the funeral rites themselves.

Although Subhas thus occupied himself with social activities, he never lost sight of his spiritual quest. His introspective nature always inclined him towards self-analysis. The moment he put his finger on something ignoble or unworthy in himself, he half conquered it. Self-analysis also enabled him to rid himself of disturbing dreams, arising from hidden anxieties and subconscious fears. He was, however, not so successful in banishing sexual fantasies.

A year had passed since his arrival in Cuttack, and it was time to return to Calcutta to take up the issue of resuming his educational career with the university authorities. He was given to understand that they would rescind the rustication order provided he secured admission to some other college. Subhas requested Dr. Urquhart, Principal of the Scottish Church College, for admission. The Principal was favourably impressed and agreed to admit him provided he secured the head of the Presidency College, from which he was rusticated, raised no objection. The former Principal having retired in the meantime, that college's new head was approached, first by his elder brother and then by Subhas himself, and a "No Objection" certificate secured from him.

Subhas joined the third year class of the Scottish Church College in July 1917 and took to his studies with a new zeal.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\text{ ibid., p. 74}\]
His former class-mates had by then graduated. With a tactful and considerate principal like Dr. Urquhart, there was no fear of any friction between the students and the authorities and Subhas soon settled down in his academic life. About this time a University Training Corps was attached to the Indian Territorial Army and Subhas promptly enlisted in it. He was particularly happy to do so since his earlier attempt to join the Territorial Army had proved unsuccessful. Subhas took to military training with the greatest relish. He thoroughly enjoyed the camp life of four months. He was greatly pleased when, in a shooting competition, Indian boys beat their British instructor.

"What a change it was," Subhas mused later, "from sitting at the feet of anchorites to obtain knowledge of God, to standing with a rifle on my shoulder taking orders from a British Army Officer."\(^1\)

"Not only was there no sign of maladaptation to my new environment but I found a positive pleasure in it. This training gave me something which I needed or which I lacked. The feeling of strength and of self-confidence grew still further. As soldiers we had certain rights which as Indians we did not possess. To us, as Indians, Fort William in Calcutta was out of bounds, but as soldiers we had right of entry there, and, as a matter of fact, the first day we marched into Fort William to bring our rifles, we experienced a queer feeling of satisfaction as if we were taking possession of something to which we had an inherent right, but of which we had been unjustly deprived. The route marches in the city and elsewhere we enjoyed, probably because it gave us a sense of importance. We could snap our fingers at the police and other agents of the Government by whom we were in the habit of being harassed or terrorised."\(^2\)

Despite his earlier resolve, the third year in college was thus given to soldiering and its thrills. But in the fourth and final year Subhas devoted himself to his studies with zeal. He passed his B.A. examination in 1919 with first class honours in philosophy, and was placed second in order of merit, just as he had done in the matriculation.

\(^1\) *ibid.*, p. 80

\(^2\) *ibid.*, p. 82
So at the age of 22 Subhas Bose was a full-fledged graduate, serious and self-assured beyond his years. He was nationalistic to the core. The racial arrogance of the British galled him as much as the political subjection of the country. But he had kept himself aloof from the secret societies and terroristic activities with which Bengal was seething then. His natural bent was religious and philosophical. His friends jokingly called him a sanyasi and he felt proud of the appellation. He had proved himself a natural leader, although his dignified bearing and puritanical traits created a certain gulf between him and his fellow-students. However, he was not at all unsociable and gave of himself freely to his close friends. He was handsome, well-built, and in the words of one of his closest friends, Dilip Kumar Roy, “never more bewitching than when in the grip of laughter”. Again, “He was a man with a super-abundant energy — a whole-hogger as well as go-getter by nature. He would plump for whatever captivated him and pay for what he wanted, with all his native aristocratic generosity.”

Although fired with patriotism and idealism Subhas seemed to have had no fixed goal before him when he graduated. No doubt he abhorred service with the British Government, but beyond that he had only vague ideas about what he would do in life. So, like other graduates, he simply enrolled himself in the M.A. class with experimental psychology as his special subject. Hardly had he settled down as a post-graduate student, when one evening to his surprise, his father, who was then in Calcutta, sent for him and asked whether he would like to go to England to study for the Indian Civil Service. To get into this service was then the highest ambition of most bright Indian students. Subhas was given twenty-four hours to make up his mind and if he agreed, he was to sail as soon as possible.

He wrote to his friend, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, on 26-8-1919:
“I am facing a most serious problem. Yesterday the family made an offer to send me to England. I have to sail immediately. There is no chance of getting into any good university in England just at present. It is their wish that I should study for a few months and appear at the Civil Service examination. It is my considered view that there is no hope of my passing the

1 D. K. Roy, The Subhas I knew, pp. 24-25
Civil Service examination. The rest are of the view that in case I fail in the examination, I might get into London or Cambridge University in October next.

"My primary desire is to obtain a university degree in England; otherwise I cannot make headway in the educational line. If I now refuse to study for the Civil Service, the offer to send me to England would be put into cold-storage for the time being (and for all time). Whether it will ever materialise in future, I don’t know. Under the circumstances, should I miss this opportunity? On the other hand, a great danger will arise if I manage to pass the Civil Service Examination. That will mean giving up my goal in life.... I have agreed to sail for England. But I am at a loss to understand what my duty is.”

Janaki Nath Bose knew his son too well and his offer to send him to England seems to have been impelled less by the desire to see him become a member of the exalted civil service than by his anxiety to keep him away from the explosive political atmosphere in India during 1919. It was as traumatic a year in Indian history as was 1857. But if the great revolt only strengthened British rule over India, the reign of blood and iron in the Punjab in 1919 gave it a jolt from which it was never to recover. The Punjab atrocities, culminating in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, marked a turning point in Indo-British relations.

Subhas rightly decided that the opportunity to study in England was too good to miss, despite his mental reservation about joining the I.C.S. Hurried preparations were made for the voyage, a passport secured and a berth reserved on the S.S. The City of Calcutta, which sailed from Bombay on September 15, 1919.

1 An Indian Pilgrim, p. 168
CHAPTER 4

RESIGNS FROM THE I.C.S.

THE City of Calcutta was a slow ship. She was scheduled to reach Tilbury in 30 days but actually took a week more. For a serious-minded young man like Subhas, the voyage proved boring. Most of the passengers were Britishers and Anglo-Indians of the snobbish type. The few Indian passengers naturally formed a separate group and amused themselves as best they could. It was wet and cloudy — typical English weather — when Subhas landed in London, but he was too excited to notice it. He immediately called on the official Adviser to Indian Students who gave him little hope of admission to a college either at Oxford or Cambridge.

He, however, tried his luck at the latter place, and, with the help of friends, succeeded in getting admission to Fitzwilliam Hall. It was then a non-collegiate institution, but was later promoted to the status of a college under the name of Fitzwilliam House. Among his contemporaries were a number of young men who attained fame in their respective fields, such as the late N.K. Sidhanta, Dilip Kumar Roy, poet, singer and mystic, C. C. Desai of the I.C.S., who, after retirement became a leading member of the Swatantra Party, Kshitish Prasad Chattopadhyaya, the well-known anthropologist, and G.S. Ghurye, who headed the Department of Sociology of the Bombay University for several years.

The college term had already begun and there was no time to lose. Bose had a large number of lectures to attend, some for the Mental and Moral Sciences Tripos, and the rest for the Civil Service examination. He had to take nine subjects for the latter, including Political Science, Philosophy, English Law, Modern European History, Economics, Geography and Cartography. He devoted himself seriously to his studies and had
little time for recreation. Cambridge, just after the war, was conservative, but Bose was greatly impressed by the measure of freedom allowed to students and the general esteem in which they were held. What a change, he thought, from a police-ridden city like Calcutta where every student was suspect as a political revolutionary. A fresher at Cambridge was made to feel that a high standard of character and behaviour was expected of him. The bitterness over racial arrogance and discrimination which Subhas had nursed in India, however, did not leave him even in the free atmosphere of Cambridge. He could detect in fellow British students a feeling of superiority beneath a veneer of bonhomie.

Indian students were politically conscious. There were some aspects of the university which created resentment in their minds. For instance, Indian students were not allowed to enlist in the Officers' Training Corps despite protests to the highest authorities. It appeared that the objection came, not from the War Office, but the India Office! A sensitive spirit like that of Bose may, therefore, be excused if he wrote to a friend in India: "Nothing makes me happier than to be served by the whites and to watch them clean my shoes!" Nevertheless, Subhas appreciated the finer traits of the British people. He wrote to his friend Hemant Kumar: "It is a real joy to see the various activities of the people here. Everybody has a keen sense of time and everything is done systematically. It is only here that men treat others as men in their mutual dealings. You do not see beggars anywhere in this land."

Again: "In this country people possess certain qualities which really make them great. The people here are real optimists. In our country people always bewail and bemoan their difficulties. Here they talk more about happiness, joy and god-given light."¹

Although Subhas applied himself seriously to his studies for the Civil Service, there was always a nagging doubt at the back of his mind whether it was right to do so. He wrote to the same friend on January 21, 1920: "I do not want to deceive myself and persuade myself to believe that studying for the Civil Service is a good thing. I have always hated it — and

¹ Sopan: *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*, p. 19
probably I still do. In the circumstances I do not quite understand if working for the Civil Service is a sign of my weakness or a good augury for the future.”

Vivekananda’s teachings continued to influence Subhas even at Cambridge. He tried his best to put them into practice and also urged his friends to do so.

Subhas appeared for the Civil Service examination in July 1920, barely eight months after his arrival in Cambridge. He was far from hopeful about his success. “So many brilliant students had come down in spite of years of preparation that it would require some conceit to feel anything but diffident,” he thought. Imagine his surprise therefore when he was informed that not only had he come out successful but that he was placed fourth in order of merit. A cable went off to his father at once.

Subhas was on the threshold of the heaven-born service and of the status and opulence it would confer. He could have conveniently forgotten his earlier scruples about joining the service, as many young men before him had done, and started on his new life with gusto. But Subhas was made of different mettle. What was an hour of glory for others, meant only a period of agony for him, and he was involved in a deep mental conflict for a long time. Even if he were personally inclined — and indeed happy — to give up his career and embrace a life of poverty and sacrifice, what about his parents and other members of the family? Would they not be deeply pained? Would they not consider it a rash and foolish step? Might he himself not regret it in future? While he was on the horns of this dilemma he began a correspondence with his brother Sarat Chandra, in which he lay bare his innermost thoughts, hopes and aspirations.

On September 22, immediately after the result was declared, he wrote to Sarat Chandra: “I don’t know whether I have gained anything really substantial by passing the I.C.S. examination. A nice fat income with a good pension, I shall surely get. Perhaps I may become a Commissioner if I stoop to make myself servile enough. Given talents, with a servile spirit one may even aspire to be the Chief Secretary to a provincial government. But, after all, is service to be the be-all and end-all of

1 *An Indian Pilgrim*, p. 173
my life? The Civil Service can bring one all kinds of worldly comfort, but are not these acquisitions made at the expense of one's soul? I think it is hypocrisy to maintain that the highest ideals of one's life are compatible with subordination to the conditions of service which an I.C.S. man has got to accept. National and spiritual aspirations are not compatible with obedience to Civil Service conditions."

On January 26, 1921 Subhas wrote again to his brother: "The amount of good that one can do while in the service is infinitesimal when compared with what one can do when outside it. I am now at the cross-roads and no compromise is possible. I must either chuck this rotten service and dedicate myself whole-heartedly to the country's cause or I must bid adieu to all my ideals and aspirations."

Bose reverted to the subject in his letter on February 23: "The principle of serving an alien bureaucracy is one to which I cannot reconcile myself. The day I sign the covenant, I shall cease to be a free man. In spite of all the agitation going on there, it still remains true that not a single Civil Servant has had the courage to throw away his job and join the people's movement. The challenge has been thrown at India and has not been answered yet.

"In the whole history of British India, not one Indian has voluntarily given up the Civil Service with a patriotic motive. It is time that members of the highest service in India should set an example to members of the other services. If the members of the other services withdraw their allegiance or even show a desire to do so — then only will the bureaucratic machine collapse. I therefore do not see how I can save myself from this sacrifice."

Nearly a year had passed since his success, and along with other probationers, Subhas had to appear for the final examination and to sign the covenant. But by now he had virtually made up his mind to resign. Tremendous pressure was brought by officials to make him reconsider his decision. There was a flutter in the India Office dovecotes. Sir William Duke, Perman-
ent Under Secretary of State for India, got in touch with Bose's eldest brother, who was then qualifying for the Bar in London, and requested him to persuade Subhas to reconsider his decision. The Secretary of the Civil Service Board in Cambridge advised Subhas to work in the service for at least a couple of years before thinking of resigning. He was sure that under the new Montford Constitution he would find no reason at all to do so. Only Mr. Reddaway, Censor of Fitzwilliam Hall, approved of Subhas's decision.

Meanwhile, Subhas had written to C.R. Das, the foremost leader of Bengal. Hailing him as "the high priest of the festival of national service in Bengal", Subhas offered him his service in any capacity, in the national cause. On February 16 he wrote: "I have the feeling that on my return to my country I should be able to take up two kinds of work — teaching in college and writing for newspapers. I desire to give up the Indian Civil Service with clear-cut plans." Later, on March 2 he added three other items of work — research for the Congress, adult education and social service — any of which he was prepared to undertake on a bare subsistence allowance.

The letters showed that even then, Bose had quite a few ideas in his mind regarding the Congress. He wrote to C.R. Das about its various shortcomings and suggested ways in which it could carry on its activities in a more effective manner. He laid stress on a clear-cut policy and constructive work: "You may well say that the Congress is now engaged in pulling down the existing order; so until this work of demolition has been completed, it is not possible to start constructive activity. But I am of the view that right from now, when the work of destruction is going on, we must begin to create." Subhas particularly referred to research work and publicity on all aspects of national life. In his reply C.R. Das assured Bose that he would find plenty of congenial work after his return to India and that there was a dearth of sincere workers in the Congress.

Dilip Kumar Roy, who was a contemporary at Cambridge, has drawn an unforgettable picture of Subhas: "He did command homage. Admiration also. He was always so tidy, never

1 *ibid.*, p. 181
2 *ibid.*, p. 185
left a book lying on a sofa as we, the care-free always did. His files were all neatly docketed; his wardrobe was never in dearth of clean stiff collars and suitable ties; none could claim to have seen his trousers without their neat creases; never did his coat betray an accidental stain or give a frayed appearance."¹ Subhas had a strong antipathy to people whom he called 'immoral'. He was something of 'a moralising prude', whose mere presence could chasten rebels into models of good behaviour. He could enjoy a joke and laugh uproariously at fun, but he never tolerated anything smuttv. Subhas was always serious in his purpose and outlook. "I cannot remember," recalls Roy, "a single student in England who took life a tithe as seriously to make himself into a standard-bearer of free India." Another contemporary, C.C. Desai, remembers Subhas to be "stern and grim" in appearance, "serious-minded rather than light-hearted". "It was not easy for him to make jokes, but you could get him to wear a faint smile with something interesting, comical or jocular. His mind was all the time set on how to get rid of the British, how to make the country free, how to raise the self-respect of Indians."² No wonder that some of his friends considered him a spoil-sport.

Subhas never talked about girls — a favourite topic among young men — much less mixed with them, while in England. On the other hand, he always warned his friends against "the two formidable temptations of this so-called European civilization — wine and women". He himself was unaccountably shy and stiff with women although they "ached to come near him not only because he was virile and handsome to a degree but also because he was as good as unapproachable".³

Subhas's decision to resign was not without its repercussions on his fellow-students in England, especially those who were studying for the I.C.S. They were impressed by the sacrifice of a prized career on the very threshold of his life. Their admiration for him knew no bounds. One of them composed a poem hailing Subhas: To thee, O hero! we bow. A few even

¹ Netaji — The Man, p. 29
² See Article in the Souvenir of the Netaji Exhibition, New Delhi, 1964
³ D.K. Roy : Netaji — The Man, p. 39
decided to emulate his example. Dilip Kumar Roy promptly gave up his studies for the I.C.S., and soon after left for Germany to devote himself to his chief love, music. For Kshitish Prasad Chattopadhyaya, who was also an aspirant for the I.C.S., it was a harder choice. He was engaged to the grand-daughter of Satyendranath Tagore, the first Indian to join the heaven-born service. He thought that he would not be able to maintain his future wife, in her accustomed affluent circumstances, if he did not join the I.C.S. So he explained the circumstances to the girl and broke off the engagement when he had finally decided not to take the examination. The story had a happy ending, however, for his ex-fiancée was waiting for him when he returned to India as an anthropologist, and they got married.

Janaki Nath naturally did not approve of his son’s proposed resignation. He pleaded with him that the life of a self-respecting civil servant would not be intolerable under the new reformed regime and that India would probably get home rule within a decade. Subhas replied that it was not merely a question of life being tolerable or otherwise. It was a matter of principle: “Should we, under the present circumstances, own allegiance to a foreign bureaucracy and sell ourselves for a mess of pottage?... The day I sign the covenant, I shall cease to be a free man.”

Arguments between father and son continued for several weeks. It was relatively easy for Subhas to get the agreement of his brother, Sarat Chandra, to his proposed course. But Janaki Nath was adamant. When he found that persuasion and coaxing had failed to make his headstrong son see reason, he threatened that he would not send him the money needed to refund the Government, as was obligatory under the contract. Subhas, however, managed to get over this monetary hurdle with the willing help of his friends. Janaki Nath had no other alternative but to fall in — however reluctantly — with the wishes of his son.

Subhas handed in his formal resignation on April 22, 1921. With a great sense of relief he conveyed this news to his friend Charu Charan Ganguly the same day and wrote: “You are aware that once before I sailed forth on the sea of life at the call of duty. The ship has now reached a port offering great
allurement — where power, property and wealth are at my command. But the response from the innermost corner of my heart is — 'you will not find happiness in this. The way to your happiness is in your dancing around with the surging waves of the ocean.'

"Today, in response to that call, I am sailing forth again with the helm in His hands. Only He knows where the ship will land. I have not been able to decide yet what I shall do. Sometimes I am feeling like joining the Ramakrishna Mission. At other times I feel like going to Bolpur. And, then again, I have the desire to become a journalist. Let us see what happens.""^1

Subhas had to stay in Cambridge a couple of months longer to take his tripos, and it was only at the end of June 1921 that he could leave Britain for home. It was a happy coincidence that Rabindranath Tagore also sailed to India by the same ship.

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^1 An Indian Pilgrim, pp. 186-7
CHAPTER 5

DISCIPLE OF C. R. DAS

No sooner did Subhas Chandra Bose land in Bombay on July 16 than he made a bee-line to Mani Bhavan on Laburnum Road, the residence of Mahatma Gandhi in the city. Within a brief period of two years Gandhi had become the acknowledged leader of the Congress and India. He had given a new hope and strength to the people and his call for non-cooperation, given at the Nagpur Congress in December 1920, had evoked unprecedented response from every nook and corner of the country. Among them were leaders of the Bar like C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru, C. Rajagopalachari and Rajendra Prasad. Titles were renounced and khadi (hand-spun and hand-woven cloth) became the livery of freedom. There was a surge of fraternity between Hindus and Muslims, and Swaraj appeared to be virtually on the horizon, as promised by Gandhi.

Bose naturally wanted to pay his respects to the architect of the new revolution, and to seek from him "a clear conception of his plan of action". The Mahatma received the young man with a hearty smile and put him at ease at once. But the interview hardly proved satisfactory for Bose, despite the habitual patience with which Gandhi replied to his questions. There were mainly three issues on which he sought Gandhi's elucidation: First, how were the different activities conducted by the Congress likely to culminate in the last stage of the campaign, namely, the non-payment of taxes? Second, how could mere non-payment of taxes or civil disobedience force the Government to retire from the field and leave India a free nation? Third, how could the Mahatma promise Swaraj within one year — as he had been doing since the Nagpur Congress? Gandhi's reply to the first question satisfied Bose; that to the second did not convince him, while that to the third proved
no better. "Though I tried to persuade myself at the time that there must have been a lack of understanding on my part, my reason told me clearly, again and again, that there was a deplorable lack of clarity in the plan that the Mahatma had formulated, and that he himself did not have a clear idea of the successive stages of the campaign which would bring India to her cherished goal of freedom."\textsuperscript{1}

Bose's first confrontation with Mahatma Gandhi was thus scarcely auspicious and it indeed set the tenor for future relations between the two. While parting Gandhi advised Bose to report to C.R. Das on reaching Calcutta. Bose had already contacted Das through his letters from Cambridge and he lost no time in calling on him. "During the course of our conversation I began to feel that here was a man who knew what he was about, who could give all that he had, and who could demand from others all that they could give, a man to whom youthfulness was not a shortcoming but a virtue. By the time our conversation came to an end my mind was made up. I felt I had found a leader and meant to follow him."\textsuperscript{2}

C. R. Das was then at the peak of his career. He was the acknowledged leader of Bengal and occupied a leading place in the national leadership that was emerging in India. If the brilliance of his legal acumen and forensic skill evoked admiration, his munificence was proverbial. It was said that if Das earned by the thousand in a day, he also spent thousands on charity in an hour. He had the heart of a poet and the spirit of a revolutionary. His renunciation of a princely practice at the Bar in obedience to the Nagpur Congress resolution, made a tremendous impression on the public mind. He was hailed as the Deshbandhu — brother of the country. He put himself in the vanguard of the non-cooperation movement. As Das came under the spell of Mahatma Gandhi, Gandhi, too, greatly valued Das's counsels. No wonder that in C. R. Das, Bose found a leader after his heart. Quick to size up men, Das discerned in the young Bose the promise of rare leadership and he promptly took him under his wing. The bond between Das and Bose was

\textsuperscript{1} The Indian Struggle; pp. 54-5
\textsuperscript{2} ibid., p. 55
to endure and grow stronger until the former's death five years later.

The year 1921, when Bose made his debut on the political scene at the age of 24, was an *annus mirabilis*. Throughout the country there was unparalleled enthusiasm, and people vied with each other in their sacrifices for the country. Even hard-headed persons were swept off their feet by Gandhi's promise of "Swaraj within a year" however chimerical it proved. The very novelty of the method of non-cooperation appealed to public imagination. The triple boycott of legislatures, courts and educational institutions was in full swing. Soon after Bose's return to Calcutta, the first anniversary of Lokamanya Tilak's death on August 1, 1921, was observed with huge bonfires of foreign cloth throughout the country. Apart from the encouragement they gave to the Swadeshi movement, a symbolic meaning was attached to these bonfires: they were to burn to ashes all the dross, dirt and weaknesses in the nation.

C. R. Das soon entrusted his new lieutenant with responsible work. He was made the principal of the National College, which was started by Das. A chain of national colleges and universities was to be set up all over the country to educate students who had left Government institutions. Bose was also placed in charge of the Publicity Board of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, and made head of the National Volunteer Corps. Many eyebrows were raised at the delegation of these onerous duties to an untried hand. But Das asked critics not to worry. "I can see through persons," he assured them. "Bose will never belie my expectations. He will be the right man to do justice to the work."

So ably indeed did Bose organise propaganda activities for the Congress that even the Government was non-plussed. The *Statesman*, the leading Anglo-Indian paper of Calcutta, ruefully remarked that while the Congress had secured such an able man, the Government had correspondingly lost a competent officer. Bose's propaganda was pitched on a simple yet effective note: "To make our non-cooperation with the Britishers successful, Indians must have the fullest co-operation among themselves."

Bose had his first contact with prominent Congress leaders when a number of them, headed by Gandhi, came to Calcutta
in September 1921, to win over the former revolutionaries to the new movement. Most of the leaders were the guests of C. R. Das. Bose took active part in arranging meetings between Gandhi and the revolutionaries, which proved fairly fruitful.

The non-cooperation movement gained an impetus by the proposed visit of the Prince of Wales to India. The professed purpose of the visit was to assuage public feelings and to prepare the ground for the inauguration of the Montford Reforms. The Congress Working Committee issued instructions for boycotting the Prince's visit since it was only meant to strengthen the bureaucratic regime. A call was given for a hartal on November 17, the day scheduled for the Prince's landing in Bombay. The hartal proved a thorough success, especially in Calcutta where it looked as if the government had abdicated and the Congress volunteers had taken over the administration. Within 24 hours the Government of Bengal issued a notification declaring the Congress volunteer organisation illegal.

A meeting of the Provincial Congress Committee of Bengal was held behind closed doors to consider the situation. It was unanimously decided to start civil disobedience and, in view of the state of emergency, all the powers of the committee were vested in its president, C. R. Das, who was authorised to nominate his successors. Bose had earlier become a member of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and this was the first occasion on which he participated in its deliberations. He was put in charge of the new movement, which was to begin modestly with batches of the five volunteers each hawking khadi in the city.

The initial response to the new campaign was somewhat lukewarm. Das, therefore, proposed that his son and wife go out as volunteers to set an example to others. When the news spread in the city that Mrs. Das and other women had been arrested and taken to prison, there was great excitement. In utter indignation—from which even the police were not free—young and old rushed to join as volunteers. A sensation was caused when a leading liberal politician, S. N. Mullick, left a Government House dinner party on hearing of Mrs. Das's arrest. Thousands of volunteers courted imprisonment and there was no room for them in the jails. Orders were given for the summary release of a large number of political prisoners, but
no one would leave the prison. In sheer desperation, the Government arrested Das and his close associates (including Bose) on December 10, 1921. This was Bose's first baptism of imprisonment. It was not until February 7, 1922, that his trial was concluded, with a sentence of six months' simple imprisonment. "Only six months?"—Bose muttered as he was being led away from the dock. "It is a matter of great shame that I have been given only six months."

Master and disciple were put in close proximity in prison and Bose served Das as a secretary, cook and valet. The long talks between them on a variety of subjects broadened Bose's mental horizon. He helped Das in the compilation of a history of Indian nationalism which, however, never saw the light of day owing to the latter's numerous preoccupations.

Meanwhile, the Viceroy, Lord Reading, had sent feelers for a compromise to Das through Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. The Viceroy was anxious that the Congress should call off the proposed boycott of the Prince's visit to Calcutta on December 24. If the Congress agreed to do so, the Government on its part would simultaneously withdraw the notification declaring the Congress volunteer corps illegal and order a general release of prisoners. It would also summon a Round Table Conference of the representatives of the Government and the Congress to consider the proposed reforms.

Notwithstanding the opposition of younger elements, including Bose, C. R. Das and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who was also a fellow-prisoner, were inclined to accept Lord Reading's offer. Das argued that the year in which Gandhi had promised swaraj was drawing to a close. Barely a fortnight remained within which something had to be achieved to save the face of the Congress, if not to fulfil the Mahatma's promise. If a settlement could be made before December 31 and all political prisoners released, it would appear to the popular imagination as a triumph for the Congress. The Round Table Conference might or might not be a success, but even its failure could put the Government in the wrong and enable the Congress to resume the fight with redoubled vigour.

As time was short a telegram was sent under the joint signatures of C. R. Das and Maulana Azad to Mahatma Gandhi
at Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad, recommending the acceptance of the proposed terms of settlement. Gandhi, however, insisted on the release of the Ali Brothers (who were not included in the compromise proposals, as they were not imprisoned in connection with the civil disobedience movement), and also on a firm announcement regarding the date and composition of the Round Table Conference. As the Viceroy was in no mood to parley further, the talks broke off.

"The Deshbandhu was beside himself with anger and sorrow. The chance of a lifetime, he said, had been lost," wrote Bose. These feelings were further intensified in the mind of Das, and were shared by many others when, a few weeks later, Gandhi called off the civil disobedience movement altogether, following the happenings at Chauri-Chaura where angry villagers had set fire to a police station and killed some policemen. There was a regular revolt in the Congress camp. In Bose's view, "To sound the order of retreat just when the public enthusiasm was reaching the boiling point was nothing short of national calamity."1 Jawaharlal Nehru held similar views. He wrote in his Autobiography: "We were angry when we learnt of this stoppage of our struggle at a time when we seemed to be consolidating our position and advancing on all fronts."2 Why, asked his father Motilal, should a town at the foot of the Himalayas be penalised if a village at Cape Comorin failed to observe non-violence?

Gandhi remained impervious to all such criticism. "Let the opponent glory in our humiliation or so-called defeat," he wrote. "It is better to be charged with cowardice and weakness than to be guilty of denial of our oath and sin against God. It is a million times better to appear untrue before the world than to be untrue to ourselves." When the All-India Congress Committee met on February 24 at Delhi, Gandhi was bitterly criticised for calling off the movement. Imperturbably he read out letters from Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das and Lala Lajpat Rai (all of whom were in jail) condemning his action, but did not resile from his decision. Although the delegates endorsed Gandhi's action, they were scarcely convinced by the arguments that had led to it.

1 ibid., p. 78
2 Autobiography, p. 81
The arrest of Gandhi on March 10 finally put an end to the controversy and also to the first non-cooperation movement, although thousands of his followers continued to languish in jail. His subsequent trial and sentence of six years' imprisonment stirred public imagination and only added to his popularity and hold on the country. It reminded Sarojini Naidu, the poetess, of Jesus Christ's trial and crucifixion: "I realised now," she wrote, "that the lonely Jesus of Nazareth, cradled in a manger, furnished the only parallel in history to this invincible apostle of Indian liberty, who loved humanity with unsurpassed compassion, and, to use his own beautiful phrase, 'approached the poor with the mind of the poor'."

Emotion apart, the withdrawal of the movement had the inevitable effect on public enthusiasm and morale. Those who had suffered and sacrificed for the cause began to wonder whether their sufferings and sacrifices were really worthwhile. Even leaders were at a loss to know how to repair the failure and to give battle to the Government which was shrewd enough to consolidate its position quickly.

C. R. Das, however, was not the man to give way to despair and in the Alipore Central Jail, where he was lodged with Azad, Bose and others, he tried to devise means for raising public enthusiasm once again by a change of tactics. The boycott of legislatures had proved to be a failure in as much as loyalists and such other elements had eagerly occupied them. In a revolutionary fight, Das thought, no point of vantage should be left in the hands of the enemy. Therefore, all electoral seats in the legislature, as also in other public bodies, he suggested, should be captured by Congressmen, and the national struggle waged from within. Taking her cue from her husband, this proposal was formally mooted by Mrs. C. R. Das at a conference of Congressmen in Chittagong in May 1922. A storm of controversy was at once let loose all over the country and Congressmen were divided into "pro-changers" and "no-changers" according to their views on entering the legislatures.

Bose was released on August 4, 1922, and five days later Das also came out of jail. After his release, Bose became the Chairman of the Reception Committee of the All-Bengal Young Men's Conference held at Calcutta on September 1922. "In thought
and language, in style and delivery”, wrote the *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, “Bose’s speech at the conference was worthy of the man from whom it came.” It laid stress on constructive activities, social uplift and mass education.

Soon, Bose was to be called for service in another field. Towards the end of September 1922 the northern districts of Bengal were inundated by floods of unprecedented magnitude. Crops were destroyed, houses collapsed and cattle were swept away. Several parts of Bogra, Rajashahi, Palna, Dinajpur and Rangpur districts were under 12 feet of water. The Bengal Provincial Congress Committee at once sent Bose and Dr. J. M. Das to take up relief work in the affected localities. Hundreds of volunteers gathered around them to organize relief activities in the villages. The volunteers were busy day and night in rendering help. Bose was so devoted to his work that he refused even to join his family at Kodalia, its ancestral village, for the annual Puja celebrations. The relief work was a unique success. It added to the prestige of the Congress and won the compliments of Lord Lytton, the Governor of Bengal.

Public attention was soon focussed on the annual session of the Indian National Congress to be held at Gaya in the last week of December 1922, especially because C. R. Das was to preside over it. Both the “pro-changers” and the “no-changers” consisting of the orthodox followers of Gandhi, had marshalled their forces for a battle royal at Gaya. Although Das forcefully expounded his plea for council entry in his presidential address, the delegates rejected the plan he advocated. Promptly he decided to resign the presidency as well as the membership of the Congress, and to organize a new party called the ‘Swaraj Party’. When an announcement to that effect was made by Pandit Motilal Nehru, who had joined hands with Das, it cast a shadow on the jubilant faces of “no-changers”. The Swarajists left Gaya defeated but determined to fight and win. Bose had naturally cast his lot with his leader and become a faithful if not an ardent “pro-changer.” He accompanied Das on his tours to popularise the new party. He was also appointed the editor of a journal called *Banglar Katha* started by Das to conduct propaganda for the new party.
CHAPTER 6

CHIEF CIVIC OFFICER

On January 11, 1928, the All-India Swaraj Party was officially inaugurated at Gaya with C. R. Das as President and Pandit Motilal Nehru as General Secretary. Its position was by no means strong. All the orthodox followers of Gandhi led by C. Rajagopalachari opposed it, and the nationalist Press was also, on the whole, ranged against it. The Swarajists had, therefore, to depend mainly on lecture tours in the country as a means of propaganda. Among the prominent men who had joined hands with Das were Motilal Nehru, Vithalbhai Patel, A. Rangaswami Iyengar and N. C. Kelkar. The first Swarajist Conference was held in March at Allahabad and its constitution was drafted. A controversy over the aim of the party was cleverly side-stepped by making the attainment of Dominion Status its immediate objective.

Soon after the conference, C. R. Das set out on an extensive tour of the South, which was considered the stronghold of the "no-changers." His eloquence, logic and sincerity made a great impression on the people and the success of the tour had its favourable repercussions on other parts of the country. Feelings between the two groups, however, continued to be bitter in Das's own home province. For some time two rival Provincial Congress Committees functioned simultaneously in Bengal, each claiming to be the representative body. In his frequent tours of the districts of Bengal, Das was usually accompanied by Bose, who was also entrusted with the management of the daily paper Forward launched by Das in October. It entailed hard work for him, but soon Forward came to hold a prominent position in the nationalist Press of India. Its leading articles, generally written under Das's personal direction, were forceful but never
extremist in tone or language. The paper developed a special knack of unearthing and exposing official secrets.

Responsible elements in the Congress were naturally sore over the schism that had developed in it and they were busy exploring ways and means to bridge the gulf between the “pro-changers” and “no-changers”. Their efforts succeeded at the special session of the Congress held in Delhi in September 1928 under the presidency of Maulana Azad. “After considering all aspects of the question”, Azad told the delegates, “I have come to the conclusion that it is useless for us to boycott the councils and remain aloof. Even as a boycott was necessary for us in the last election, so, under the present circumstances, it is to our advantage to occupy as many seats in the councils as possible.”

Azad’s plea was unexpectedly buttressed by Maulana Mohammed Ali, who had just been released. He claimed to have been commanded by Mahatma Gandhi “by some mysterious wireless” not to hesitate to modify the boycott programme if the interests of the country so demanded. A compromise resolution was accordingly passed at the Delhi Congress to the effect that Congressmen should be permitted to take part in the next elections and to carry on a uniform, continuous and consistent opposition against the Government within the legislatures. But the Congress, as an organization, would have no responsibility in the matter.

The tables were thus turned on the “no-changers” within nine months of the Gaya Congress. It was a personal triumph for Das. No wonder the Swarajists left Delhi in a jubilant mood. Bose, who was in charge of the Bengal camp, fully shared that sentiment.

Although he was only a lieutenant of Das in the Swaraj Party, he was gradually coming into his own as a leader of youth. He formed the “All-Bengal Youth League” with himself as president. It had an ambitious programme. Its first conference held in Calcutta in December was the precursor of the youth movement in the province. It revealed the desire of young men to have a movement and an organization of their own.

The general elections under the Montford Act brought thumping victories to the Swarajists in almost all provinces. Especially in Bengal, unknown men set up by Das swept away
veterans in public life. Surendranath Banerjea, one of the pioneers of the Congress, was defeated by Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, then virtually unknown in politics. The Deshbandhu’s own cousin S. R. Das, then Advocate-General of Bengal, was defeated by a comparatively unknown man like Satkaripati Roy. The eminent physician, Sir Nilratan Sirkar, was humbled by Bijoy Krishna Bose. Das was elected leader of the Swaraj Party in the Bengal Legislative Council, while that honour devolved on Pandit Motilal Nehru in the Central Assembly. Due to the omission of his name in the electoral roll, Bose could not stand for election and help his chief within the legislature. But all the while he was imbibing his strategy and tactics as a leader of an aggressive political party. This was for him a period of apprenticeship and preparation and he put it to very good use indeed.

Das had become the beau ideal of Bose. He was a leader to whom allegiance could be willingly and unquestioningly given. The incisive intellect, which could seize the weakness of the opponent in no time, the broad sympathies which embraced all men and communities, the generosity which had become a by-name for Das—all appealed to Bose. But he had in no sense become a blind follower, and never tried to model his life on that of Das’s, or to cultivate his mannerisms, as some of the followers of Gandhi did. Despite his loyalty to Das, he retained independence of outlook and judgment. Towards the end of 1923, Bose became the general secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. C. R. Das was its president.

The Swaraj Party greatly consolidated its position in 1923. It represented the main body of opposition to orthodox Gandhism. That year was also significant for the tentative beginning of the Communist Party of India in Bombay. In Bengal, however, the reaction against Gandhism took a revolutionary rather than a communist turn. The year was also unfortunately marked by the eruption of communal disturbances at numerous places. In order to solve the communal question so far as Bengal was concerned, C. R. Das evolved a Hindu-Muslim Pact. The Cacanada Congress at the end of 1923, however, rejected it on the ground that it violated the principle of nationalism and showed excessive partiality to the Muslims. The Congress and
the country as a whole had to regret the short shrift given to Das's proposals. There is no doubt at all that if they had been accepted in the spirit in which they were conceived, similar settlements could have been arrived at in others provinces and the communal question, which was to result in the partition of this sub-continent 24 years later, might not have been allowed to raise its ugly head at all.

The Swaraj Party met at Lucknow on January 9, 1924, under the presidency of C. R. Das and formulated the national demands to be presented in the Indian Legislative Assembly. They were:

1. All political prisoners and detenus must be released,
2. All repressive laws must be repealed, and
3. A national convention must be summoned to decide the principles for the future constitution of India.

In moving this resolution in the Assembly, Motilal Nehru declared: "Our party cannot be dismissed as wreckers. We have come here to offer our co-operation. If the Government would receive this co-operation, they would find that the Swarajists were their men. If not, the Swarajists would stand on their rights and continue to non-cooperate; they would oppose the Budget and adopt the policy of wholesale destruction."

Many non-Swarajist members of the Assembly supported these demands. The country was watching with admiration the struggle waged by the Swarajists in the very citadel of the Government under the leadership of Motilal Nehru. It was widely felt that the council entry programme should be accepted as the official programme of the Congress party as a whole. Mahatma Gandhi was released on February 5, 1924, following an operation for appendicitis. After recuperation, when he began to take interest in politics again, Das and Motilal Nehru called on him at Juhu near Bombay on May 18, to discuss the future programme of work. Although the Cocomada Congress had given the Swarajists full liberty to conduct their activities in the legislature, Gandhi was not, at first, reconciled to the situation. Under the persuasive argument of Das and Motilal Nehru, however, he generally relaxed his opposition and, six months later, he went to the extent of blessing the Swaraj Party.
What is known as the Gandai-Das Pact was evolved in November during Gandhi's visit to Calcutta. "The agreement," in the words of Gandhi, "puts the Swarajists on a par with no-changers. They claim to be a growing body. That they have made an impression on the Government cannot be gainsaid. Opinions may differ as to its value but it is not possible to question the fact itself. They have shown firm determination, grit, discipline and cohesion and have not feared to carry their policy to the point of defiance. Assuming the desirability of entering councils, it must be admitted that they have introduced a new spirit into the Indian legislatures. That their very brilliance takes the nation's mind away from itself is to one like me regrettable, but so long as our ablest men continue to believe in council entry, we must make the best of legislatures. Though an uncompromising 'no-changer' I must not only tolerate their attitude and work with them but I must even strengthen them wherever I can."

While giving battle to the Government in the legislature, Das decided to establish Swarajist hegemony over the Calcutta Municipal Corporation also. The Calcutta Municipal Act had been amended in 1923, its franchise enlarged and its elective element strengthened. The Municipal elections held in 1924 under the amended Act, proved a walk-over for the Swarajist Party. Its candidates were returned from almost all wards of the city, Bose being returned unopposed from ward No. 22 (Bhowanipore). At the first meeting of the newly elected municipal councillors, Das was elected Mayor and Mr. Shaheed Suhrawardy Deputy Mayor. On April 24 the Corporation appointed Bose as the Chief Executive Officer. Apart from causing great annoyance to the Government,—its sanction to the new appointment was not given until a month later—it caused heart-burning in some quarters within the party itself. But Das had full faith in the ability of his Chief Executive Officer, who was just 27. Bose's first decision on assuming office was to contribute half his monthly salary of Rs. 8,000 to charity.

The Swarajist administration lost no time in giving a new look to the Corporation and a new deal to citizens. Khadi became the official uniform of its employees, the Swarajist councillors having already taken to it. An Education Department
was started and dispensaries and health associations opened in
different wards for rendering medical aid and advice. The
weekly *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, the first civic journal in
India, was launched. Preference was given to swadeshi goods
and the Corporation Commercial Museum was established for
the propagation of the swadeshi movement. The Museum was
the first to compile and publish a directory of indigenous
products. The minorities were given preferential treatment in
civic appointments. The custom of presenting addresses to high
Government officials was stopped, and, instead, receptions were
given to nationalist leaders. A new civic consciousness was thus
created among the citizens.

Das and Bose turned the Calcutta Municipal Corporation
into a patriotic forum. Although normally civic bodies should
not dabble in political questions, a subject nation has neces-
sarily to utilize every public platform for the attainment of
freedom. The council chamber of the Corporation thus reflected
the political developments in the country and it echoed and
re-echoed the passionate protests of the Congress against the
Government's repressive acts and policies. Some of the most
notable orations of C. R. Das were delivered from the Mayoral
chair, such as the one he made when his chief executive officer
was arrested.

Bose undertook his new duties with dedicated zeal. He
devoted most of his waking hours to his work, going on regular
inspection rounds of different wards. His files were never kept
pending, and his dispatch amazed his subordinates. Most of
his departmental heads were Britishers, but, with one or two
exceptions, he had no difficulty in dealing with them.

The resounding success of the Swaraj Party throughout the
country chagrined the Government. It was frequently defeated
in the Indian Legislative Assembly, while in Bengal and the
Central Provinces the working of the constitution was rendered
impossible. Popular enthusiasm reached its peak when dyarchy
was overthrown in these two provinces and was made to appear
ridiculous in others. The objective of the Swarajist policy to
create a spirit of resistance to the Government was richly ful-
filled. This made the bureaucracy panicry, an additional contri-
butory factor being the murder of a European by Gopinath Saha.
It was a case of mistaken identity, Saha’s intended victim being Charles Tegart, Commissioner of Police, Calcutta.

The Government feared an upsurge of revolutionary activities. About the middle of 1924 matters reached a critical stage and secret preparations were afoot to gag the Swarajist leaders who had become the *bete noire* of the Government. Warrants under the antiquated Regulation III of 1818 were prepared in July 1924, but they were executed only on October 25. In the early hours of the morning that day a large number of Congressmen were arrested, some of them under a new emergency ordinance called the Bengal Ordinance signed by the Viceroy the previous night.

Among those arrested was Bose although everybody knew that he had occupied himself with municipal work to the extent of eschewing politics altogether. To justify his arrest, a fantastic allegation was made by two Anglo-Indian papers of Calcutta, that Bose was the brain behind the revolutionary conspiracy. His solicitors at once filed a suit against the papers for defamation. Their British proprietors spared no pains in searching for the necessary evidence to support their allegations. The India Office in London extended all possible help to them. But they failed to collect the requisite proof for Bose’s complicity in a revolutionary conspiracy. Nor could Bose’s solicitors bring home the charge of libel, and the case was eventually withdrawn.
CHAPTER 7

DETENU IN MANDALAY

A WAVE of indignation swept through the country over these arrests. Nobody was more provoked than Das who was then in Simla. He hurried back to Calcutta and in an impassioned speech delivered from the mayoral chair of the Calcutta Corporation he gave vent to his feelings over the arrests, particularly that of Bose.

"All that I want to say is that Subhas is no more revolutionary than I am. Why have they not arrested me? I should like to know why? If love of one's country is a crime, I am a criminal. If Subhas is a criminal, I am a criminal. Not only the Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation but the mayor of this Corporation is equally guilty. I can only say that these Ordinances are directed against us only to put down lawful organization.

"Subhas Bose's arrest under Regulation III is sheer brute force on the part of the bureaucracy. One fine morning he went out to do his work as the Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation. He returned home and found the police force in his house. No charge was made against him. No explanation was asked from him. No reason was given but he was simply told: we have got brute force and we shall drag you to prison.

"Is this law? Is this justice?"1

Gandhi wrote an editorial in Young India condemning the arrest. Along with Motilal Nehru and other leaders he rushed to Calcutta. Over a hundred and fifty thousand people attended a meeting addressed by these leaders in Calcutta on October 31, to protest against the arrests. Gandhi was convinced that it was the Swaraj Party's successes which had made the Government

1 Hemendranath Das Gupta, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, p. 112
resort to such violent measures. Incidentally, it was during this visit that the Gandhi-Das Pact, alluded to earlier, was arrived at.

Bose was kept for about a month in the Presidency Jail, where he was allowed to transact his work as the Chief Executive Officer of the Municipal Corporation. His subordinates called on him with files, needless to add, under the watchful eye of a police officer. C. R. Das also met him on a few occasions. He was soon transferred to Berhampore jail. On January 25, 1925, orders were received for his transfer to Calcutta, but Bose soon learnt that his destination — and that of his fellow-prisoners, was Mandalay jail in upper Burma. After a night at the Lalbazar Police Station lock-up which was “a veritable hell on earth” he was taken to the dock. By nine o’clock in the morning the ship, on which he was put, was sailing down the river, his cabin heavily guarded by the police. Four days later the ship reached Rangoon, from where Mandalay was about a day’s rail journey. “We had a very large police escort and at every stop on our way, they would line up on both sides of the train. From the fuss they made, one would think that we were either high state officials or wild animals.”

The first thought that struck Bose on reaching Mandalay was about Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who had been imprisoned there for six long years. He remembered that Lala Lajpat Rai and Sardar Ajit Singh were also interned there for some time. “It gave us therefore, some consolation and pride to feel that we were following in their footsteps.” Among the prison staff were many who had been there since Tilak’s time. They told him many interesting anecdotes about him and showed him the lime trees which were planted by Tilak with his own hands. “The jail-buildings, built of wooden palisades, looked exactly like cages in a zoo or a circus. From the outside and especially at night, their inmates appeared like animals prowling behind the bars. Within these structures we were at the mercy of the elements. There was nothing to protect us from the biting cold of winter, or the intense heat of summer, or the tropical rains in Mandalay.” Among his fellow-prisoners were Satyendra Chandra Mitra, Purna Chandra Das, Dipin Ganguli, Satis Chakravarty, Surendra Mohan Ghosh, Madan Bhowmik

1 The Indian Struggle, p. 180
and others. They engaged themselves in endless discussions on national and international problems, and also took part in games.

Reading was the chief pastime of Bose, and he spent long hours in meditation. He also made a special study of criminal psychology and prison reforms. Contrary to the commonly held opinion he discovered that murderers represented a better type of prisoner, while thieves were the worst. The Burmese prisoners had an artistic talent and they would organize variety performances during the festivals they were allowed to celebrate. They would play drums and sing songs specially composed for the occasion, dance their national dances and even improvise a jail orchestra.

Bose discovered that Burma was "a marvellous country" so far as folk-music and folk-dance were concerned. He wrote in a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy from Mandalay (9-10-25): "Pure native dance and music are in full swing here and they cater to tens of thousands, zigzagging deep into the heart of remote villages... Music may not be an evolved art (in Burma) but its capacity for delighting the illiterate poor has somehow, appealed to me. I am told that their dance too is very beautiful. Furthermore, their art is not confined to select coteries because, there is no caste system in Burma. (As a result art here has infiltrated everywhere). And probably also because folk-music and folk-dance have always had a tremendous vogue in this country. So the common folk have won a deeper understanding of beauty than the Indians."

Though this was not his first taste of jail, the circumstances in which he was arrested and the environment in which he was placed were totally different. In the first place, he was detained without trial under an antiquated regulation and nobody knew how long he would be kept behind bars. Secondly, Mandalay was a remote place even though Burma was politically a part of India. Its hot and humid climate hardly suited Bose. Thirdly, he had not the consolation of the periodical interviews with relatives and friends which were permitted in Indian jails. A philosophic spirit like that of Bose, however, was quick to adjust itself to prison life. "Usually a kind of philosophic mood instils

1 Netaji the Man, pp. 185-86
strength into our hearts in prison surroundings,” he wrote on May 2, 1925. “In any event I have taken my station there and what little I have read of philosophy superadded to my conception of life in general, has stood me rather in good stead here. If a man can find sufficient food for contemplation, then his incarceration need hardly hurt him much unless of course his health deserts him. But our suffering is not merely spiritual—there is the rub—the body too has a say in the business, so that even when the spirit was willing, the flesh might be weak.

“The enforced solitude in which a detenu passes his day gives him an opportunity to think down into the ultimate problems of life. In any event, I can claim this for myself, that many of the most tangled questions, which whirl like eddies in our individual and collective life, are edging gradually to the estuary of a solution. The things I could only puzzle out feebly, or the views I could offer tentatively in days gone by are crystallizing out more and more presentably from day to day. It is for this reason, if for no other, that I feel I will be spiritually a gainer through my imprisonment.

“I am inclined to think that the suffering in jail life is less physical than mental. When the blows of insult and humiliation are not too brutal, the torments of prison life do not become so hard to bear... But lest we forget too readily our outer material existence and conjure up an ideal world of bliss within, they will deal us these blows to waken us to our bleak and joyless surroundings.”¹

Bose protested when Roy described his detention as a ‘martyrdom’: “This only testifies to the sympathy native to your character as also to your nobility of heart. But since I have some sense of humour and proportion—I hope so, anyway I can hardly arrogate to myself the martyr’s high title. Against hauteur and conceit, I want to be sleeplessly vigilant. How far I have achieved this it is for my friends to judge. At all events martyrdom can only be an ideal so far as I am concerned.”²

While Bose was thus gradually settling down—if that is possible in a jail—a calamity befell the country in the death of C. R. Das on June 16, 1925. The nation lost a leader, and Bose

¹ ibid., pp. 175-77.
² ibid., p. 176
a friend, philosopher and guide. For weeks he was desolate with
a sense of bereavement. Das and Bose were together during their
first imprisonment, two months in the same cell, six in adjacent
ones. "I took refuge at his feet," he wrote to Roy, "because I
came to know him thus through a very close relationship... I
gave him my heart's devotion and reverent love not so much
because I happened to be his follower in the arena of politics
as because I had come to know him rather intimately in his
private life. So versatile was his talent and so many-sided his
activities that people in different and widely separate spheres
will be hard hit by the loss. I used to criticize him by saying
that he had too many irons in the fire—but creative spirits do
not submit to pragmatic or logical limitations and I have no
doubt that it was only the fullness of life and realization that
impelled him to attempt reconstruction in so many different
spheres of our national life. If for the country the loss in the
death of Das is irreparable, for the youth of Bengal it is
cataclysmic, appalling." 1

Many years later in *The Indian Struggle* Bose attempted a
more dispassionate assessment of C. R. Das, whose memory was
to remain a source of inspiration to him to the end of his days:

"With the reckless abandon of a Vaishnava devotee, he had
plunged into the political movement with heart and soul and
he had given not only himself but his all in the fight for Swaraj.
When he died whatever worldly possessions he still had were
left to the nation. By the Government he was both feared and
admired. They feared his strength but admired his character.
They knew that he was a man of his word. They also knew that
although he was a hard fighter, he was none the less a clean
fighter, and, further, he was also the man with whom they could
bargain for a settlement. He was clear-headed, his political in-
tinct was sound and unerring, and, unlike the Mahatma, he
was fully conscious of the role he was to play in Indian politics.

"He knew more than anyone else that the situations favoura-
ble for wresting political power from the enemy do not come
often, and when they do come, they do not last long. While the
crisis lasts, a bargain has to be struck. He knew also that to
sponsor a settlement when public enthusiasm is at its height,

1 *ibid.*, pp. 178, 181, 186
needs much courage and may involve a certain amount of unpopularity. But he was conscious of his exact role, namely that of a practical politician and he was, therefore, never afraid of courting unpopularity.”

The mutual relations between Bose and his fellow-detenus on the one hand, and prison officials on the other were, on the whole, good. Some of the officials were helpful in lending books and extending other facilities though, naturally, they had to follow the orders of the Bengal Government, which was exceedingly vindictive towards the prisoners, who were dubbed “as eight of the most dangerous men in India.” Many were the interesting discussions between Bose and the prison officials and visitors on criminal psychology and allied subjects.

A sudden crisis developed, however, on the occasion of the Durga Puja on October 1925 when the prisoners asked for funds and facilities to celebrate the festival, just as Christian prisoners were enabled to celebrate Easter and Christmas. The necessary orders were passed by the jail superintendent but the Government not only countermanded them but it went to the extent of censuring him. The prisoners’ pleas for reconsideration were turned down whereupon they decided to go on a hunger-strike to enforce their rights. No sooner did the hunger-strike begin in February 1926 than the Forward got the news and published it. A sensation was caused and questions were asked in the Central Assembly. The Home Member found himself in an uncomfortable position and promised to redress the grievances of the state prisoners. It was only after a fortnight’s hunger strike that the situation returned to normal. Bose lost nearly 40 lbs. in weight and his health was seriously affected.

In the latter half of 1926 Bose was set up by the Congress party as a candidate for the Bengal Legislative Council from a Calcutta constituency. He was pitted against a formidable candidate, J. N. Basu, leader of the Liberal Party in Bengal, who had defeated a Swarajist candidate in the previous election. This was the key election of the year and it was fought on the slogan Put Bose in to get him out. The election campaign raged fast and furious with huge posters showing Bose behind prison bars displayed on numerous hoardings. Bose was elected with a

1 The Indian Struggle, pp. 110-11
thumping majority although the Government refused to release him.

Meanwhile Bose’s health was fast deteriorating. He had an attack of broncho-pneumonia in the winter of 1926. Tuberculosis was suspected. He was, therefore, transferred to Rangoon for an examination by a medical board consisting of Lt. Col. Kelsall and Bose’s brother, Dr. Sunil C. Bose. The board recommended his release, but while the proposal was under the Government’s consideration Bose was transferred again to Insein jail. After keeping him under observation for three weeks, the jail superintendent there sent a strong note to the Government about his health. The Government showed its usual perversity and instead of acting on the note, it made an offer in the Bengal Legislative Council that if Bose wanted to go to Switzerland at his own expense for recouping his health, he would be put on board a ship sailing for Europe from Rangoon. Bose was, however, informed that he would not be allowed to meet members of his family. He rejected this offer since it would have meant an acceptance of indefinite exile. He wrote to his brother Sarat Chandra: “I have no desire to become a voluntary exile from the land of my birth.” He would like “to feel myself a free agent before I make my choice and I would prefer not to be stampeded into signing my warrant of exile... I have tried to anticipate, the worst that may befall me if I do not accept the Government’s offer, but I have not been able to persuade myself that a permanent exile from the land of my birth would be better than life in a jail leading to the sepulchre. I do not quail before this cheerless prospect, for, I believe as the poet does, that ‘the paths of glory lead but to the grave’.”

He continued in the same philosophic vein: “Ideas will work out their own destiny and we who are but clods of clay encasing sparks of the divine fire have only to consecrate ourselves to these ideas. A life so consecrated is bound to fulfil itself regardless of the vicissitudes of our material and bodily existence. My faith in the ultimate triumph of the ideas for which I stand is unflinching and I am, therefore, not troubled by thoughts about my health and future prospects. ... I am not a shop-

1 *Netaji*, p. 63
keeper and I do not bargain. The slippery path of diplomacy I abhor as unsuited to my constitution. I have taken my stand on a principle and there the matter rests. I do not attach such importance to my bodily life that I should strive to save it by a process of haggling. My conception of values is somewhat different from that of the market place, and I do not think that success or failure in life should be determined by physical or material criteria. Our fight is not a physical one and it is not for a material object. We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

“Our cause is the cause of freedom and truth: as sure as day follows the night that cause will ultimately prevail. Our bodies may fail and perish: but with faith undiminished and will unconquerable, triumph will be ours. It is, however, for Providence to ordain which of us should live to witness the consummation of all our efforts and labours and, as for myself, I am content to live my life and leave the rest to destiny.”¹ This spirited reply recalls the letter written by Lokamanya Tilak to Khaparde, in similar circumstances sixteen years earlier, in which he also had rejected a conditional offer of release.²

Bose was naturally annoyed at the Government’s argument in support of its offer to send him direct to Europe, that he, being a bachelor, had no family as such. “It is not easy for a Westerner to appreciate the deep attachment which Oriental people have for their kin and I hope that it is this ignorance — rather than wilfulness — which is responsible for what I cannot but regard as a heartless feature of the Government’s offer. It would be typical only of a western mind to presume that because I have not married, therefore, I have no family and no attachment to anyone.”

Bose struck a deeply stirring note — which is not without pathos — in this final passage:

“Let no one grieve that the chances of my release are few and far between. Above all, please console my dear parents — for their’s is the hardest lot — and all those who love me. We have

¹ Hugh Toye: Subhas Chandra Bose, p. 35
² See N.G. Jog: Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, pp. 128-9
got to suffer a lot, both individually and collectively, before the priceless treasure of freedom can be secured. Thank God! I am at peace with myself and I can face with perfect equanimity any ordeal that He, in His wisdom, may choose to visit me with. I regard myself as doing penance in my own humble way for the past sins of our nation and I shall be happy in my atonement. Our thoughts will not die, our ideas will not fade from the nation’s memory, and posterity will be heirs of our fondest dreams: this is one faith which will sustain me in my tribulation forever and forever.”

When public pressure for Bose’s release began to mount, orders were issued for his transfer to Almora jail in the United Provinces. Early in May 1927 he was removed from the Insein jail and put on a boat sailing for Calcutta. Before reaching there he was taken to the Government’s launch where another medical board consisting of Sir Nilratan Sirkar, Dr. B. C. Roy and Major Hingston, the Governor’s physician, examined him. Despite police pressure on the doctors to recommend Bose’s transfer to Almora jail or his externment to Switzerland, the board urged his immediate release in view of his health. He was accordingly released, on May 16, 1927, after detention without trial for two years, six months and twenty-one days.

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1 Netaji, pp. 62-63
OSE returned home after his exile in Burma a physical wreck, but he was unvanquished in spirit. Those who called on him — among them Vasanti Devi, widow of C. R. Das — were shocked by the havoc wrought on his health. His first task was to recover his strength. At the same time he had to take stock of the political situation as it had developed during his absence. Nevertheless, he had to make a careful assessment of all factors before he could resume his activities. His political apprenticeship being over he could now emerge as a leader at least in his own province.

Das — Bose’s guru — was no more; Motilal Nehru, on whom the mantle of Swarajist leadership had fallen, was in Europe with Jawaharlal and other members of his family; Gandhi was in virtual retirement from public life since his release. The death of Das virtually marked the beginning of the end of the Swaraj Party. It had received the imprimatur of Gandhi, and, in the words of Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, it had become the Congress itself. But this apparent success only cloaked its character as a protestant wing of the Congress.

There was a gradual watering down of the original Swarajist policy of undiluted opposition to the Government in the legislature. Pandit Motilal Nehru's formulation of what was called the “National Demand”, amounted to a compromise with the non-Swarajist members of the Legislative Assembly. His acceptance of membership of the Skeen Committee on the Indianisation of the Army was also a departure from the original Swarajist policy. The rise of the Responsivist Party, headed by M. R. Jayakar and N. C. Kelkar, was a logical outcome of these trends. The rise of the Nationalist Party under the leadership of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lala Lajpat Rai further
complicated the political situation. If the Swaraj Party was the Right wing of the Congress, the Nationalist Party was further to the Right of the former, and worked in close co-operation with the Hindu Mahasabha. Its rise was in a sense inevitable with the growing communal temper in the country during 1925 and 1926.

"On the one side, there were the Muslim fears of a Hindu majority; on the other side, Hindu resentment at being bullied by the Muslims. Many a Hindu felt that there was too much of the stand-up-and-deliver about the Muslim attitude, too much of an attempt to extort special privileges with the threat of going over to the other side. Because of this the Hindu Mahasabha rose to some importance, representing as it did Hindu nationalism, Hindu communalism opposing Muslim communalism. The aggressive activities of the Mahasabha stimulated still further this Muslim communalism. And so action and reaction went on, and in the process the communal temperature of the country went up."¹ No wonder then that this led to communal disturbances throughout the country, the worst of them taking place in Calcutta. This communal madness culminated in the cold-blooded murder of Swami Shraddhanand in December 1926, just on the eve of the Gauhati Congress.

The general elections in November 1926 brought a fair measure of success for the Congress especially in Madras and Bihar. But in the United Provinces it had to suffer a veritable rout. "Religion in danger", was the cry of the opponents of the Congress, both Hindu and Muslim. A natural result of this was that few nationalist Muslims were returned on the Congress ticket, their seats being generally captured by their reactionary co-religionists.

If 1925 and 1926 thus marked in general a period of political slump and communal reaction throughout the country, the situation in Bengal was still worse. Following the death of C. R. Das in 1925 the triple crown worn by him was placed on the head of J. M. Sengupta with the blessings of Gandhi. He became overnight the leader of the Swaraj Party in the Bengal Legislative Council, Mayor of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation and President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Com-

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Autobiography*, p. 159
mittee. Hardly was he in power for a year, when opposition to his leadership began to make itself felt. It crystallised under the leadership of B. N. Samsal, a popular and influential figure in Congress circles in Bengal. Despite attempts to patch it up the quarrel continued till 1927.

For some time there were two rival Provincial Congress Committees in Bengal, and in the elections to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, held in March 1927, two sets of Congress candidates were set up. Mr. Samsal's party was defeated, which led to his temporary retirement. The situation in the Bengal Swarajist Party was still worse. There were four factions: Hindu Swarajists and Swarajist Hindus, Muslim Swarajists and Swarajist Muslims, the difference being the emphasis based on the adjective or the substantive. The issue revolved round the pact that was observed in Bengal for some time between Hindus and Muslims, which was based essentially on the "Bengal Pact", forged by C. R. Das in 1923.

The return of Bose was, therefore, hailed by all sections of Bengal Congressmen. It was hoped that he would put an end to the factional squabbles which had disfigured the name of the party. Rarely did a leader receive such co-operation from all sides as Bose did— for a time. He was elected President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. Relations between him and Sengupta were cordial for some months, but, before long, a group of disappointed workers rallied round the latter and set him up as a rival to Bose. The consequent struggle between them disfigured Congress politics in Bengal for a long time. Rival groups of the Jugantar and Anusilan parties (some of whose members formerly belonged to terrorist organisations), rallied round Bose and Sengupta respectively and exerted an unhealthy influence on Bengal politics. Bose had to suffer the mortification of being defeated by a Liberal candidate, B. K. Basu, in the election to the mayoral chair of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation.

The summer of 1927 again saw an eruption of communal riots in Punjab, Bihar, the Central Provinces and elsewhere. Altogether 25 riots had broken out, taking a toll of 250 killed and over 2,500 injured. A Bill was hurriedly passed in the Central Legislative Assembly to check the incitement of com-
munal passions. A “Unity Conference” was held in Calcutta in October 1927, which as usual achieved nothing more concrete than a pious appeal to both communities to create an atmosphere of non-violence in the country.

In the first week of November 1927 the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, made an announcement regarding the appointment of the Indian Statutory Commission under Section 84A of the Government of India Act, 1919, which provided for decennial reviews of the political situation in India. This commission was headed by Lord Simon and all political parties in Britain were represented on it. Ostensibly intended to placate Indian opinion, the commission produced exactly the reverse effect. It was condemned by all sections of Indians including the Moderates. It was not so much the violation of the principle of self-determination which offended them as the exclusion of Indians from the all-White body. Subsequent efforts to associate representatives of Indian legislatures with the commission failed to assuage popular anger. In the words of Miss Ellen Wilkinson, never since the Amritsar tragedy was there such universal condemnation of any act of the British.

The Congress passed a resolution at the plenary session held in Madras in December 1927 under the presidency of Dr. M. A. Ansari boycotting the Simon Commission “at every stage and in every form”. By another resolution it directed the Working Committee to convene an All-Parties Conference to draw up a constitution for India acceptable to all parties. This was in reply to Lord Birkenhead’s challenge to Indian politicians to produce an agreed constitution for India. Another resolution declared that the goal of the Indian people was “complete national independence”. The Madras Congress also marked a definite orientation to the Left in the appointment of the General Secretaries. They were: Subhas Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and Shuaib Qureshi. Thus at the end of 1927 Bose made his debut on the all-India stage. He was 30 then.

The arrival of the Simon Commission in Bombay on February 3 was greeted with an all-India hartal. It passed off peacefully except in Madras where the police resorted to firing. In Bengal the Provincial Congress Committee launched an intensive campaign for the boycott of British goods. Wherever the
Commission went the sky was rent with the cry "Simon, go back!" But for the Justice Party in Madras and some Muslim organisations, the country was solidly opposed to the Simon Commission. Rarely has such unity been evinced before or after.

The death of Lala Lajpat Rai following a police assault, when the Simon Commission visited Lahore, aggravated public resentment. It was typical of the youthful impatience of Bose to think that this provided the finest opportunity to launch an all-out movement against the British Government. He wrote: "There is absolutely no doubt that if the Congress Working Committee had taken courage in both hands, they could have anticipated the movement of 1930 by two years... When the writer (Bose) visited the Mahatma in May 1928 at his Ashram in Sabarmati, he reported to him the public enthusiasm which he had met with in many provinces and begged him to come out of his retirement and give a lead to the country. At that time the reply of the Mahatma was that he did not see any light, though, before his very eyes, the peasantry of Bardoli were demonstrating through a no-tax campaign that they were ready for a struggle.

"During the whole of 1928 and 1929 there was so much unrest in the labour world that if a political campaign had been started at the time, it would have been well-timed. Moreover, in 1928 and 1929 there was more enthusiasm and excitement in provinces like Punjab and Bengal than in 1930... The responsibility for not utilising the situation in 1928 devolves not only on the Mahatma but on the Swarajist leaders, who had the Congress machinery in their hands at the time but who had unfortunately lost their dynamic impulse."

In pursuance of the directive of the Madras Congress to call an All-Parties Conference and to prepare an agreed constitution, a committee under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru was appointed to determine its principles. The committee (of which Bose was a member) issued a unanimous report, subject to certain reservations made in the preamble, in August 1928.

It was cordially received in nationalist quarters as rendering

1 The Indian Struggle, pp. 147-48
2 It stated that a minority (which included Bose) did not accept Dominion Status and pressed for complete independence.
the work of the Simon Commission superfluous. The All-Parties Conference also adopted it unanimously. The younger elements, however, were not happy over the recommendation regarding Dominion Status in view of the Madras Congress resolution on independence. The position was made still more unpalatable by the acceptance by the Conference of a clause guaranteeing the land-holders a vested right in their properties. In view of the paramount need of presenting a united front to the Simon Commission, Bose suggested that those who saw eye to eye with him and Nehru should merely voice their protest at the conference instead of dividing and wrecking it. Thereafter, they should organise an Independence of India League to carry on an active propaganda in the country in favour of independence. Meanwhile both Bose and Nehru offered to resign their general secretaryship of the Congress. They were, however, told that such a step was not necessary in view of the Madras resolution, and that they could go ahead with their proposed Independence League without conflicting with the Congress policy.

While the boycott of the Simon Commission had created a new upsurge in the country, the youth movement was also gathering force. Youth conferences were held and youth leagues were formed in many cities. The Bombay Presidency Youth League was constituted early in 1928. Notable among the conferences were those held in Calcutta in August under the chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru, and the All-India Youth Congress over which K. F. Nariman presided. The youth movement marked the emergence of radical and militant trends in the nation and many of the present-day leaders made their name through it. Bose as the chairman of the Reception Committee of the Youth Congress, strongly advocated activism as opposed to the passivism which, he thought, was being preached by Gandhi and Aurobindo:

“As I look around me today, I am struck by two movements or two schools of thought about which it is my duty to speak out openly and fearlessly. I am referring to the two schools of thought which have their centres at Sabarmati and Pondicherry. I am not considering the fundamental philosophy underlying these two schools of thought. This is not the time for metaphysical speculation. I shall talk to you as a pragmatist, as one
who will judge the intrinsic value of a school of thought, not from a metaphysical point of view, but from experience of its actual effects and consequences.

"The actual effect of the propaganda carried on by the Saba-

mati school of thought is to create a feeling and impression

that modernism is bad, large-scale production is an evil, wants

should not be increased and the standard of living should not

be raised, that we must endeavour, to the best of our ability,

to go back to the days of the bullock-cart, and that the soul is

so important that physical culture and military training can

well be ignored."

Bose was equally blunt in his remarks on the Pondicherry

school: "The actual effect of the propaganda carried on by the

Pondicherry School of thought is to create a feeling and an

impression that there is nothing higher or nobler than peaceful

contemplation, that Yoga means Pranayama and Dhyana, that

while action may be tolerated as good, this particular brand of

Yoga is something higher and better. This propaganda has led

many a man to forget that spiritual progress under the present-
day condition is possible only by ceaseless and unselfish action,

that the best way to conquer nature is to fight her, and that

it is weakness to seek refuge in contemplation when we are

hemmed in from all sides by dangers and difficulties."

Bose concluded his speech with a call for a policy of activism:

"It is the passivism, not philosophic but actual, inculcated

by these schools of thought against which I protest. In this holy

land of ours, Ashrams are not new institutions and ascetics and

yogis are not novel phenomena. They have held and will

continue to hold an honoured place in society. But it is not

their lead that we shall have to follow if we are to create a new

India at once free, happy and great. In India we want today a

philosophy of activism. We must be inspired by robust optimism.

We have to live in the present and to adapt ourselves to modern

conditions."¹

Such views were rank heresy in the climate of 1928 and their

ventilation raised a veritable hornet's nest around Bose's ears.

Bose's adversaries made political capital out of this speech and

¹ J.S. Bright: Important Speeches and Writings of Subhas Bose, pp. 81-2
even his friends were aghast at his temerity. The more orthodox followers both of Gandhi and Aurobindo were naturally angry with him. As a matter of fact, Bose had given expression to such views—though not so bluntly—in his presidential address to the Maharashtra Provincial Conference earlier in Poona (May 1928), in which he had asked young men and industrial workers to start organisations of their own to safeguard their interests.

Unrest among workers came to a head in 1928 as the trade union movement grew stronger. A wave of strikes swept the country, notable among which were the prolonged textile strike in Bombay, the jute mills strike in Calcutta, the East India Railway Strike at Lillooah, the Oil and Petrol Works strike at Budge-Budge and the Tata Iron and Steel Works strike at Jamshedpur. The last-named strike marked the initiation of Bose in the labour movement. He was prevailed upon to take the leadership of workers just as the strike was about to collapse. He revived it with sufficient strength to bring about an honourable settlement. Subsequently, however, differences arose among the workers themselves, leading to disastrous consequences.

A convention of the All Parties Conference was held in Calcutta in December 1928, prior to the Congress session which was presided over by Motilal Nehru. The good work of the conference was virtually nullified as it foundered on the question of communal representation and reservation in the legislatures. M. A. Jinnah put forward his notorious "Fourteen Points" at the convention, and the other minority leaders also pitched their demands high. As a result of these developments, the Nehru Report ultimately proved a dead letter.
CHAPTER 9

COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE

THE Calcutta Session of the Congress served as a befitting precursor to the historic session at Lahore in 1929. The attendance was the largest since the inception of the Congress and preparations for it were made on a colossal scale. Bose had raised a strong, well-disciplined and uniformed volunteer force, of which he was the General Officer Commanding. He trained it on a military basis with different officer cadres. The volunteers in uniform and their leader dressed like a general, made a great impact on the people of Calcutta and delegates to the Congress. In the glittering presidential procession Bose was as much the cynosure of eyes as Motilal Nehru, the president-elect. A contemporary newspaper report sounded prophetic. Wrote The Welfare:

"Before daybreak the footpaths along the route were lined with a patient crowd; every inch of space on the terraces, verandas, and balconies and windows was taken up by eager people . . . to welcome the president of the 43rd Session of the Indian National Congress. They were also gathered to witness a scene of national significance—the birth, in a non-martial race, of a desire for martial honours.

"Indeed, a new day was dawning for Bengal; a wave of hope and enthusiasm was sweeping just as in olden days when the conquering heroes marched in triumph at the head of victorious forces; windows were opened to shower flowers on Bose, the General Officer Commanding, as he stood in a car like a hero who had conquered a people's apathy and timidity.

"Not an eye could ignore him, not a camera could miss him. He stood masterfully as a commander while the car crawled on. He looked every inch a general. Self-assurance was stamped on
his face and figure... It was a sight, a promise of the future..."1

To put the record straight, there were not a few critics who dismissed the procession as a theatrical show, and a waste of good money.

The Calcutta Congress was marked by an open clash between the older and younger groups. The controversy which had taken place at Lucknow over the Nehru Committee Report was revived in the Subjects Committee, and Nehru and Bose moved an amendment to Gandhi’s resolution on the Report. Their aim was to put no time-limit, nor, even by implication, to accept Dominion Status as contemplated in the constitution drawn up by the All-Parties Conference. They stood squarely by the Madras Congress resolution declaring complete independence to be the goal of the Indian people.

After a heated and lengthy debate; the Congress leaders held an emergency session in the evening to arrive at a compromise. Bose and Nehru yielded to the persuasion of Gandhi to maintain party unity. At the same time Gandhi agreed to placate the younger elements, withdrew his original resolution, and proposed another, giving the British Government only a year to accept the Dominion Status formula of the Nehru Committee. This resolution was passed by the Subjects Committee by 118 votes to 45. Both Bose and Nehru abstained from the voting and promised that they would not oppose Gandhi’s resolution at the open session. Accordingly, Gandhi moved the agreed resolution in the plenary session on December 31. It stated that "subject to the exigencies of the political situation, this Congress will adopt the Constitution (framed in the Nehru Report), if it is accepted in its entirety by the British Parliament on or before the 31st December 1929, but in the event of its non-acceptance by that date or its earlier rejection, the Congress will organise a campaign of non-violent non-cooperation by advising the country to refuse taxation and in such other manner as may be decided upon."

Everything appeared to be going smoothly for the official resolution when Bose suddenly stood up and moved an amendment in the open session to the effect that the Congress would

1 Netaji, p. 34
be content with nothing short of independence, which implied severance of the British connection.

He put a straight question to the delegates: "In the main resolution you have given twelve months' time to the British Government. Can you lay your hands on your hearts and say that there is a reasonable chance of getting Dominion Status within the period? Pandit Motilal Nehru has made it clear in his speech that he does not think so. Then why should we lower the flag for these twelve months? Why not say we have lost the last vestige of faith in the British Government, and that we are going to take a bold stand?"

To the consternation of everybody Nehru also supported Bose's amendment, though somewhat half-heartedly. It seemed likely that the amendment would be passed. But the followers of Gandhi, true to type, made it into an issue of confidence. They warned that the Mahatma would retire from the Congress if the amendment was passed. Consequently it was lost by 973 votes to 1350. The compromise resolution was eventually passed. Gandhi administered a stern rebuke to the rebels in the following words: "You may take the name of independence on your lips, as the Muslims utter the name of Allah or the pious Hindu utters the name of Krishna or Rama, but all that muttering will be an empty formula if there is no honour behind it. If you are not prepared to stand by your own words, where will independence be? Independence is a thing, after all, made of stern stuff. It is not made by juggling with words."

This rebuke was well deserved, and Bose's later explanation that despite his earlier commitment to Gandhi he had to move his amendment on the pressure of his followers sounded unconvincing.

A noteworthy — and somewhat untoward — incident occurred later at the session when nearly 50,000 workers held a demonstration near the pandal and sought entry. Bose had reason to believe that the demonstration was engineered by certain elements which were not well disposed towards him. As G.O.C., he refused to admit them. He was persuaded, however, by Motilal Nehru to allow them entry. The demonstrators stayed in the pandal for a couple of hours and dispersed peacefully.

1 Selected Speeches of Subhas Chandra Bose, pp. 42-43
Soon after the Calcutta Congress, Gandhi took the wind out of the sails of his extremist critics by declaring in the *Young India* that if by December 31, 1929, the Government did not concede Dominion Status to India, he would turn an "Independence-wallah" on January 1, 1930. The year 1929 was thus to be a year of grace. Bose did not share the prevailing hope that there would be any change of heart on the part of the British Government, and he honestly felt that the temporising resolution of the Calcutta Congress would only serve to damp public enthusiasm. A succession of sensational incidents, however, disproved these fears.

The wave of strikes which had begun in 1928 continued in 1929, and it frightened both the employers and the Government. The labour movement was becoming class-conscious and militant, both in ideology and organisation. On March 29, 1929, the Government suddenly arrested the leaders of the Bombay Girma Kamgar Union, as well as labour leaders from Bengal, U.P. and the Punjab. Some of them were communists and their sympathisers, the rest being merely trade unionists. Thirty-one persons were arrested on a charge of conspiracy "to deprive His Majesty of the sovereignty of India", and they were brought to Meerut—an out-of-the-way town—where trial by jury did not obtain. Among those arrested were three Englishmen, and probably because of this the case roused great interest and sympathy in British labour ranks. It dragged on for nearly four years during which one of the accused died.

Judgment was delivered on January 16, 1933, acquitting three of the accused, and sentencing the rest to various terms of imprisonment, from three years to transportation for life. Bose was associated with the defence committee, and visited Meerut to meet the under-trial labour leaders. On April 8, 1929, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt hurled two bombs along with red pamphlets entitled *Hindustan Socialist Republic Army Notice*, into the Assembly chamber in New Delhi as President Patel was about to give his ruling on the Public Safety Bill. Sir John Simon happened to be present in the visitors' gallery. Bhagat Singh and Dutt said in their statement before the court that the bombs were thrown not with the object of taking life but of attracting the world's attention. The Central Legislative
Assembly, they said, was specially chosen for the occasion as it had been used by the Government repeatedly to flout the national demand, and it had become a symbol of India's humiliation and helplessness. Later on these two young men were also implicated with the murder of Saunders, a police officer. He had been shot dead in December 1928 as a reprisal for the assault on Lala Lajpat Rai, during the demonstrations against the Simon Commission. The fearless and dignified behaviour of Bhagat Singh and his comrades after their arrest and during their trial, made a deep impression on the public mind. Every town and village of the Punjab resounded with his name. The popularity he achieved was amazing, and to this day he is honoured as one of the foremost revolutionaries of India.

After the arrest of Bhagat Singh and Dutt, many other young men were also rounded up. It was alleged that they were engaged in widespread terrorist acts such as the manufacture of bombs, dacoity for political purposes, and murder. Among them was Jatindra Nath Das, a volunteer at the Calcutta Congress session. At their trial, known as the Lahore Conspiracy case, extraordinary scenes were witnessed. Partly as a protest against the treatment given to them in the court and prison, and partly by way of a demand for special classification for political prisoners, the accused went on a hunger strike. For over two months the strike dragged on and created a countrywide stir. Every heart was moved by the suffering of the hunger-strikers, but the Government remained obdurate. Although, his colleagues dropped out, one by one, or were forcibly fed, Jatin Das continued the valiant struggle until he died on the 61st day of his hunger-strike — September 13, 1929.

Demonstrations were held throughout the country. People gathered in their thousands at every railway station to pay homage to Das's body as it was being removed from Lahore to Calcutta for cremation. Among the tributes paid to Jatin Das was one from the family of Terence McSweeney, the Lord Mayor of Cork, who had similarly given up his life in the struggle for Irish freedom. Jatin Das's martyrdom served as an inspiration to the youth of India. (It may be noted that although the Government later issued a notification categorising prisoners in three classes, it refused to recognise a special class of political prisoners
as such). Bose, who took a prominent part in arranging the last rites of Das in Calcutta, had been arrested earlier (and released on bail) on August 11, on a charge of sedition for leading a procession on the All-Bengal Political Sufferers Day.

During 1929 Bose presided over a number of conferences, especially of the youth, all over the country. At the Rangpur Political Conference, on March 30, he declared: "The present year (1929) is a year of preparation. If we work in right earnest we shall be able to resort to civil disobedience campaign, and no-tax campaign, next year. There is no doubt that in the Lahore Congress the resolution for complete independence will be adopted." Reverting to the arrest of labour leaders he observed that until the labour movement gathered strength, the possibilities of repression remained. It was therefore necessary to establish unity among the various labour organisations, and also co-operation between the labour movement and the Congress. Bose urged a boycott of the Whitley Commission, appointed to report on labour conditions in India, and on the possible means of their amelioration, on the same lines as that of the Simon Commission.

During the latter part of the year he presided over the Punjab Students' Conference in Lahore, the Central Provinces Youth Conference in Nagpur, and the Berar Students' Conference at Amraoti.

The burden of his speeches at these conferences was more or less the same. At Lahore he asked why a ban should have been placed on students' participation in politics: "If in a dependent country all the problems are fundamentally political problems, then all national activity is in reality political in character. There is no ban on participation in politics in any free country; on the contrary, students are encouraged to take part in politics."1 He urged students to start co-operative swadeshi stores, which would serve a dual purpose of encouraging swadeshi and making goods available to themselves at a cheap price.

At Nagpur, Bose said: "The youth movement is an emblem of dissatisfaction with the present order of things. It stands for

1 J. S. Bright: Important Speeches and Writings of Subhas, pp. 91-92
the revolt of youth against age-old bondage, tyranny and oppres-
sion. It seeks to create a new and better world for ourselves and
humanity by removing all shackles and giving the fullest scope
to the creative activity of mankind. The youth movement is not,
therefore, an additional or exotic growth superimposed on the
movements of today. It is a genuine independent movement,
the main springs of which are deeply imbedded in human
nature . . . . The youth movement is in its scope co-extensive
with life itself. It therefore follows that the youth movement
will have as many departments as there are aspects in our life.”

Bose urged his young audience not to be lured or led away
by love of popularity: “On occasions you will have to take the
responsibility of creating public opinion or of stemming the
tide of popular feeling. If you wish to solve the fundamental
problem of your national life, you will have to look miles ahead
of your contemporaries. The mass mind is often unable to cut
itself off from present-day moorings and visualise the future. It
is not improbable that the mass mind will refuse to accept your
prescription. On such an occasion you must summon courage
to stand out, alone and unfriended, in the presence of the cross
as it were and fight the rest of the world. One who desires to
swim with the tide of popular approbation on all occasions may
become the hero of the hour, but he cannot live in history . . .
For the most unselfish actions we should be prepared to get
abuse and vilification; from our closest friends we should be
prepared for unwarranted hostility.”

At the Amraoti Students’ Conference he asked students not
to fight shy of the word ‘revolution’. “There is no inherent
difference between ‘evolution’ and ‘revolution’. Revolution is
evolution compressed into a shorter period; evolution is revo-
tion spread over a longer period. Both evolution and revolution
imply change and progress, and in nature there is room for both.
In fact, nature cannot do without either.” Bose delineated his
vision of a free India as “a perfect synthesis of all that is good
in the east and in the west.” As the heirs of free India, he asked

1 ibid., pp. 85-6
2 ibid., p. 87
3 ibid., p. 95
students to train themselves in such a manner as to be pioneers in social reconstruction.

In August a special meeting of the A.I.C.C. was called to decide who should preside over the plenary session. The consensus of opinion was in favour of Gandhi, who declined to accept the nomination. Next the name of Vallabhbhai Patel was suggested in view of his great achievement in the Bardoli no-tax campaign. Gandhi was not agreeable to his nomination, and at the last moment he put forward the name of Jawaharlal Nehru. "For the Mahatma the choice was a prudent one," wrote Bose in the Indian Struggle. "But for the Congress Left wing it proved to be unfortunate because that event marked the beginning of a political rapprochement between the Mahatma and Jawaharlal Nehru, and a consequent alienation between the latter and the Congress Left wing. Since 1920 Jawaharlal Nehru had been a close adherent of the policy advocated by the Mahatma, and his personal relations with the latter had been always friendly. Nevertheless, since his return from Europe in December 1927, Jawaharlal Nehru began to call himself a Socialist and give expression to views hostile to Mahatma Gandhi and the older leaders, and to ally himself in his public activities with the Left wing opposition in the Congress. But for his strenuous advocacy it would not have been possible for the Independence League to attain the importance that it did.

"Therefore for the Mahatma it was essential that he should win over Jawaharlal Nehru if he wanted to beat down the Left Wing opposition, and regain his former undisputed supremacy over the Congress. The Left wingers did not like that one of their most outstanding spokesmen should accept the presidency of the Lahore Congress because it was clear that the Congress would be dominated by the Mahatma, and the president would be a mere dummy. They were of the opinion that a Left wing leader should accept the presidency only when he was in a position to have his programme adopted by the Congress. But the Mahatma took a clever step in supporting the candidature of Jawaharlal Nehru, and his election as president opened a new chapter in his public career. Since then Jawahar-
lal Nehru has been a consistent and unfailing supporter of the Mahatma.”

Bose’s observations on Gandhi and Nehru might sound uncharitable and unfair, but their asperity is put in the correct perspective by Nehru’s own reactions to his election. “I have seldom felt quite so annoyed and humiliated as I did at that election,” he wrote in his Autobiography. “It was not that I was not sensible of the honour, for it was a great honour, and I would have rejoiced if I had been elected in the ordinary way. But I did not come to it by the main entrance or even a side entrance; I appeared suddenly by a trap-door and bewildered the audience into acceptance. They put a brave face on it, and like a necessary pill, swallowed me. My pride was hurt and almost I felt like handing back the honour. Fortunately I restrained myself from making an exhibition of myself and stole away with a heavy heart.”

A Labour Government came into power in Britain in May 1929. Consultations were held between the Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, and Sir John Simon, as a result of which the Viceroy made an announcement on October 31, 1929, to the effect that he had been authorised by His Majesty’s Government to state clearly that in their judgment, “it is implicit in the Declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India’s constitutional progress, as here contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status”. The Viceroy further stated that a Round Table Conference would be held in London after the publication of the report of the Simon Commission.

This ingeniously worded statement, which could mean anything or nothing, created high hopes, and at the instance of Vithalbhai Patel, President of the Legislative Assembly, a leaders’ conference was arranged at Delhi. A joint manifesto was adopted accepting the Viceroy’s declaration, which, it was emphasized, must be fulfilled. It was signed by Gandhi, the Nehrus (Motilal and Jawaharlal), Dr. Ansari, Malaviya, Sastr, Sapru, Dr. Moonje, Mrs. Resant and others. Bose pointed out that it was a trap reminiscent of a similar move made by the British Government some years earlier in Ireland, when Prime

1 Indian Struggle, pp. 169-70
2 Autobiography, pp. 194-95
Minister Lloyd George had suggested that a convention consisting of all parties should be held for framing a constitution. But the Sinn Fein Party was shrewd enough to see through the game and boycott the convention. Jawaharlal Nehru was at first reluctant to sign, and intended to issue a separate manifesto along with Bose, opposing the acceptance of Dominion Status and participation in the Round Table Conference. Gandhi, however, talked Jawaharlal Nehru into signing the manifesto as it would lose its importance if the President-elect of the Congress did not sign it.

Bose, Dr. Kitchlew and Abdul Bari issued a separate manifesto opposing the terms offered in the Viceroy's announcement. "And so it happened," Nehru bitterly mused, "that later on, though none of the conditions (laid down by the leaders) were satisfied and most of us lay in jail, together with scores of thousands of others, our Moderate and Responsivist friends, who had signed that manifesto with us, gave their full cooperation to our jailors."1

While Bose was taking a firm and straightforward stand on the Delhi Manifesto, he was dragged deeper and deeper into party squabbles in Bengal. By now the breach between Sengupta, who stood for blind obedience to Gandhi even in provincial party politics, and Bose, who followed an independent line, was complete, and two groups were formed in the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee supporting their respective leaders. The election for office-bearers was keenly fought and Bose's party emerged victorious. Nevertheless, Sengupta and his followers persisted in their opposition and the issue was referred to the Congress Working Committee. Pandit Motilal Nehru, the President, deputed Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya to conduct an inquiry on the spot. Bose did not apparently agree to the choice and Sitaramayya's visit to Calcutta proved infructuous. The mutual charges and counter-charges were ultimately referred to the All-India Congress Committee which met in Lahore. Much heat was generated when the question was taken up. Bose expressed regret for any aspersions he might have unintentionally cast on the President or any member of the Working Committee. It was finally decided that Motilal Nehru should

1 Autobiography, p. 196
himself go to Calcutta to give his award which should be binding on both groups. This was done soon after and the quarrel was patched up for the time being.

The Lahore session is historic in the annals of the Congress. At the midnight hour of the last day of 1929 the flag of independence was unfurled by Jawaharlal Nehru to the cheers of thousands, and amidst deafening shouts of *Inquilab Zindabad!* — Long live revolution! As he had promised at the beginning of the year, Gandhi himself moved the resolution advocating complete independence. The Leftists hailed it, but they were not satisfied with the steps adumbrated to achieve independence. They thought that no plan had been evolved to reach that goal, and on their behalf Bose moved an amendment that the Congress should aim at setting up a parallel government in the country, and should immediately take in hand the task of organizing workers, peasants and youths. In his speech he declared that he was an extremist and his principle was: *All or nothing!* He called for a programme of all-round boycott:

"The resolution refers to the constructive programme as the method whereby we have to achieve the political emancipation of India. I would like the House to consider whether the constructive programme, which the Congress has been pursuing for the last few years, is something which is sufficient to enable us to reach the goal of complete independence. No doubt there is a reference to civil disobedience in the resolution. But I submit that civil disobedience will never come until we can organize the workers and peasants and depressed classes on their specific grievances. If my programme is adopted, it will be sufficiently effective for us to march on the road to independence."1

The amendment was defeated. Differences between the Rightists and Leftists again came to a head over the election of members of the Working Committee. Bose, Srinivas Iyengar and others of their persuasion were excluded from the Working Committee on the specious plea of having a homogeneous body, which provoked a dramatic walk-out by Leftists.

True to his fighting spirit, Bose promptly formed the Congress Democratic Party on January 2, 1930, to win over Congressmen

1 *Selected Speeches of Subhas Chandra Bose*, p. 61
to his militant programme. He sent a telegram seeking the blessings of Basanti Devi (widow of C. R. Das): "Circumstances and tyranny of majority forced us to form a separate party as at Gaya. Pray, the spirit of Deshbandhu may guide us and your blessings may inspire us."

Bose's imprisonment soon after, however, made the new party in effect still-born.
CHAPTER 10

A STORMY YEAR

ON January 2, 1930, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution fixing January 26 as Independence Day, when meetings would be held and the independence pledge taken all over the country. (Since 1950 the day is celebrated as the Republic Day.)

The first Independence Day saw a vast gathering taking the pledge. Its opening clause read:

"We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives the people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe therefore that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj, or complete independence."

Immediately on his return to Calcutta, Bose began preparations for celebrating the Independence Day. On January 9 he presided over a meeting at Hazra Park to explain to the people the significance of the Day. As the president of the Trade Union Congress he specially appealed to workers to observe the Day, for, without Independence, their economic exploitation would never end. While he was engrossed in this organizational work, judgment was delivered in the case which was pending against him since August 1929. He was sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment on January 23 and sent to the Central Jail.
Though this event was in no way connected with the campaign that was soon to be launched, Bose’s imprisonment only proved a precursor to a wave of arrests, lathi charges and repression that was to sweep the country. The year 1930 was to witness a great political storm under the inspiring leadership of Gandhi. As was usual with him, he made a gentle beginning. In a statement issued on January 31 he announced his famous “Eleven Points”, and declared that he would call off the threatened civil disobedience movement if the British Government conceded his demands which contained the “substance of independence”. The Eleven Points were: (1) Total prohibition of alcohol; (2) the restoration of the exchange rate of the rupee to 1 s. 4 d.; (3) reduction of land revenue by 50 per cent; (4) abolition of the salt tax; (5) reduction of military expenditure by at least 50 per cent; (6) reduction of the salaries of civil servants by half; (7) a protective tariff against foreign cloth; (8) enactment of a coastal reservation bill in favour of Indian shipping; (9) release of all political prisoners not condemned for murder or attempted murder; (10) abolition or control of the Criminal Investigation Department; and (11) issue of licences for fire-arms for self-defence, subject to popular control.

Bose and Nehru were bewildered by these omnibus demands, of which the abolition of the salt-tax was to become the foremost. “What was the point of making a list of some political and social reforms—good in themselves no doubt—when we were talking in terms of independence? Did Gandhiji mean the same thing when he used this term as we did, or did we speak a different language?”—Nehru plaintively asked.

The answer was not long in coming. On March 2, Gandhi wrote a long letter to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, and sent it through a young Englishman, Reginald Reynolds. Referring to the demand for the abolition of the salt tax he said: “Even the salt he (the peasant) must use in order to live, is so taxed as to make the burden fall heaviest on him if only because of the heartless impartiality of its incidence. The tax shows itself more burdensome to the poor man, for salt is the one thing he must eat more than the rich, individually and collectively.”

Gandhiji said in conclusion: “If you cannot see your way to deal with these evils and my letter makes no appeal to your
heart, on the eleventh day of this month, I shall proceed with such co-workers of the Ashram as I can take, to disregard the provisions of the salt laws. I regard this tax to be the most iniquitous of all from the poor man's standpoint. As the independence movement is essentially for the poorest in the land, a beginning will be made with this evil. The wonder is that we have submitted to the cruel monopoly for so long. It is, I know, open to you to frustrate my design by arresting me. I hope that there will be tens of thousands ready, in a disciplined manner to take up the work after me, and, in the act of disobeying the Salt Act, to lay themselves open to the penalties of a law that should never have disfigured the statute book.”

Lord Irwin sent a curt reply expressing his regret that Gandhi should be “contemplating a cause of action which was clearly bound to involve violation of the law and danger to the public peace”. Gandhi's rejoinder to this was characteristic: “On bended knees I asked for bread and received a stone instead. The English nation responds only to force and I am not surprised by the Viceregal reply. The only public peace the nation knows is the peace of the public prison. India is a vast prison-house. I repudiate this (British) law and regard it as my sacred duty to break the mournful monotony of compulsory peace that is choking the heart of the nation for want of free vent.”

Gandhi's historic march to Dandi became inevitable. He started for his destination on March 2, with a band of 78 followers chosen from those members of his Ashram and students of the Gujarat Vidyapith, who had offered themselves as volunteers. His destination lay 241 miles away, on the seashore, and the march was to last 24 days. "Like the historic march of Ramchandra to Lanka, the march of Gandhi will be memorable," said Motilal Nehru. It was "like the exodus of Israelites under Moses", added P. C. Roy. Every day of the march added to the public enthusiasm and gave a momentum to the movement. Rarely has such a spectacle, of a frail old man challenging the might of a powerful government by the simple expedient of picking up a lump of natural salt, or of making it out of sea-water been witnessed in modern times. Salt suddenly turned into a magic word, a word of power. Like the hated gabelle, which served as a rallying cry for the peasantry on the eve of
the French Revolution, or the Boston Tea party during the revolt of the American colonies against Britain, salt became a symbol of rebellion. On April 6, the anniversary of the Amritsar massacre, Gandhi, after a bath and prayers, picked up a handful of salt and was promptly hailed by Sarojini Naidu as a "law breaker". In a statement he said: "Now that the technical or ceremonial breach of the salt law has been committed, it is open to any one who would take the risk of prosecution under the Salt Act, to manufacture salt, whenever he wishes and wherever it is convenient."

Here was the signal the people were waiting for. Manufacture of salt and raids on salt depots began all over the country. The different provinces vied with each other in this campaign regardless of police beatings. The Government, which was first inclined to dismiss the Dandi march as a theatrical stunt, took alarm and started a reign of terror before which, in the words of Gandhi, even Dyerism paled into insignificance. What was remarkable was that despite the arrest of most leaders the movement, on the whole, remained non-violent.

Its most spectacular demonstration occurred in Peshawar, the capital of the North-West Frontier Province, on April 23 and succeeding days. On the arrest of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the leader of the Khudai Khidmatgars — servants of God — who were popularly known as Red Shirts, thousands of people surrounded the place of his detention and held a mammoth meeting to protest against his arrest. Armoured cars were sent to cow down the demonstrators. One armoured car was burnt after which wholesale firing was resorted to, resulting in scores of deaths and hundreds of casualties. An unprecedented development took place when two platoons of the Second Battalion of the 18th Royal Garhwal Rifles refused to obey the order to fire on the peaceful demonstrators and were put under detention in their barracks.

Gandhi was arrested on May 5. "At the dead of night like thieves they came to steal him away," wrote Mira Behn, his English disciple, "for 'when they sought to lay hands on him they feared the multitude because they took him for a prophet'."

Despite Gandhi's arrest the movement gathered force every passing day — the most noteworthy feature of which was the
participation by women in their thousands. There was no dearth of volunteers to break the law and fill the jails. The leadership of the movement, from the highest echelons to the lowest, was kept alive by the system of nominating successors—"dictators" as they were popularly called. Jawaharlal Nehru requested Gandhi to succeed him as acting president, but on his refusal he nominated his father, Motilal, who was to pass away within a few months.

*Prabhat pheris* (morning processions), observance of special days like Peshawar Day, *hartals*, mass raids on salt depots, boycott of foreign goods—all these kept the movement at fever heat. Numerous acts of moral and physical courage were witnessed everywhere in the face of the lathi and bayonet-wielding policemen. "In eighteen years of reporting in twenty-two countries during which I have witnessed innumerable civil disturbances, riots, street fights and rebellions," wrote Webb Miller, "I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at Dharasana (a salt depot). Sometimes the scenes were so painful that I had to turn my eyes away momentarily. One surprising feature was the discipline of the volunteers. They were thoroughly imbued with Gandhi's non-violent creed." George Slocombe of the *Daily Herald* felt it "humiliating for an Englishman" to watch a similar scene at Wadala in Bombay.

From behind prison bars Subhas Chandra Bose watched the mounting tempo of the movement with joy. For once he had nothing but admiration for Gandhi's leadership and his capacity to evoke the highest acts of bravery and sacrifice from common people. Nor was Bose to be spared the assaults to which his comrades outside were being subjected daily. On April 22 the Alipore Central Jail, where he was detained, was the scene of a tussle between the jail staff and Anglo-Indian prisoners, on the one hand, and political prisoners on the other. Among those attacked by the jail staff, were Sengupta, Kiron Shankar Roy and Bose. So severely was Bose beaten that he was rendered unconscious for more than an hour. Somehow a rumour spread that Sengupta and Bose had died, and thousands of people collected outside the jail gate. A committee of inquiry was later appointed and the jail superintendent was transferred.

Bose was involved in a hunger strike at the end of July for
the redress of some grievances of political prisoners. The strike was quickly resolved after certain official assurances. On September 25, Bose was released and, soon after, was elected mayor of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. In December 1930 he started the Bengal Swadeshi League for co-ordinating the activities of industrialists, businessmen and social workers.

Bose was not unhappy that the negotiations for calling off the civil disobedience movement, begun on the initiative of George Slocombe, had broken down. The campaign was still gaining ground, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel having launched a no-tax campaign in Bardoli. Nehru wanted a similar movement to be started in the United Provinces. In Bengal, unfortunately, party differences had become so acute that two separate committees were formed to conduct the civil disobedience movement. Thanks to Motilal Nehru’s mediation the differences were ironed out and the prestige and strength of the Congress party in Bengal restored.

The report of the Simon Commission was published in June and the Government of India sent its views to Whitehall as a preliminary to the discussions at the Round Table Conference. None except prospective delegates to the Conference were concerned with this constitutional exercise since the Congress had boycotted both the Commission and the Conference.

While preparations were being made to hold the Round Table Conference in London, an Ordinance Raj operated in India. Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, had promulgated a dozen ordinances such as the Unlawful Instigation Ordinance, the Press Ordinance and the Unlawfulness Association Ordinance. The cumulative effect of these “lawless laws” was to drive the civil disobedience movement underground. Congress Committees were declared illegal organizations, their properties confiscated and their meetings banned. Snap street corner meetings, however, were held and Congress bulletins circulated freely. The Congress writ ran in cities like Bombay, and only the avowed loyalists supported the Government.

It was such a political atmosphere that reigned in India when the Round Table Conference was opened with stately splendour in London on November 12, 1930. The delegates numbered 86, of whom 13 represented the different parties in Britain, 16 were
Indian princes or their nominees, and 57 were from British India. The Congress, of course, was conspicuous by its absence. It was like Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark and the other actors were keenly conscious of it. The conference divided itself into a number of sub-committees but its purpose was far from accomplished when it adjourned on January 19, 1931. In his concluding speech Prime Minister Macdonald announced the policy of His Majesty's Government in regard to the future constitution of India in the following words:

"The view of His Majesty's Government is that responsibility for the Government of India should be placed upon the legislatures, central and provincial, with such provisions as may be necessary to guarantee, during a period of transition, the observance of certain obligations and to meet other special circumstances, and also with such guarantees as are required by the minorities, to protect their political liberties and rights.

"In such statutory safeguards as may be made for meeting the needs of the transitional period, it will be the primary concern of His Majesty's Government to see that the reserved powers are so framed and exercised as not to prejudice advance of India through the new constitution to full responsibility for her own government."

Macdonald added significantly: "If, in the meantime, there is response to the Viceroy's appeal from those engaged at present in civil disobedience, steps will be taken to enlist their services."

Realizing that his viceregal tenure was nearing its end and that something was needed to be done to restore his reputation as a 'Christian Viceroy', Lord Irwin ordered the release of Gandhi and the members of the Working Committee on January 25, 1931. He declared: "My Government will impose no condition on these releases for we feel that the best hope of restoration of peaceful conditions lies in discussions being conducted by those concerned under the terms of unconditional liberty.

"Our action has been taken in pursuance of a sincere desire to assist the creation of such peaceful conditions as would enable the Government to implement the undertakings given by the Prime Minister, that if civil quiet were proclaimed and observed, Government would not be backward in response."
"I am content to trust those who will be affected by our decision to act in the same spirit as inspires it, and I am confident that they will recognize the importance of securing for these grave issues calm and dispassionate examination."

Gandhi was released the following day, which happened to be the second anniversary of Independence Day.

By an ironical coincidence Bose was severely injured by the police that very day, while he was leading a procession as the Mayor of Calcutta. That morning a police officer served on him an order from the Police Commissioner not to lead the procession. Bose refused to obey the order. During the lathi charge he received five injuries including the fracture of two fingers of his right hand. He was taken to the Lalbazar police station and detained overnight without food, change of clothes or medical attention. Next day he appeared in court with his clothes stained with blood and his arm in a sling to receive a sentence of six months' rigorous imprisonment. He was, however, released soon after, on March 8, in the general amnesty. Earlier, in January, he had undergone seven days' simple imprisonment for violating an order not to enter the Maldha district.
RESPONDING to a request of some delegates to the Round Table Conference Gandhi declared, on his release, that he had come out of jail with an open mind, and that he was prepared to study the whole situation from every point of view, and to discuss the British Premier's statement with them. Before he could meet them, however, he had to rush to Allahabad to visit Motilal Nehru who was seriously ill. The members of the Congress Working Committee, who were released, were also summoned there. They passed a resolution to the effect that the civil disobedience movement was to continue unabated, but its publication was withheld. Motilal was in no condition to participate in the proceedings of the committee. "I am going away, Mahatmaji," he whispered to Gandhi, "and I shall not be here to see Swaraj. But I know that you have won it and will soon have it." On February 4, he was removed to Lucknow for X-ray treatment. Two days later he breathed his last. His death was all the more tragic occurring as it did on the eve of momentous discussions. Bose said that the last intellectual stalwart of the Congress had disappeared.

On the same day, 26 delegates to the Round Table Conference who had returned to India, appealed to the Congress to come forward to make a solid contribution to the completion of the scheme which they had prepared in London. Sapru, Sastri and some other delegates hastened to Allahabad, and had long discussions with Gandhi and members of the Congress Working Committee. To probe the intentions of the Government—for repression still continued despite the gestures of the Prime Minister and the Viceroy—Gandhi wrote a letter to Lord Irwin seeking an inquiry into reports of police atrocities. This request was summarily turned down. Gandhi was again persuaded to
ask for a 'heart-to-heart' talk with the Viceroy. Lord Irwin having agreed to receive him, Gandhi left for Delhi on February 16. The talks began the next day in an air of great expectancy. The Congress Working Committee invested Gandhi with pleni-
potentiary powers to negotiate a settlement.

The Gandhi-Irwin talks have become historic, partly on account of their dramatic background, and partly because of
the vitriolic comment made about them by Sir Winston Chur-
chill: "It is alarming and nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a
seditionous Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a
type well-known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps
of the Viceregal Palace, while he is still organizing and conduct-
ing a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal
terms with the representative of the King-Emperor."

The talks continued with varying fortunes—at times they
were on the point of a break-down—till March 5 when an agree-
ment known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed. The progress
of the talks was watched with keen anxiety by the Leftists, and
more especially by Nehru (who was with Gandhi in Delhi),
and Bose, who was in the Alipore Central jail. The terms of the
Pact only deepened their anxiety. The Congress agreed to the
suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement, and to partici-
pation in the deliberations of the Round Table Conference on
the basis of federation, responsibility and safeguards. The Gov-
ernment agreed to withdraw the emergency ordinances, to
release all political prisoners, to permit peaceful picketing and
the manufacture of salt, free of duty, within a certain distance
of the sea-shore. In fairness, it must be conceded that the Pact
was hailed with relief by the country at large. Nehru was dis-
tressed particularly by clause two of the Pact referring to
reservations and safeguards. "Was it for this," he asked in
anguish, "that our people had behaved so gallantly for a year?
Were all our brave words and deeds to end in this?" Bose called
it a 'curse'. Gandhi naturally defended the Pact as a victory
for both parties.

The main item on the agenda of the Karachi Congress, which
met on March 29, 1931, under the presidentship of Sardar
Vallabhbhai Patel, was to ratify the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. A deep
gloom hung over the session due to the execution of Bhagat
Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev on its very eve, the Viceroy having turned down Gandhi’s plea of clemency on their behalf. Gandhi was greeted with black flags on his arrival at Karachi by members of the Nawajawan Bharat Sabha (All-India Youth Congress). The eruption of Hindu-Muslim riots in Kanpur, in which Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, a prominent Congress leader, was murdered added to the gloom. The success of the resolution on the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, however, was assured by two adroit manoeuvres of the Congress Working Committee. Nehru was persuaded to move it in the open session, and the father of Bhagat Singh was brought all the way from Lahore to support it. An important and far-reaching resolution before the Karachi session related to Fundamental Rights and Economic and Social Changes. In essence, this resolution formed the basis of the Fundamental Rights which were to be enshrined in the Constitution of Free India nineteen years later.

Bose had long talks with Gandhi on the Pact at Bombay. From Bombay they travelled together to Karachi. Bose was greatly impressed by the ovations the Mahatma received everywhere, which proved his undiminished popularity with the masses. The Leftists decided that though they disapproved of the Pact, they would refrain from dividing the Congress on it in view of the peculiar circumstances then prevailing, and to present a united front to the Government. They were convinced, moreover, that the majority of delegates were inclined to accept the Pact. Bose accordingly read a statement in the Subjects Committee, which was greeted with jubilation by the supporters of the Pact, although it caused acute disappointment to the Leftists.

Bose presided over a session of the Nawajawan Bharat Sabha held simultaneously with that of the Congress. In his speech he urged the foundation of a socialist republic in India. He also subjected the Gandhi-Irwin Pact to a searching analysis: “It is exceedingly unsatisfactory and highly disappointing. What pains me most is the consideration that at the time the Pact was drawn up we actually had more strength than would appear from the contents of the document.” The Sabha passed a resolution condemning the Pact, and asked its members to do constructive work to strengthen the nation. Similar resolutions were passed
at the provincial conference of the Sabha held at Mathura in May, and the All-India Trade Union Congress at Calcutta in July, both under the presidency of Bose.

In his address to the Trade Union Congress Bose deplored the split which had occurred at the Nagpur session of the Trade Union Congress, and urged the Congress to close its ranks: "I want unity because thereby we can have a strong and powerful organization. But if we are to quarrel again and part company, then we need not attempt a patched-up unity now. The Trade Union Congress is public property. All unions are welcome to join the Congress and make their presence felt. If thereby the office of the Congress passes into the hands of a particular party, then no one can legitimately complain. I would, therefore, earnestly invite all unions to join the Trade Union Congress and to capture the executive if they so desire."

Bose could scarcely have envisaged then that the split was to harden and congeal into a permanent bifurcation of the ranks of Indian labour. He welcomed the recommendations of the Whitley Commission, which would improve the conditions of workers, if honestly implemented. The Fundamental Rights resolution passed by the Karachi Congress was welcomed as "a definite move in the direction of socialism". The salvation of India as of the world, concluded Bose, depended on socialism. "India should learn from and profit by the experience of other nations, but she should be able to evolve her own methods in keeping with her own needs and her own environment. In applying any theory to practice, you can never rule out geography or history. If you attempt it you are bound to fail. India should therefore evolve her own form of socialism. When the whole world is engaged in socialistic experiments, why should we not do the same? It may be that the form of socialism which India will evolve will have something new and original about it which will be of benefit to the whole world."

It was not the Leftists alone who were dissatisfied with the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. The steel frame — the Indian Civil Service, which then was comprised mostly of British members — was even more sore, and it sought every excuse and opportunity to evade its implementation. Its hands were strengthened first by the

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1 Selected Speeches of Subhas Chandra Bose, p. 69
change in the viceroyalty, and later by the change of Government in Britain. Lord Willingdon, who took over from Lord Irwin on April 17, 1931, was reputed to be bitterly hostile to the Congress and personally allergic to Gandhi, although he professed to sympathise with Indian aspirations. The mutual esteem established between Irwin and Gandhi gave way to distrust and resentment.

Complaints began to pour into the Congress Office about breaches of the agreement. Tension increased especially in the politically sensitive provinces such as Bengal, the United Provinces and the North-West Frontier Province. The Black and Tan methods that were employed in Bengal, brought on a series of regrettable incidents. The vicious circle of unredressed popular grievances and official repression produced an explosive situation and Gandhi's mind was overcome with doubt about whether the edifice of the truce which he and Lord Irwin had so laboriously built was not crumbling. In June the Congress had authorised him to attend the Round Table Conference as its sole representative, but he was loath to do so unless the Pact was faithfully implemented, and an agreement arrived at on the Hindu-Muslim problem. The latter was not to materialize then or ever. As for the former, assurances were received from the Government as a result of the prolonged correspondence conducted by Gandhi with various provincial authorities on specific grievances, and his frequent visits to Simla.

A formula was found to satisfy both parties on the basis of the March 5 agreement, and Gandhi sailed from Bombay for London on August 29 as the sole representative of the Congress. If Gandhi had any illusions about gaining "the substance of independence" at the Round Table Conference, he was disillusioned in his very first meeting with Sir Samuel Hoare (later Lord Templewood), the Conservative Secretary of State for India. The latter frankly told him that there could be no question of immediate independence for India, or even of Dominion Status. The best that could be done was to move slowly towards it. At the conference itself Gandhi was consistently outmanoeuvred and outvoted, and his claim to represent the whole of India was brusquely rejected, not merely by the British spokesmen but also by some Indian delegates. His speeches at the open session
or the Committee meetings were politely listened to, but his repeated appeals to the delegates to present a united front were unceremoniously disregarded.

Speaking before the Minorities Committee on October 8 Gandhi said: "Causes of failure were inherent in the composition of the Indian delegation. We are almost all not elected representatives of the parties or groups we are presumed to represent. We are here by the nomination of the Government. Nor are those whose presence was absolutely necessary for an agreed solution, to be found here." It was a vain fight against an entrenched alien power, which had set up a plethora of feudal and communal interests to defeat and nullify the Congress demand. "The Congress," Gandhi declared, "will wander, no matter how many years, in the wilderness rather than lend itself to a proposal under which the hardy tree of freedom and responsible Government can never grow." He bade goodbye to the Round Table Conference on December 1, 1931, with the ominous words that they had come to the parting of ways. He hoped, however, that if a fight was unavoidable, it would be conducted without malice on either side.

Assessing the failure of Gandhi at the Round Table Conference, four years later, Bose compared it to the similar reverse suffered by President Wilson at the Versailles Conference: "The Professor-President of America was no match for the Welsh wizard, Mr. Lloyd George; nor was the saint-politician from India any match for the wily Mr. Ramsay Macdonald." Gandhi’s agreement to constitute himself as the sole representative of the Congress was thoroughly wrong in Bose’s view: "Alone in an assembly of about one hundred men, with all kinds of nondescripts, flunkies and self-appointed leaders arrayed against him like a solid phalanx, he was at a great disadvantage." If fifteen or so Congress delegates could have accompanied him — according to the terms of the original offer made by the Government — they would have been useful in crossing swords with reactionary elements. He should have insisted on nationalist Muslims being represented at the Conference. Gandhi’s pro-

1 The Indian Struggle, p. 228
2 ibid., p. 213
gramme in London was badly planned and he engaged himself in too many side activities to the detriment of his main work."

Bose felt that Gandhi played a double role during his stay in England—the role of a political leader and that of a world teacher: "Sometimes he conducted himself, not as a political leader who had come to negotiate with the enemy, but a master who had come to preach a new faith—that of non-violence and world peace. Because of his second role, he had to spend much of his time with people who were quite useless in promoting his political mission." Indeed, Bose rightly thought that if the Mahatma had desired to co-operate at all with the Round Table Conference he should have gone there in 1930: "With the Labour Cabinet in power in England in 1930 and Lord Irwin in Delhi, the Congress could have given a different turn to the Conference."¹

While Gandhi was waging a one-man crusade in London, the political situation in India was fast deteriorating. The solemn assurances given first by Lord Irwin and then by Lord Willingdon were brought to nought, in devious ways, by the bureaucracy. The inquiry promised into the allegations of police excesses in connection with the collection of revenue in Bardoli, was conducted in such a manner as to prove worse than useless. As a protest Vallabhbhai Patel and Bhulabhai Desai, who represented the Congress, withdrew from the inquiry. In the United Provinces the conflict between landlords and the tenants was coming to a boil. The partial relief in the collection of land revenue granted by the former owing to the intervention of the Government was considered inadequate and unsatisfactory by the peasantry. A conference under the auspices of the Allahabad District Congress Committee passed a resolution declaring that, if better terms could not be obtained, it would have to advise the peasants to withhold payment of revenue. The U.P. Government considered this sufficient provocation to promulgate an ordinance permitting arrest and detention on suspicion, without trial. In the North-West Frontier Province the Government arrested Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, leader of the Khudai Khidmatgars, on the pretext that he did not care to attend a Durbar held by the Chief Commissioner.

¹ ibid., pp. 25-6
UNEASY TRUCE

It was in Bengal, however, that the situation headed towards a grave crisis. There was unimaginable ill-treatment of political prisoners in many jails in the province, and appeals to the Government for redress proved unavailing. The atrocities committed in Midnapore district to suppress the no-tax campaign provoked the murder of a succession of British magistrates. In Chittagong the murder of a police officer let loose a reign of hooliganism in the town. They looted it in broad daylight while the authorities remained passive. In November a veiled form of martial law was imposed on Chittagong. At the Hijli camp, about 70 miles from Calcutta, where State prisoners were detained, the guards opened fire allegedly to quell a riot, killing two and seriously injuring twenty of the inmates. A judicial inquiry held that the firing was unjustified. At Dacca in the wake of an unsuccessful attempt to murder the District Magistrate, batches of policemen raided the houses of respectable citizens, destroyed property, assaulted innocent persons and made indiscriminate arrests. Bose, who was a member of the Committee appointed to inquire into the incident, was physically prevented from reaching Dacca. The moment he was free, he attempted to reach it from a different direction. On reaching Tejgaon station he was arrested. He was subsequently released on November 14.

A special session of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee was held at Behrampore in December to consider the situation. It resolved that the Government had violated the Delhi Pact and asked the Congress Working Committee to give formal notice to the Government, and revive the civil disobedience movement with special emphasis on the boycott of British goods. The revival of the civil disobedience movement, it argued, would attract youth to non-violent forms of protest, and thereby help to stop the growing terrorist activities in Bengal.

Gandhi was kept posted in London with all these ominous developments, but all he could do was counsel patience and restraint until his return home. He could have been in no doubt of what awaited him when he landed at Bombay, on December 28, 1931, to the acclamation of thousands of citizens who had gathered at Ballard Pier to receive him. Next day he sent a telegram to the Viceroy: "I was unprepared on landing yesterday to find the Frontier and U.P. Ordinances, shootings in the
Frontier and arrests of valued comrades in both provinces and, on the top, the Bengal Ordinance awaiting me. I do not know whether I am to regard these as an indication that friendly relations between us are closed, or whether you expect me still to see and receive guidance from you as to the course I am to pursue in advising the Congress.” Lord Willingdon sent a curt reply refusing to discuss with Gandhi any measures his Government, with the fullest approval of His Majesty's Government, found it necessary to adopt. A request for an interview was also summarily turned down.

Bose, who was specially asked to attend the Working Committee meeting which authorized Gandhi to send the messages, was alone in expressing the opinion that it would be humiliating for the Mahatma in the circumstances obtaining then, to apply for an interview. Before coming to Bombay he had presided over the Maharashtra Youth Conference in Poona which passed a resolution calling on the Congress Working Committee to resume the civil disobedience movement. He was arrested on January 2, 1932, at Kalyan on his way back to Calcutta. Nehru was arrested earlier on his way to Bombay. Gandhi himself was arrested on January 4, along with Vallabhbhai Patel. The brief and uneasy truce between the Congress and the Government had come to an end.
CHAPTER 12

INTO EXILE

The arrest of Gandhi and other Congress leaders marked the opening move of the Government's offensive which had been prepared in the minutest detail during the uneasy truce. A set of Ordinances was issued on the same day, on the strength of which Gandhi was arrested (January 4), and made effective all over the country. Congress Committees, Ashrams and other national institutions were declared unlawful and their funds and properties seized. Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India, admitted in the House of Commons that the Ordinances were very drastic. They were drawn up in a comprehensive form because he said, "the Government, with the full knowledge at their disposal, sincerely believed that they were threatened with an attack on the whole basis of Government and that the Ordinances were essential if India was to be prevented from drifting into anarchy."

Left leaderless, the people did not know in what manner the civil disobedience was to be renewed, and which laws were to be disobeyed. However, they were not dismayed for long. They came forth in their thousands to break laws which they considered to be unjustified. Raids were again organized on salt depots and reserved forests. Attempts were even made to regain the symbolic possession of sequestered properties. Police brutality reached a new high, and even satyagrahis in prison were not spared from it. According to official statistics, 14,800 arrests were made in January, and 17,800 in February 1932. The movement was intensified with the boycott of British goods, picketing of liquor shops, publication of unauthorized news-sheets called Congress Bulletins, organization of processions and hartals. The National Week was observed from April 6 to 13, and even a token session of the Congress was held on April 24. The move-
ment thus flourished, belying Lord Willingdon's hopes of crushing it within six months. The Government then started arresting even sympathisers of the movement. Bhuilabhai Desai, former Advocate General of Bombay, and Sarat Chandra Bose found themselves in detention without even a charge-sheet.

The country gave as good an account of itself as it had done two years earlier. There was this difference however. In 1930 the Congress was on the offensive while Government was on the defensive. In 1932 the roles were reversed. Nevertheless, the public response to the movement left nothing to be desired. The total arrests during the first four months of 1932 were over 80,000. The jails were so overcrowded that ordinary convicts were released to make room for political prisoners. A particularly odious aspect of the Government's offensive was the gagging of the Press. There were as many as 163 cases in which action was taken against newspapers. Their presses were searched, seized or confiscated, and their editors and printers arrested. The Home Member admitted in the Central Legislative Assembly that in dispersing assemblies, firing was ordered 17 times in Bengal, seven times in the United Provinces, three times in Bihar and Orissa, once in Madras Presidency and once in the North-West Frontier Province. The toll of firing in the Bombay Presidency alone was 34 killed and 91 injured. While the civil disobedience movement was being bravely waged by the people themselves, an unexpected development occurred diverting public attention and energy.

Gandhi declared a fast unto death on September 20 to protest against the 'Communal Award' of the British Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald. Under the award, the Depressed Classes or Untouchables (later called the Harijans), were not only given separate electorates but were also granted the additional right of contesting seats in the general constituencies. This was an obvious attempt to dismember the Depressed Classes from the Hindu community, against which Gandhi had solemnly warned at the second Round Table Conference. He was in communication with the British authorities over this for some months. No sooner was the Award announced than he informed Macdonald about his intention to fast unto death unless redress was forthcoming. The Premier replied that the Award could not be
changed unless an alternative was agreed to by all the groups and interests concerned.

From this distance in time, it is hardly possible to realize the nation-wide dismay and anguish that was caused by Gandhi's fast. There were hurried consultations among various leaders; frantic appeals were issued to save the Mahatma's precious life, and a number of eminent personages descended upon Yerawada jail (where Gandhi was interned) to persuade him to give up his fast. Rajendra Prasad declared: "Hindu society is on trial. If it has any life in it, it must now respond with a great and magnificent act." Madan Mohan Malaviya called a conference to find a solution. A scheme was ultimately evolved on the fifth day of the fast which was acceptable both to Gandhi and to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the champion of the Depressed Classes. Dr. Ambedkar agreed to forgo separate electorates on certain terms. The agreement, known as the Poona Pact, lost its validity with the ushering in of independence in 1947.

Bose was perforce a detached observer of all these dramatic happenings from behind prison bars. As in 1930 he was elated by the courageous response of the people to the national call, although he gradually realized that the enthusiasm could not be long sustained, due to lack of leadership. When Gandhi launched his sudden fast he found that "all rational thinking was completely suspended, and the one thought of his countrymen was how to save his life." The civil disobedience movement was completely side-tracked and soon lost its momentum. The 'epic fast' of Gandhi no doubt roused the conscience of the Hindu community and gave a powerful impetus to the eradication of untouchability. But it also marked a turning point for the movement, and from then on, the Government got the better of the Congress.

While Bose was brooding over all these developments in his cell, his health, never robust since his detention in Burma, began to deteriorate. On his arrest on January 2, he was taken to Seoni jail from where he was removed to Jabalpur Central Jail. Since his health did not improve there, he was again transferred to the Madras Penitentiary on July 17, where he spent the next three months. Mukundlal Sarkar, who was detained in the same jail, has given an interesting account of Bose's life.
He looked a physical wreck on arrival and lived mostly on tea and water mixed with lime juice. "He would not eat but would feed others, and for that he would cook himself. That was his pleasure. His preparations were really excellent. One day he said in all humour that when he would be released, he would be able to earn at least Rs. 40 per month as a cook, and thus remove himself from the list of vagabonds."  

Bose had started a Sunday class for political prisoners with about 125 students. His weekly talk extended over an hour. Along with intellectual pabulum he also used to provide his audience with snacks prepared by himself. "He must give something new every week either in politics or eatables."

Despite his failing health Bose was negligent about medicines which Sarkar had to coax him to take, along with some nourishing food. If Sarkar is to be believed, it was in Madras Penitentiary that Bose prepared the first draft of *The Indian Struggle*, consisting of about 100 pages. According to him, it was smuggled out of jail and printed in Coimbatore. Bose makes no mention of this in his preface to the book under that title, published in Britain in 1935.

Again, according to Sarkar, it was in Madras that Bose formulated his ideas on *Hindustan Samyawadi Sangh* which he was to incorporate later in his political statement issued from Vienna.

Once the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Madras paid his routine visit to the jail and asked Bose whether he was comfortable. Like a flash came his reply: "You should feel ashamed of yourself and your Government to keep me a prisoner without any charge or trial. Don't you think it is sheer mockery to ask a prisoner if he is comfortable? Why don't you put yourself in this position and then get the answer?" No official visitor ever again bothered Bose!

Bose was a voracious reader on socialism and communism. His interest in spiritual matters, however, in no way waned. In a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy (September 1932) he wrote: "I do not know if I am sufficiently 'open' to receive yogic power—probably not. Nevertheless, I think that even those who rule out a supra-mental order have to admit the existence and efficacy

1 *Netaji*, p. 116
of what is popularly styled 'will-power'. And this power is bound to act even if the receiver is not 'open' or adequately and consciously receptive.

"I have been studying a bit and thinking more; at times I feel as if I am groping in the dark. But I cannot go wrong as long as I am sincere and earnest—even if my progress towards truth be more zig-zag than straight. After all life's march is not as straight as a straight line.

"Has not each of us a sphere of work allotted to us, taking 'work' in the broadest sense? And is not this sphere conditioned by our past karma, our present desires and our present environment? Nevertheless, how difficult it is to understand or realize our proper sphere of work? This sphere of work is the external aspect of our nature or dharma. It is so easy to say 'live according to your swadharma', but so difficult to know what one's dharma is. It is here that the help of a guru becomes so necessary and even indispensable."¹

Bose's stay in Madras did little good to his health. On the contrary, his gall bladder was affected and he became distinctly worse. A medical board appointed by the Government of India came to Madras to examine him. The majority of its members recommended his removal to a bracing climate, preferably out of India. But as the report was not unanimous, the Government sent him to the Bhowali sanatorium in the United Provinces on October 9.

There also Bose's health did not show the least improvement and another medical board was appointed to examine him and report on his health. It also recommended that he should be sent to Europe for treatment and change of climate. The Government of India agreed to release him provided he proceeded straight to Europe, at his own expense. Such was its vindictive policy however, that Bose was not allowed to meet his parents or friends before his departure. Only a few relatives were allowed to see him in jail. The police officers who escorted him to Bombay surrounded him like a pack of hounds until the SS Ganges, by which he sailed, left the harbour on February 23, 1933.

¹ Netaji The Man, pp. 64-5
CHAPTER 13

ACTIVITIES IN EUROPE

BOSE arrived in Vienna on March 8, 1933, and three days later entered Firths Sanatorium for treatment. His immediate concern was to improve his health which was shattered during the previous fourteen months. Scarcely could he have imagined then that he was to remain in exile in Europe for the next four years, or that he would be shadowed by the agents of the British Government wherever he went. They watched his movements and tried to hinder his contacts with prominent officials. Bose visited many countries to win sympathizers for the Indian freedom movement. The tactics of the British agents varied with the occasion and the country. In fascist or pro-fascist countries they tried to paint him as a communist. In democratic or socialist countries they described him as a fascist.

British embassies and consulates did their best to misrepresent him wherever he went. The British Ambassador in Yugoslavia, for instance, took the extraordinary step of requesting its Foreign Office to prevent Yugoslavian newspapers from publishing interviews with Bose. Even British M.P.s lent a hand in the campaign. One of them, Sir Walter Smiles, was so agitated over a speech delivered by Bose in Geneva in September 1933, that he suggested that he should be put in prison on his return to India. No reply was given by Sir Walter when Bose challenged him to point out a single falsehood in his statement. Bose was among the few men in India who realized the value of propaganda abroad. He had discussed this issue in his very first letter, in 1922 from Cambridge to C. R. Das, who wanted to organize an Asiatic League for that purpose.

It was not surprising, therefore, that back in Europe, Bose should take every opportunity to propagate the cause of Indian freedom. He found a kindred spirit in Vithalbhai Patel, former
President of the Indian Legislative Assembly, who was also then in Europe for medical treatment, Patel had a keen appreciation of the utility of foreign propaganda. He had definite ideas on how it should be conducted. He had established close contacts with Eamon de Valera, who found him an astute and far-sighted politician. It was at De Valera's initiative, and with his help, that Patel had undertaken a propaganda tour in the United States during 1932-33. So strenuous was the tour—he delivered 85 lectures in less than five months, all over America—that when he returned to Europe in March 1933 his health was ruined. Vithalbhai Patel and Bose had many qualities in common, and a rapport was soon established between them. Bose found in Vithalbhai a loving friend and a shrewd counsellor. Many were the discussions they had over the developments in India. Both were fiery patriots and ardent Leftists, and they did not approve of the manner in which Gandhi had abandoned the civil disobedience movement over an extraneous issue, in September 1932. The movement, however, was not officially withdrawn despite waning popular response. As many as 120,000 persons, including several thousand women, were arrested and imprisoned during fifteen months ending March 1933. But Gandhi's attention was now exclusively focussed on the anti-untouchability campaign and on May 8, he started another three weeks' fast as a penance because his followers had not made sufficient progress with the campaign. The Government set him free so that they would not be held responsible in case the worst happened to him during the fast. As a gesture in return Gandhi suspended the civil disobedience movement. The history of 1922 was repeating itself. So intense was the public anxiety over the Mahatma's fast, that judgment over the discontinuance of the campaign was suspended. People merely prayed for the termination of the self-imposed ordeal.

The news of the suspension of the movement made Patel and Bose, who were in Vienna, furious. They were practical politicians, and had little sympathy for the spiritual involutions and convolutions of the Mahatma. They remembered the grave damage caused to the freedom struggle by the abrupt withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement by Gandhi eleven years earlier, and feared similar consequences again. On May 9,
they issued a statement denouncing the suspension of the movement. "The events of the last thirteen years," they said, "have demonstrated that a political warfare based on the principle of maximum suffering for ourselves and minimum suffering for our opponents cannot possibly lead to success. It is futile to expect that we can ever bring about a change of heart in our rulers merely through our own suffering, or by trying to love them. And the latest action of Mahatma Gandhi in suspending the civil disobedience movement is a confession of failure so far as the present method of the Congress is concerned. We are clearly of opinion that as a political leader, Mahatma Gandhi has failed. The time has, therefore, come for a radical reorganization of the Congress on a new principle and with a new method. For bringing about this reorganization, a change of leadership is necessary, for it would be unfair to Mahatma Gandhi to evolve or work a programme and a method not consistent with his life-long principles. If the Congress, as a whole, can undergo this transformation, it would be the best course; failing that, a new party will have to be formed within the Congress, composed of all the radical elements. Non-cooperation cannot be given up, but the form of non-cooperation will have to be changed into a more militant one, and the fight for freedom is to be waged on all fronts."

Alfred Tyranauer later contributed to The Saturday Evening Post a graphic account of how this statement came to be issued, with a photostat of Bose's draft: "I can well remember the strange picture of a modernly furnished Vienna hotel room in which the two striking Orientals (Patel and Bose) sealed their portentous agreement. Following a telephonic invitation, I visited Patel one day in the fall of 1933, in the Vienna 'Hotel de France', where he was dividing his bed-ridden days between his physicians and his friends.

"After a cordial welcome Patel explained, 'We are about to issue a joint declaration against the passive resistance policy of Gandhi. We are both of the opinion that India had arrived at a stage of revolution where a more active policy is called for. There is a little difficulty with the wording to be smoothed out.

1 G. I. Patel, Vithalbhai Patel, Book Two, p. 1219
My young friend, Bose, believes that an attack must be sharp
like a dagger, whereas I hold one should not be careless in one's
own house.' Bose interrupted, 'Gandhi is an old, useless piece
of furniture. He has done good service in his time, but he
is an obstacle now.'

"'May be, he is,' agreed Patel reluctantly, 'as an active politi-
cian. But his name is of great and permanent value. We must
take that into consideration.'

"Patel looked at me with his intelligent dark eyes. 'For old
friendship's sake, I want you to be the first correspondent to
get this joint statement which might possibly be of far-reaching
importance,' he concluded, 'It might put an end, once and for
all, to the useless Round Table discussions by frightening some
people to seek cover under the table.'

"I ventured to observe that the Round Table discussions
might serve to clear the issue even though they had shown no
definite results.

"Bose interrupted his writing: 'No real change in history
has ever been achieved by discussions,' he said.

"'Well, the only alternative is violence,' I answered, 'revolu-
tion, war, under the present tension-laden circumstances even a
world conflagration.'

"'What of it?' retorted Bose passionately, 'India can well
afford to bring a bloody sacrifice for her liberation. Three
hundred and fifty million miserable lives are waiting for
deliverance!'

"Patel turned to me with a faint smile. 'He speaks the mind
of young India,' he said slowly. 'It may be a brilliant mind and
may be a foolish one. It may be creative or it may be suicidal.
But it is here and if the gods are thirsty, what can we do but
offer our blood?'

"Bose finished writing. I looked over his shoulder and saw
the sentence: 'We are clearly of opinion that, as a political
leader, Mahatma Gandhi has failed.' Then, 'The form of non-
co-operation will have to be changed into a militant one and
the fight for freedom will have to be waged on all fronts.'

"He handed the script to Patel who finally gave his approval
and signed it.
"It was Patel's last political act. Soon afterwards he died of a heart attack."¹

Vithaldhavi Patel and Bose were carried away by their anger, but they were grievously wrong in their verdict on Gandhi, which did no credit to their political judgment. Fortunately, so anxious were the people of India over Gandhi's fast, that little notice was taken of their statement. What was meant to be a deadly bomb, proved a damp squib.

Bose spent some months in Geneva to study the organization of the League of Nations and to explore the possibility of utilizing it for the cause of India's freedom. He also worked with the International Committee on India, which had its headquarters in Geneva, and helped in the publication of a monthly bulletin on India. He made short trips to several countries in Europe in 1938 and the succeeding year. He was not allowed, however, to visit Britain, where he was scheduled to preside over the Third Indian Political Conference in London. His address, which was read in absentia, is a document of considerable political importance because in it he made a historical analysis of India's freedom struggle, and mooted the establishment of a new party called the SAMYAVADI-SANGHA.

Bose called it 'the party of the future', which would have to part company with the erstwhile leaders of the Indian people, because there was no possibility that the latter would be able to adopt the principles, programme, policy and tactics that would be required for the next phase of the fight. The party would have to play a dual role—the role of the fighters and leaders in the 'national' campaign against Great Britain, and also the role of the architects of New India, who would be called upon to undertake the work of post-war social reconstruction.

"The Samyavadi-Sangh would be a centralized and well-disciplined all-India party. It would have its representatives working in the Indian National Congress and the All-India Trade Union Congress, in the peasants', women's and youths' organizations, and also in the sectarian or communal organizations, if necessary. The Sangha would stand for all-round freedom of the Indian people—that is for social, economic and political freedom. It would wage a relentless war against bond-

¹ ibid., pp. 1217-19
age of every kind till the people are really free. It will stand for political independence for India, so that a new state could be created in free India on the basis of the eternal principles of justice, equality and freedom. It will stand for the ultimate fulfilment of India’s mission so that India might be able to deliver to the world the message that has been her heritage through the past ages.”

Though Bose never actually established the Samyavadi-Sangha (the Forward Bloc, founded in 1940, was the nearest approximation to it) its main ideas constantly revolved in his mind, and he used to elaborate them frequently during his sojourn in Europe.

During the last days of Vithalbhai Patel in a clinic in Geneva, Bose was constantly at his bed-side doing what he could to nurse and cheer him. Patel passed away on October 22, 1933, and his remains were sent to India. Just before his death he made a will appointing Govardhanbhai I. Patel—his future biographer—and Dr. Purshottamdas T. Patel, as his executors. Clause 5 of the will ran:

“The balance of my assets, after disposal of the above-mentioned four gifts, is to be handed over to Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose (son of Janki Nath Bose) of I, Woodburn Park, Calcutta, to be spent by the said Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose, or his nominee or nominees, according to his instructions, for the political uplift of India, and, preferably, for publicity work on behalf of India’s cause in other countries.”

The probate of the will was obtained from the High Court of Bombay on September 21, 1934. The payment of the residue of Patel’s estate to Bose, however, was delayed, and, as a matter of fact, was never made. At first it was argued on behalf of the executors that a scheme would have to be framed in the matter and trustees appointed with the approval of the executors, before the funds could be paid to Bose. Later on, a contention was raised that the bequest was invalid in law. The issue dragged on for six years and created much ill-will between the executors backed by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and other leaders on the one hand and Bose on the other. It was even unjustly questioned why all the three persons who had attested Vithalbhai’s sig-

1 The Indian Struggle, pp. 378-79.
nature, belonged to Bengal when there were Gujarati friends of his, available in Geneva at that time.

A panel of eminent counsels appointed by the executors opined that clause 5 of the will was, in the first place, vague and therefore, invalid. It also maintained that under the will Bose was merely a Trustee. The attorneys of Bose, on the other hand, contended that he was given under the will absolute and unfettered discretion to carry out the testator’s wishes, and that they did not agree with the interpretation of the will as understood by the executors. The matter was taken to the Bombay High Court and Mr. Justice Wadia held the bequest to be void. An appellate court confirmed his judgment on September 28, 1939. Subsequently, in October 1940, Sardar Patel, on behalf of himself and other heirs of Vithalbhai Patel, sent a cheque for one lakh of rupees, representing the amount which had been bequeathed by the testator, to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad for acceptance by the Congress Working Committee, and for the appointment of a committee “with full authority to spend the amount in such manner and for such purposes as the committee may think fit.” The obvious implication of this was that Bose, who had by then been expelled from the Congress, would not have faithfully carried out Vithalbhai Patel’s wishes!

During his four year’s stay in Europe, Bose visited practically every country in Europe, but he did not go to Soviet Russia though he had been invited and was anxious to make a personal study of Soviet life and politics. Apparently he did not visit Russia because of dissuasion by Vithalbhai Patel, who thought that any link with that communist country would hamper Bose’s utility to India. Bose visited Berlin and Rome several times and met the top hierarchy of the Nazi and Fascist parties. In Rome he was received by Mussolini several times, but it is not clear whether he met Hitler too, at that time. He asked the German rulers when they would strike at Britain, ‘so that we might also take up arms simultaneously against the British’. They replied that they had not thought about it. Bose told them, however: “Britain is our traditional enemy. We will fight her whether you support us or not.”

These contacts were to prove useful when Bose escaped to

1 _On to Delhi_, pp. 67-8
Berlin in 1941. It would be entirely wrong to conclude, however, that Bose was developing fascist leanings during his stay in Europe. He was no doubt struck by what the dictators had achieved for their countries, as many other observers like Winston Churchill were. He was specially attracted by Mustapha Kemal Pasha's success in swiftly modernizing a backward oriental country. He was impressed also by what Dr. Benes and de Valera, (whom he met more than once), had done for Czecho- slovakia and Eire respectively. He was constantly on the move, closely studying the situation in every country he visited, utilising all possible opportunities to propagate the cause of India's freedom, and admonishing Indians in Europe to behave like unofficial ambassadors of their country. He contributed several articles and delivered a number of speeches.

Bose made little distinction between the high and the low in his contacts, realizing that he must cultivate friendship for India at every social and political level. In 1938, for instance, he came in contact with Kitty Kurk, wife of a Czech engineer who had settled in Germany. He paid a number of visits to the Kurks and explained to them the conditions in India. On one occasion he read out to them the speech he had prepared for the London Political Conference. He corresponded occasionally with Mrs. Kurk for some years.¹ Bose did not confine himself to political activities. He was busy in the cultural field, too, and spoke at several gatherings and soirees on the heritage of Indian civilization. He was very particular in appearing on such occasions in the Indian national dress, and insisted on fellow Indians doing the same. He was fairly fluent in German, and was admired in scholastic circles in central Europe.²

Bose devoted the year 1934 mainly to the writing of Indian Struggle. It was published in Britain at the end of the year.

Bose's views on "a synthesis between communism and fascism" developed in the chapter—'A Glimpse of the Future' of this book, call for some notice as they throw light on his ideology. Nehru had observed in a press statement in December 1933: "There is no middle road between fascism and communism.

¹ See Subhas Chandra Bose as I knew him by Kitty Kurk.
² See Personal Reminiscences by Prof. Suniti Kumar Chatterji in Netaji, pp. 125-138.
One has to choose between the two and I choose the communist ideal”. Bose vigorously controverts this view: “Unless we are at the end of the process of evolution, or unless we deny evolution altogether, there is no reason to hold that our choice is restricted to two alternatives. Whether one believes in the Hegelian or the Bergsonian or any other theory of evolution, in no case need we think that creation is at an end. Considering everything, one is inclined to hold that the next phase in world history will produce a synthesis between communism and fascism.

“And will it be a surprise if that synthesis is produced in India? In spite of India’s geographical isolation, the Indian awakening is organically connected with the march of progress in other parts of the world. Consequently, there need be no surprise if an experiment of importance to the whole world is made in India, especially when we have seen with our own eyes that another experiment (that of Mahatma Gandhi) made in India, has roused profound interest all over the world.

“In spite of the antithesis between communism and fascism there are certain traits common to both. Both communism and fascism believe in the supremacy of the state over the individual. Both denounce parliamentary democracy. Both believe in party rule. Both believe in the dictatorship of the party, and in the ruthless supression of the dissenting minorities. Both believe in a planned industrial reorganization of the country. These common traits will form the basis of the new synthesis. That synthesis is called by the writer Samyavada — an Indian word, which means literally ‘the doctrine of synthesis or equality’. It will be India’s task to work out this synthesis.”

Bose formulates the following ten-point programme for the Samyavadi-Sangh, the formation of which he had originally proposed in his address to the London Political Conference in 1933:

(1) The party will stand for the interests of the masses, that is, of the peasants, workers etc. and not for the vested interests, that is, the landlords, capitalists and moneylending classes.
(2) It will stand for the complete political and economic liberation of the Indian people.

1The Indian Struggle, pp. 313-14
(3) It will stand for a federal government for India as the ultimate goal, but will believe in a strong central government with dictatorial powers for some years to come, in order to put India on her feet.

(4) It will believe in a sound system of state planning for the reorganization of the agricultural and industrial life of the country.

(5) It will seek to build up a social structure on the village communities of the past, that were ruled by the village Panch and will strive to break down the existing social barriers like caste.

(6) It will seek to establish a new monetary and credit system in the light of the theories and the experiments that have been, and are, current in the world.

(7) It will seek to abolish landlordism and introduce a uniform land tenure system for India.

(8) It will not stand for a democracy, in the mid-Victorian sense of the term, but will believe in government by a strong party bound together by military discipline, as the only means of holding India together, and preventing chaos when Indians are free and are thrown on their own resources.

(9) It will not restrict itself to a campaign inside India, but will resort to international propaganda also in order to strengthen India’s case for liberty and will attempt to utilize the existing international organizations; and

(10) It will endeavour to unite all the radical organizations under a national executive so that whenever any action is taken, there will be simultaneous action on many fronts.

A dispassionate analysis will show that except for his suggestion of a “strong central government with dictatorial powers for some years to come”, Bose’s programme bears no resemblance at all to fascism. As a matter of fact, those ten points have been incorporated, more or less, in the Constitution of the Indian Republic. True, even in its heyday under Nehru, the Central Government had no ‘dictatorial powers’—not in theory at any rate. Nor has the ruling party ever been bound together by ‘military discipline’. But many would think that
the Indian Republic might well have been spared many of its misfortunes had there been a measure of discipline in the ruling party, or had it been able to win the support of other radical parties. And, finally, does not free India's non-alignment policy basically amount to a diplomatic *Samyavada* towards the power blocs?
CHAPTER 14

PLEA FOR SYNTHESIS

In November 1934 Janaki Nath fell seriously ill. A cable was sent to Bose, asking him to rush to his father's bedside. Bose flew to Karachi on December 3. Janaki Nath, however, had died the previous day. From Karachi Bose went to Calcutta, where he was promptly served with an order under Regulation III of 1818, interning him at his house at 38-2 Elgin Road, and imposing on him the following restrictions:

1. Not to be absent from the precincts of the said house, and not to interview any visitor at any time.
2. Not to correspond, converse or communicate or associate in any manner with anybody save the members of the family actually living in the house.
3. To deliver unopened, to the police, all books and communications received from any source whatever.
4. When so required by the Police Commissioner or any magistrate, to facilitate in every way access of such person to the premises.

This Draconian order concluded with the warning that, "if you knowingly disobey any of the directions you will be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years, and be also liable to a fine."

It was not in Bose's nature to yield to such humiliating restrictions. But in his grief over the death of his father, he had to put up with them. He stayed with his family for a little over a month, and after the obsequies were over he left for Europe on January 8, 1935.

Bose was not allowed to meet any of his colleagues, much less to take part in political discussions or activities, during his five weeks' stay in Calcutta. Nevertheless, he was able to take a closer view of developments in the country than he could do from
Europe. A political recession was evident on all fronts in India. The civil disobedience movement had been withdrawn, but Nehru was still in jail. The Government was yet in no mood to soften its repressive policy. Gandhi had formally retired from the Congress in 1934, and was devoting himself to the uplift of Harijans, the All-India Village Industries, and such other non-political activities. The attention of the Congress was once again turned to the parliamentary programme and in the November elections to the Central Assembly it secured a striking success, winning 44 out of 49 general seats in a House of 180. In alliance with the Nationalist group and some of the Independent members, it was in a position to inflict defeats on the Government.

The formation of the Congress Socialist Party in May 1934 gave some indication of the resurgence of the Left wing, but the C.S.P. was never able to fulfil the promise it held at its birth. At its meeting in December 1934, the Congress Working Committee rejected the Joint Parliamentary Committee's Report, which was later to become the basis of the Government of India Act passed by the British Parliament in 1935—which, happened to be the golden jubilee year of the Indian National Congress. The Government of India Act had been in gestation for nearly eight years, since the appointment of the Simon Commission. It consisted of two parts—the Federal and the Provincial. In the words of Prof. A. B. Keith: "Federation was largely evoked by the desire to evade the issue of extending responsible government to the Central Government of India." There was almost unanimous opposition to the federation proposal, even the Princes, who were given an unconscionable weightage, having lost their initial attraction for it. Ultimately it proved a dead letter.

The provincial part of the Act, on the other hand, provided some possibilities of popular government. The provincial legislatures were wholly elected, and the Princes had no representation in them. There were no reserved subjects in the provincial administration, though the Governor was given emergency powers for use at his discretion if the tranquillity of the province was endangered. It was no secret that it was the attraction of power in the provincial sphere which induced
Congressmen to take part in the first elections under the Act in 1936-37.

Bose continued his medical treatment on return to Vienna, and underwent an operation. After recovery he resumed his activities connected with India’s freedom. He issued a statement on “Our Internal and External Policy” from Geneva in February 1935. “In the domain of our external policy,” he observed, “our own socio-political views or predilections should not prejudice us against people or nations holding different views, whose sympathies we may nevertheless be able to acquire. This is a universal cardinal principle in external policy.” Regarding India’s internal policy he returned to his favourite theme of “a synthesis of all that is useful and good in the different movements that we see today.”

In the light of this, Bose enumerated what he considered to be the essential features of the future Indian movement. “Firstly, India must be consolidated under a strong central government before we can hope for an internal reconstruction and security from external attack. Secondly, a strong and disciplined party must be organized before we can hope for a National Government and the entire nation must be brought under the influence and control of this party. Thirdly, this party must stand for the masses as distinct from the vested interests.

“It must stand for justice for all sections of the people and for freedom from bondage of every kind whether political, economic or social. In order to ensure justice and freedom for all, the party must stand for equality; and work for the destruction of all artificial barriers whether of religion, creed, caste, sex or wealth. Thus it should aim at a really democratic state in which we shall all be equal and in which there will be no problem of minorities. I would call this party the Samyavadi Sangha of India.”

In March 1935 Bose issued another statement on the Congress Socialist Party. It showed, first, that he entertained excessive and unwarranted expectations about the party, which was formed in the previous year by Left-wingers headed by Jayaprakash Narayan, and, second, that he was appreciably impressed, if not by the philosophies of communism, nazism and

1 *The Indian Struggle*, p. 381
fascism, at least by their practical achievements in Russia, Germany and Italy respectively. Bose’s statement noted: “Even though Nehru acted as the Congress Socialist Party’s godfather and continued to give it his blessing, he never associated himself officially with this group. The reasons are not entirely clear but his action conformed to pattern. He agreed fully with the basic objective of converting the Congress to socialism. He felt, however, that the C.S.P. had rigidly adopted the language of Western socialism which was little understood by the rank and file and which, therefore, carried a barrier for the majority of nationalists.”

Bose, on the other hand, hoped that the Congress Socialist Party would gradually be able to capture the Congress and that it would transform itself into an opposite of the National Socialist Party in Germany—“Socialist” being a deceptive common factor in their names as it was of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Bose seems to have been as misinformed of the aims and objects of the Congress Socialist Party in India as he was of the National Socialist Party in Germany. He urged the Congress Socialist Party not to be carried away by the idea of a Constituent Assembly: “Instead of committing political suicide in this way, the Congress Socialist Party, if it has confidence in its own principles, methods and programmes and if it does not suffer from an inferiority complex, should claim the exclusive right to draft a constitution for the country.

“What I have said may shock the democratic and constitutional instincts of many of my countrymen. But I should like to urge most emphatically that democracy as understood today, in a large portion of this wide world, is different from democracy as understood in the mid-Victorian era. Russia today is ruled by a party—not by a parliament elected on the basis of adult suffrage—but that party claims to act on behalf of the people. Similarly in Italy and also in Germany, a party has usurped all political power, having suppressed all (other) political parties, but this party claims to represent the people.”

As the first step towards the clarification of economic and political ideas, Bose asked the C.S.P. to by-pass the false idea of unity. “The experience of the All-Parties’ Committee and the All-Parties’ Conference of 1928 should have taught us by now
that unity has value only when it represents not only unity in ideas, but also unity in action. A real unity is a source of infinite strength; superficial unity is only a source of weakness.”

Bose concluded: “Any party that aspires to win freedom for India should be prepared to draw up the constitution for India, and after winning Swaraj should be prepared to put into effect the whole programme of the post-war reconstruction. There can be no question of giving up political power after the battle is won, there can be no question of dissolving the Congress after the Congress is victorious. Just as Ghazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha and his party won freedom for his country and thereafter remained in power in order to put Turkey on her feet, and put into practice their programme of national reconstruction, so also we must do in India. Dictatorship of the party both before and after Swaraj is won—that should be our slogan for the future.”

This quotation may expose Bose to the charge of harbouring totalitarian tendencies, if not fascist leanings. But that these ideas were no more than tentative was made clear three years later in an interview given by Bose to R. Palme Dutt, and published in the Daily Worker, London, on January 24, 1938. Asked by Palme Dutt to clarify his comments on fascism and communism in The Indian Struggle, Bose replied: “My political ideas have developed further since I wrote my book three years ago. What I really meant was that we in India wanted our national freedom, and having won it, we wanted to move in the direction of socialism. This is what I meant when I referred to ‘a synthesis between communism and fascism’. Perhaps the expression I used was not a happy one. But I should like to point out that when I was writing the book, fascism had not started on its imperialist aggression, and it appeared to me merely an aggressive form of nationalism. (Emphasis added).

“I should point out also that communism, as it appeared to be demonstrated by many of those who were supposed to stand for it in India, seemed to me anti-national and this impression was further strengthened in view of the hostile attitude which several among them exhibited towards the Indian National

1 Indian Struggle, p. 386
Congress. It is clear, however, that the position today has fundamentally altered.

"I should add that I have always understood, and am quite satisfied, that communism, as it has been expressed in the writings of Marx and Lenin, and in the official statement of policy of the Communist International, gives full support to the struggle for national independence, and recognises this as an integral part of its world outlook.

"My personal view today is that the Indian National Congress should be organized on the broadest anti-imperialist front and should have the two-fold objective of winning political freedom and the establishment of a socialist regime." (Emphasis added).

On April 3, 1935, there occurred an event to which Bose was eagerly looking forward, since his arrival in Europe two years earlier. He was in correspondence with Romain Rolland, the French savant and philosopher, but his plans to meet him had not succeeded till 1935. Bose, therefore, was in high spirits when he called at Villa Olga, Rolland's residence, on the morning of April 3. The main purpose of his visit was to discuss with M. Rolland the latest developments in India, and to ascertain his views on important world problems. The following account of the meeting was contributed by Bose to *the Modern Review* (September 1935):

"What would be M. Rolland's attitude," Bose asked, "if the United Front is broken up and a new movement is started not in keeping with the requirements of Gandhian satyagraha?"

"He would be very sorry and disappointed", said M. Rolland, "if Gandhi's satyagraha failed to win freedom for India. At the end of the great war when the world was sick of bloody strife and hatred, a new light had dawned on the horizon when Gandhi emerged with his new weapon of political strife. Great were the hopes that Gandhi had roused throughout the world."

"We find from experience," said Bose, "that Gandhi's method is too lofty for this materialistic world, and as a political leader he is too straightforward in his dealings with his opponents. We find, further, that though the British are not wanted in India, with the help of superior physical force they have nevertheless been able to maintain their existence in India in spite
of the inconvenience and annoyance caused by the Satyagraha movement. If Satyagraha ultimately fails, would M. Rolland like to see the national endeavour continued by other methods or would he cease taking interest in the Indian movement?"

""The fight must go on in any case", was the emphatic reply.

"But I know several European friends of India who have told me distinctly that their interest in the Indian freedom movement is due entirely to Gandhi's method of non-violent resistance."

'M. Rolland did not agree with them at all. He would be sorry if Satyagraha failed. But if it really did, the hard facts of life would have to be faced and he would like to see the movement conducted on other lines.

'That was the answer nearest to my heart. Here then was an idealist who did not build castles in the air but who had his feet planted on terra firma.

""What would be M. Rolland's attitude," Bose continued, "if the United front policy of the Indian National Congress fails to win freedom for India, and a radical party emerges which identifies itself with the interests of the peasants and the workers?"

'M. Rolland was clearly of the opinion that the time had come for the Congress to take a definite stand on economic issues.

'Explaining his attitude in the event of a schism within the Congress he continued "I am not interested in choosing between two political parties or between two generations. What is of interest and of value to me is a higher question. To me, political parties do not count. What really counts is the great cause that transcends them, the cause of the workers of the world. To be more explicit, if as a result of unfortunate circumstances, Gandhi (or any party, for that matter) should be in conflict with the cause of the workers and with their necessary evolution towards a socialistic organization, if Gandhi (or any party) should turn away and stand aloof from the workers' cause then for ever will I side with the oppressed workers, for ever will I participate in their efforts and in their combats because, on their side, is justice and the law of the real and necessary development of human society."

'I was delighted and amazed. Even in my most optimistic
moods I had never expected this great thinker to come out so openly and boldly in support of the workers' cause.

'M. Rolland spoke of his acute mental agony since the end of the war in trying to revise his social ideas and his entire ideology. "This combat within myself", he said, "extended over a very wide field and the problem of non-violence was only a part of it. I have not decided against non-violence, but I have decided that non-violence cannot be the central pivot of our entire social activity. It can be one of its means, one of its proposed forms, still subject to experiment."'

In eliciting these views of Romain Rolland on violence versus non-violence, one wonders whether Bose was seeking support for the momentous step he was to take six years later, when he escaped from India and waged a war for the freedom of India.
DURING his sojourn in Europe, Bose began to feel keenly the need for systematic propaganda abroad for Indian freedom. Political parties in other countries, he found, had regular organizations for publicity. The whirlwind propaganda carried out by the Sinn Fein Party, especially in the United States, was not a little responsible for the eventual independence of Eire. India, on the other hand, was exposed to anti-national propaganda abroad in various direct and indirect ways. Books such as Miss Mayo’s Mother India, films like India Speaks and numerous articles and speeches by British propagandists represented India in unflattering terms. News agencies like Reuters generally published slanted news about India. Bose found a complete lack of appreciation of the need or utility of foreign propaganda in the older generation of Congress leaders. C. R. Das was the first to realize its importance, and much good work was done in this field by Lala Lajpat Rai and Vithalbhai Patel in America and Europe. As mentioned earlier, the latter had bequeathed the residue of his estate to Bose for this purpose. During his lifetime, Patel had started a centre for Indian propaganda in Dublin under the name of the Indo-Irish League. His journey to Geneva a month prior to his death, was intended to prepare the ground for another centre there, but that wish remained unfulfilled.

Bose did what he could to further the cause of India. Whenever his health would permit he travelled extensively to deliver lectures in various centres in Europe. He observed in an article in 1935: “History teaches us that for enslaved and suppressed nations—especially for those that eschew the path of violence—the sympathy of the civilized world is absolutely necessary, and in order to win that sympathy, propaganda has to be under-
taken." According to Bose Indian publicity abroad should have a three-fold objective: (1) to counteract false propaganda about India; (2) to enlighten the world about the true conditions obtaining in India; and (3) to acquaint the world with the positive achievements of the Indian people in every sphere of human activity.

To achieve this purpose Bose suggested the following steps:

1. Indians should attend every international congress.
2. Articles and books should be published in the different languages of Europe and America.
3. Well-equipped libraries should be established in important centres in foreign countries.
4. Prominent Indian scholars, representing different aspects of Indian culture, should travel and lecture abroad. Foreign scholars should be invited to India.
5. In every country mixed societies of Indians and the nationals of that country should be organized for developing close cultural relations with India. Corresponding societies should be established in India.
6. Mixed chambers of commerce should be organized in every foreign capital, with corresponding bodies in India.
7. Regular assistance should be given to organizations which are already active in this field, such as the International Committee for India in Geneva.

(More than thirty years have elapsed since Bose drew this blueprint for foreign publicity. India has been an independent country since 1947 but our case frequently goes by default abroad even now.)

To hark back to happenings in India. Nehru's election as president for the Indian Congress session in April 1936 was heartily welcomed by the Leftists, but viewed with misgivings and suspicion by the Right-wingers. The president-elect would, it was hoped, infuse new life in the Congress which was in doldrums after five years of unavailing struggle. Its enrolled membership had gone down to less than half a million. Public attention was focussed more on the Harijan campaign of Gandhi than on Congress activities, such as they were. The emergence of the Congress Socialist Party had brought into the open the ideological cleavage between the Leftist and the Rightists.
A controversy reminiscent of the one between the 'Pro-changers' and 'No-changers' in the twenties loomed on the horizon in view of the imminence of the first general elections under the new Government of India Act.

Bose felt that his presence in India at this juncture would strengthen the hands of the Leftists. He was, therefore, anxious to attend the Lucknow Congress session. As soon as he announced his intention, the British Government issued a warning through its Consul in Vienna that he would be arrested if he returned to India. He wrote to Nehru asking his advice. "My inclination at the moment—as you can very well imagine from your own reactions," he wrote, "is to defy the warning and go home. The only point that one has to consider is which course would be in public interest. The personal factor does not count at all with me...Going to prison also has its public utility and there is much to be said in favour of defying an official order like this and deliberately courting imprisonment."¹

It is not known what advice Nehru gave to Bose, but in a spirited reply Bose rejected the Consul's warning and sailed for India, reaching Bombay on April 8. He was promptly arrested even before he disembarked and was sent to Yerawada jail near Poona. Although he was prevented from attending the Lucknow Congress, his brief message to 'Keep the flag of freedom aloft' was read out at the Congress. Nehru sent him a letter of sympathy and appointed him a member of the Working Committee. He was later taken to Kurseong on May 20, and interned in the house of his brother at Girda Hill.

On March 23, 1936, an adjournment motion was moved in the Indian Legislative Assembly by Nilkantha Das, to protest against the refusal of the Government to allow Bose to return to India even after his prolonged exile. Defending the Government's action, Home Secretary Halliatt observed: "After Mr. Bose's arrest in 1924, his record was examined with great care by two judges who held that there was reasonable ground for the belief that Bose was a member of a revolutionary conspiracy, and if allowed freedom he could be a danger to the State, more particularly because of his public position and outstanding organizing capacity. Bose published in 1923 an article in

¹ Nehru, A Bunch of Old letters, pp. 175-76
Atmathaki, a revolutionary paper of Bengal, asking youths to sacrifice their lives. Bose was personally in touch with the terrorist party and was cognisant of its plots for the assassination of government servants. He preached the message of communism and urged a parallel government at the Lahore Congress. Bose was the head of the Jugantar Party responsible for the Chittagong armoury raid, the Pahartali outrage and other crimes."

As if these sweeping and unproved allegations were not enough, Sir Henry Craik, Home Member of the Government of India, added: "The Samyavadi Sangha movement, founded by Bose in 1932, later on converted its name into the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army. A pamphlet in Bose's own hand, intercepted from Vienna, regretted that no attempt had been made to win over the Indian army and the police and noted that the national movement would succeed only if the revenue collection was prevented, and help from other quarters of a financial or military kind did not reach the Government in times of distress."

Sir Henry concluded: "This man had a definite terrorist connection, and had, to the best of our belief, a definite idea of violent revolution. The Government of India would be acting in criminal folly if they allowed a man of Bose's intellect and organizing capacity to have liberty to put these ideas into execution."

Nilkantha Das and Bhulabhai Desai indignantly protested against such grave charges being levelled against Bose without giving him an opportunity to disprove them in a court of law. Bhulabhai Desai, the leader of the Opposition, said: "If Government had evidence, let Mr. Bose be tried. Its answer to this was that people who were not police informers and who gave the information, would find their lives in danger thereby. Was it not better that these lives be risked than that a person be deprived of his liberty and the opportunity of doing service for his country, because the deprivation of such opportunity was worse than death?"

The adjournment motion was carried by 62 votes to 59, despite Government's frantic effort to muster support for its vindictive policy. On May 10, 1936, a countrywide hartal was observed to protest against Bose's continued incarceration.
After seven months’ detention in Kurseong, Bose was brought to Calcutta on December 17 and kept at the Medical College Hospital for treatment. As his health showed little improvement he was released unconditionally on March 17, 1937.

Dilip Kumar Roy who met Bose immediately after his release was shocked to see how wasted he looked. "He looked more spiritual than ever in spite of the rings of shadow under his keen eyes. His eyes irradiated with a lustre that had not been there eight years ago, in the heyday of his activism. Years of struggle and disappointment on top of frequent incarcerations, had mellowed the exterior austerity of the youthful ascetic." Bose told Roy: "Through my tribulations I realized from day to day as never before, why humility and charity had been counted by the ancients as among our chief path-finders in life .... I felt one was obligated not only to be lenient to one's antagonists but also to love them."

Bose put himself under the treatment of Dr. Sir Nilratan Sirkar for about a month. On April 25, he left for Dalhousie, a hill station in the Punjab,¹ and stayed at the house of his friend Dr. Dharamvir. Five months' rest in the salubrious climate of Dalhousie did Bose a lot of good. He regained sufficient energy to write some articles, among them one on 'Japan's role in the Far East', which he contributed to the Modern Review. It shows Bose's close study of Asian nations. The strictures on Japan make remarkable reading even now, considering that Bose threw in his lot with that country six years later. Bose concluded his articles in the following words:

"Japan has done great things for herself and for Asia. Her awakening at the dawn of the present century sent a thrill throughout our continent. Japan has shattered the white man's prestige in the Far East, and has put all the Western imperialist powers on the defensive—not only in the military but also in the economic spheres. She is extremely sensitive—and rightly so—about her self-respect as an Asiatic power. She is determined to drive out the Western powers from the Far East."

"But could not all this have been achieved," Bose asked pertinently, "without imperialism, without humiliating another proud, cultured and ancient race? No, with all our admiration

¹ Now in Himachal Pradesh
for Japan, where such admiration is due, our whole heart goes out to China in her hour of trial. China must still live for her own sake and for humanity. Out of the ashes of the conflict she will once again rise Phoenix-like as she has often done in the past.

"Let us learn the lessons of this Far Eastern conflict. Standing at the threshold of a new era, let India resolve to aspire after national self-fulfilment in every direction—but not at the expense of other nations, and not through the bloody path of self-aggrandizement and imperialism."¹

This shows without a shadow of doubt that Bose had no illusions about Japan or about its loudly trumpeted plans for 'co-prosperity in the East'. He saw Japan for what she was—a naked aggressor.

Bose returned to Calcutta on October 7, and after a short trip to Kurseong, picked up again the threads of his political activities, after five years. He found that the entire complexion of Indian politics had changed. The Congress had swept the polls in the first elections held under the new Government of India Act early in the year. It had secured absolute majorities in Madras, Bombay, the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, Bihar and Orissa. In these provinces, erstwhile jail-birds sat in the seats of power. In Assam the Congress was the strongest party. The most striking development was in Madras where the Justice Party, which was in unbroken control of the legislature since 1922, obtained only 21 seats in the lower house as against the 159 of the Congress. In Bengal the Congress won 60 seats out of 250. In the North-West Frontier Province Congress won 15 out of 36 seats reserved for Muslims. The question of office acceptance immediately came to the fore. At first the Congress refused to form ministries as the Governors declined to give any assurance about the use of their reserved powers. But in July a compromise was arrived at and the Congress took office in seven out of eleven provinces, though the left-wing groups were initially opposed to the acceptance of office.

By a happy coincidence, Bose's return to active politics coincided with a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee in

¹ See J. S. Bright, Important Speeches and Writings of Subhas Bose, p. 76.
Calcutta. This was its first meeting since the formation of Congress ministries. Gandhi stayed as a guest of the Bose brothers at 1, Woodburn Park for about two weeks and Bose had many opportunities of exchanging views with the Mahatma. It was informally decided that Bose should preside over the ensuing session of the Congress at Haripura.

Soon after the A.I.C.C. session, Bose flew to Europe on November 18, and stayed at Badgastein, his favourite health-resort in Austria, for about six weeks. He left for Britain on January 8, 1938. On being officially informed about his unanimous election as the Congress President, he declared: “It will be agreed on all hands that we have to bring India before the world more than we have done so far. India’s problems, after all, are world problems. On our close contacts with the progressive movements abroad will depend not only the salvation of India but also of the suffering humanity as well.”

During his stay in Britain Bose met members of the British Government and also leaders of the Labour and Liberal parties. He had lengthy conversations, especially with Attlee and Bevin. Of special significance were the two midnight meetings with Eamon de Valera who was then in London. De Valera explained to Bose the strategy he had adopted to win freedom for Eire. Bose was given a number of receptions in London and Cambridge. The Manchester Guardian reported: “English people who met him for the first time were impressed alike by his pleasant, quiet manner, and the decisiveness with which he discussed Indian affairs.”

On January 22, he left for India, arriving at Calcutta two days later. His friends were very happy to see him considerably restored to health. They welcomed him as the new Rashtrapati—the president-elect of the Congress.

It is widely believed that Bose was the youngest president of the Congress. He was not. He was 41 when he presided over the Haripura session in 1938. Nehru was 40 when he presided over the Lahore session in 1929. The honour of being the youngest president of the Congress goes to Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Gandhi’s guru, who was 39 when he presided over its Banaras session in 1905. Maulana Azad, however, was only 35 when he presided over a special session of the Congress in 1923. Bose was
certainly the most uncompromising president so far as the goal of complete independence was concerned. This was said of Jawaharlal Nehru too in 1929 but over the years he had shown a tendency to subordinate his views, however strongly held, to those of Gandhi. Bose, on the other hand, had always been an unsparing critic of Gandhi, and had never hesitated to air his differences with the Mahatma whether it was in the Congress meetings, on the public platform, or in the Press. His statement from Vienna in 1938 roundly condemning the Gandhian leadership still rankled in the hearts of many of Gandhi's followers, who wondered why the Mahatma should have sponsored the presidentship of such a firebrand.

Gandhi might have meant it as a gesture of forgiveness to Bose, or as a warning to the British Government, or as a shrewd move to take the wind out of the sails of the Leftists. This strategy had paid rich dividends earlier in the case of Nehru, but it was soon to fail with Bose. For the moment, however, all was fair sailing, and Bose seemed to have established an accord with Gandhi and his colleagues on the issues that faced the Congress then. He went to Wardha for a meeting of the Working Committee on February 8, 1938, and sought Gandhi's advice in the preparation of his presidential address.

The 51st session of the Congress was held on February 19, on the banks of the Tapti at Haripura, in Gujarat. Vithalnagar, the venue of the session, named after Vithalbhai Patel, was set in beautiful surroundings. The panoramic layout of more than two square miles, the vast number of bamboo huts for delegates and visitors, the huge exhibition grounds, the special waterworks, and a kitchen designed to serve a hundred thousand people—all were of a piece with the impressive scale on which everything was planned. About 7,000 volunteers and 4,000 workers were in charge of the arrangements. Since it was the 51st session of the Congress, 51 gates were erected, 51 national flags were hoisted and the presidential chariot was drawn by 51 white bullocks to the chanting of 51 national songs.

Bose got a magnificent reception from the hospitable people of Gujarat as he arrived at Haripura. The A.I.C.C. met on the 16th, when Nehru, the retiring president, reviewed the happenings during the previous year, and requested the new President
to take the Chair. It was the first occasion when provincial ministers attended a Congress session as delegates. A storm, however, was brewing in the United Provinces and Bihar, whose Chief Ministers had already placed their resignation in the hands of the Governors, on the issue of the release of political prisoners. Bose referred to this question, as he hoisted the national flag on the eve of the Congress session, and hinted that it was only a forerunner of the bigger conflict which was soon to involve the country.

After the customary welcome by the chairman of the Reception Committee, Bose delivered his presidential address. It ranged over a vast canvas and included a number of constructive suggestions. “The British Empire,” Bose said, “is a hybrid phenomenon in politics. It is a peculiar combination of self-governing countries, partially self-governing dependencies and autocratically-governed colonies. Constitutional device and human ingenuity may bolster up this combination for a while, but not for ever. If the internal incongruities are not removed in good time then, quite apart from external pressure, the Empire is sure to break down under its own strain.”

Bose struck a prophetic note about the partition of India, though Pakistan was nowhere on the horizon then. “It is a well-known truism that every empire is based on the policy of divide and rule. But I doubt if any empire in the world has practised this policy so skilfully, systematically and ruthlessly as Great Britain. In accordance with this policy, before power was handed over to the Irish people, Ulster was separated from the rest of Ireland. Similarly, before any part is handed over to the Palestinians, the Jews will be separated from the Arabs. An internal partition is necessary in order to neutralize the transfer of power. The same principle of partition appears in a different form in the new constitution. Here we find an attempt to separate the different communities and put them into water-tight compartments. If the new constitution is finally rejected, I have no doubt that British ingenuity will seek some other constitutional device for partitioning India, and thereby neutralize the transfer of power to the Indian people.”

Bose then reiterated the Congress assurance to the minorities: “In all matters affecting the minorities in India, the Congress
wishes to proceed by their co-operation and through their goodwill in a common undertaking, and for the realization of a common aim which is the freedom and betterment of all the people of India."

Alluding to the future policy of the Congress, Bose observed: "I believe more than ever that the method should be satyagraha or non-violent non-cooperation in the widest sense of the term, including civil disobedience. It would not be correct to call our method passive resistance. Satyagraha, as I understand it, is not merely passive resistance but active resistance as well, though that activity must be of a non-violent character. It is necessary to remind our countrymen that satyagraha may have to be resorted to again. The acceptance of office in the provinces, as an experimental measure, should not lead us to think that our future activity is to be confined within the limits of strict constitutionalism. There is every possibility that a determined opposition to forced inauguration of Federation may land us in another big campaign of civil disobedience."

What should be the role of the Congress after freedom was won? "I know that there are friends who think that after freedom is won, the Congress party having achieved its objective, should wither away. Such a conception is entirely erroneous. The party that wins freedom for India should also be the party that will put into effect the entire programme of post-war reconstruction. Only those who have won power can handle it properly. If other people are pitchforked into seats of power which they were not responsible for capturing, they will lack that strength, confidence and idealism which is indispensable for revolutionary reconstruction."

This need not lead to totalitarianism: "It will be argued that the continuance of a party in such circumstances, standing behind the state, will convert that state into a totalitarian one; but I cannot admit the charge. The state will possibly become a totalitarian one if there be only one party, as in countries like Russia, Germany and Italy. But there is no reason why other parties should be banned. Moreover, the party itself will have a democratic basis unlike, for instance, the Nazi Party, which is based on the leader principle. The existence of more than one party, and the democratic basis of the Congress party,
will prevent the future Indian State becoming a totalitarian one. Further, the democratic basis of the party will ensure that leaders are not thrust on the people from above, but are elected from below."

Bose next referred to the need of national planning: "I have no doubt in my mind that our chief national problems relating to the eradication of poverty, illiteracy and disease and to scientific production and distribution can be effectively tackled only along socialistic lines. The very first thing which our future national government will have to do would be to set up a commission for drawing up a comprehensive plan for reconstruction.

"Our principal problem will be how to eradicate poverty from our country. That will require a radical reform of our land system, including the abolition of landlordism. Agricultural indebtedness will have to be liquidated, and provision made for cheap credit for the rural population. An extension of the co-operative movement will be necessary for the benefit of both producers and consumers. Agriculture will have to be put on a scientific basis with a view to increasing the yield from the land.

"A comprehensive scheme of industrial development under state ownership and state control will be indispensable... The state, on the advice of a planning commission, will have to adopt a comprehensive scheme for gradually socializing our entire agricultural and industrial system, in the spheres of both production and appropriation. Extra capital will have to be procured for this, whether through internal or external loans, or through inflation."

Bose was probably the first front-rank leader to visualize the compelling need for family limitation in any scheme of national planning. He observed: "With regard to the long-term programme for a free India, the first problem to tackle is that of our increasing population... If the population goes up by leaps and bounds, as it has done in the recent past, our plans are likely to fall through. It will, therefore, be desirable to restrict our population until we are able to feed, clothe and educate those who already exist."

Bose then struck a realistic note over foreign policy and international contacts: "The first suggestion I have to make is that
we should not be influenced by the internal politics of any country, or the form of its state. We shall find in every country men and women who will sympathize with Indian freedom, no matter what their own political views may be. In this matter we should take a leaf out of Soviet diplomacy. Though Soviet Russia is a communist state, her diplomats have not hesitated to make alliances with non-socialist states, and have not declined sympathy or support coming from any quarter."

Bose made a strong plea for a lingua franca, a common script (preferably Roman) and the development of closer cultural relations with our neighbouring countries. After putting in a word for the Congress Socialist Party, which could "prepare the country for socialism when political freedom is won", the President concluded his address with a hope and prayer that Mahatma Gandhi would be spared for many years to come, not only for India's sake, but for the cause of humanity.

Few Congress Presidential addresses have proved as prescient as Bose's. He anticipated many of the problems of a free India. His warning about partition came true within nine years. His hope that the Congress should remain in the seat of power even after independence, has been fulfilled despite Gandhi's wishes to the contrary. This has not turned India into a totalitarian nation as was feared by some. National planning has more or less followed his prescription, though Bose has never received the credit due to him. It took several years after independence for the Government to realize the pressing need for family planning, as stressed by Bose in 1938. The speech is remarkable, moreover, for Bose's repeated emphasis on socialism, and should disabuse the minds of those who believe that he was a fascist.

Among the resolutions passed at the Haripura session were those on the ministerial crisis in U.P. and Bihar (alluded to earlier), on the rejection of the proposed federal scheme, on minority rights, on war—which then loomed on the horizon, on the princely states, on Kisan Sabhas and on national education. Bose guided the deliberations with scrupulous fairness and the Haripura session concluded with expressions of cordiality on all sides.
CHAPTER 16

PYRRHIC VICTORY

BOSE was busy during the following months in presiding over Congress committee meetings and conferences, and in touring the country. During a visit to Chittagong (East Bengal) a crowd of Muslim Leaguers threw brickbats at the presidential party, injuring Bose and some others.

In May he was presented with an address by the Bombay Municipal Corporation at which he commended the achievements of the Vienna and Birmingham municipalities in the field of housing and other amenities for the citizens. "Municipal socialism," he told the corporators, "is nothing else but a collective effort for the service of the entire community. If that were done, the corporation would be serving not only the particular city concerned but humanity as a whole." The same month he convened a Congress Chief Ministers' Conference in Delhi where the main agenda was national planning. Five months later a Congress Industries Ministers' Conference was called for the same purpose and Bose made a lucid exposition of planning. He pointed out that before the First World War, Russia was no better than India, with a predominant population of peasants, as miserable and wretched as their counterparts in India. But within sixteen years, the picture was changed, and Russia was on the way to become a leading industrial nation. There need be no conflict between cottage industries and large-scale industries. Bose succinctly laid down the principles of national planning as follows:

(A) Though, from the industrial point of view, the world is one unit, we should nevertheless aim at national autonomy.

(B) We should adopt a policy aiming at the growth and development of basic industries viz. power supply, metal
production, machine and tools manufacture, transport and communication industries etc.

(C) We should also tackle the problem of technical education and technical research, as Japan has done.

(D) There should be a permanent national research council.

(E) As a preliminary step, there should be an economic survey of the present industrial position with a view to securing the necessary data for the national planning commission.

In October a national planning committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru. The Congress Governments gave a donation of Rs. 50,000 to the committee, which was asked to complete its work in six months. But owing to Nehru's absence abroad, the time was extended by another year. The committee was inaugurated by Bose on December 17, at Bombay.

July 12 was observed as All-India Chinese Day, to demonstrate sympathy for the Chinese people in their hour of trial. Bose made an appeal for funds and volunteers for the Indian medical mission sent to China on July 7, the first anniversary of Japan's aggression.

Between May and December 1938, Bose met Jinnah more than once, and carried on a protracted correspondence with him for an understanding between the Congress and the Muslim League. But Jinnah remained intractable and Bose's efforts proved as unavailing as the earlier attempts of Gandhi, Nehru, and other Congress leaders.

In July occurred the Dr. Khare episode in the Central Provinces which Bose handled firmly. The statement issued by him on the conduct of Dr. N. B. Khare, who was Chief Minister of the Central Provinces, and the disciplinary action taken by the Congress Working Committee against him for defying its directive, was "remarkable as much for the vigour of language as for the summation of facts and the presentation of arguments". According to Dr. Khare, however, Bose went to Dr. Khare's room at Wardha at about midnight on July 25, 1938, and told him that "Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee were doing him (Khare) a great injustice. They were in a majority and Bose as the President was in a minority. Therefore Bose was obliged to support the Congress policy of injustice to Khare,
and he was sorry for it. He further advised Khare to sign Gandhi's draft and keep quiet for about four months when the matter would be raised again."

It must be noted that Dr. Khare's story appeared for the first time in his *Political Memoirs*, published in 1959 i.e. 21 years after the incident and 14 years after Bose's death. It is curious that Dr. Khare should not have made it public earlier.

On August 21, the Indian Science News Association of Calcutta invited Bose to preside over its third annual meeting. Bose's replies to the questions put by Dr. Meghnad Saha, the president of the Association, were short and lucid. Asked what the Congress attitude to industrialization was, Bose frankly replied: "I must say that all Congressmen do not hold the same view on this question. Nevertheless, I may say without any exaggeration that the rising generation are in favour of industrialization and for several reasons. First, industrialization is necessary for solving the problem of unemployment. Though scientific agriculture will increase the production of the land, if food is to be given to every man and woman, a good portion of the population will have to be transferred from land to industry. Secondly, the rising generation is now thinking in terms of socialism as the basis of national reconstruction, and socialism presupposes industrialization. Thirdly, industrialization is necessary if we have to compete with foreign industries. Lastly, industrialization is necessary for improving the standard of living of the people at large."

To another question of Dr. Saha, whether India would remain one nation when she was freed from British control, Bose gave an equally frank reply: "We of the Congress are conscious of our responsibility in the matter of achieving Indian unity and solidarity. We want to go, not the way of China, but the way of Turkey. But we will have to work very hard indeed if we want to hold together as one nation when we are free...To my mind the problem of unity is largely a psychological problem. The people must be educated and drilled to feel that they are a nation. Other factors like language, dress, food etc. may help unity but cannot create it.

"In addition to the national will, what is needed for main-

1 See p. 48, where it is put in Bose's own mouth
taining national unity and solidarity is an all-India party. That party is the Congress. We find in history that each country has produced a party for the purpose of unifying the people of that country. The Communist Party in Russia, the Nazi Party in Germany, the Fascist Party in Italy, and Kemal's Party in Turkey are instances in point. The Congress party in India will play the unifying role which the above parties have played in their respective countries."

The first ten months of Bose's presidency were spent in constant activity, which was interrupted only by bouts of illness. On the surface at least, he was in the good books of Gandhi, whom he frequently consulted. His relations with his colleagues were also cordial, Nehru incidentally being away in Europe during the latter part of the year. According to Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, a member of the Working Committee, "while he (Bose) might have had his own opinions on several matters, he did not choose to parade them, or project them into discussions, and appeared to be singularly free from a desire to take sides. Not that there were no differences between him and other leaders over some matter or other, but that the differences, such as they were, did not create situations, much less scenes. It was all smooth sailing."1

Bose indeed earned a reputation as "one of the silent presidents of the Congress". Further, "the occasions on which he spoke at the meetings of the Working Committee during a whole year of his first presidency could be counted on one's fingers." The patience he exhibited at the A.I.C.C. meeting in September, in Delhi, impressed observers, though it displeased some Rightists because of the latitude he gave to the Congress Socialist Party spokesman on a resolution concerning civil liberties.

The cordiality between the President and members of his Working Committee since the Haripura Session, however, proved the proverbial lull before the storm, which broke out all too suddenly in January 1939 over Bose's decision to stand as a candidate for a second term of presidency. It was a storm reminiscent of the split in the Congress at the Surat Session in 1907 though its consequences were altogether different.

On the face of it there was nothing improper or unusual in

1 History of the Congress, Vol. II, p. 104
Bose's desire to be re-elected. If Nehru could become the Congress President thrice, including two consecutive terms just before Bose, why could not the latter seek re-election in 1939? It was not personal vanity but ideological considerations that impelled him to do so.

But Gandhi, who was the acknowledged king-maker of the Congress, did not want Bose to be president again. In fact, he was strongly opposed to his re-election, as subsequent developments proved. But he never gave explicit expression to his wish, much less to the reasons for his opposition to Bose. If he had done so in time the later history of the Congress (and of the country), might have been different, and, very probably, Bose's life would not have taken the dramatic turn it did, two years later.

When Nehru returned from Europe in November 1938, Gandhi suggested his name for one more term as president. Nehru declined and recommended Maulana Azad. Though at first he was favourably inclined towards the proposal, Azad turned it down on grounds of health on January 20, and suggested the name of Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya who was acceptable to Gandhi and most members of the Working Committee. Bose, who had been nominated by a number of Provincial Congress Committees, refused to withdraw. In a statement on February 21, he said: "The issue is not a personal one. The progressive sharpening of the anti-imperialist struggle in India has given birth to new ideas, ideologies, problems and programmes. People are consequently veering round to the opinion that, as in other free countries, the presidential election in India should be fought on the basis of definite problems and programmes so that the contest may help the clarification of issues and give a clear indication of the working of public mind.

"In view of the increasing international tension, and the prospective fight over the Federation, the new year will be a momentous one in our national history. Owing to this and other reasons, if my services in office are demanded by the majority of the delegates, with what justification can I withdraw from the contest? If, however, the majority of the delegates vote against my re-election, I shall loyally abide by their verdict and shall
continue to serve the Congress and the country as an ordinary soldier."

Three days later, on January 24, seven members of the Working Committee (Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Jairamdas Daulatarm, J. B. Kripalani, Jamnalal Bajaj, Shankarrao Deo and Bhulabhai Desai) issued a rejoinder to Bose’s statement from Bardoli, where they had gathered for a meeting. They said that up till then Congress presidential elections were unanimous and they thought that it was a sound policy to adhere to the rule of not re-electing the same president except under very exceptional circumstances. Bose’s opposition to federation was shared by all of them. They thought that the policies and programmes which Bose had mentioned were not relevant to the consideration of the choice of Congress president, since they were determined, not by him, but by the Congress or the Working Committee. The position of the president, who symbolized the unity of the nation, was analogous only to that of a chairman. They, therefore, supported Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya and urged Bose to fall in line.

Anybody who was conversant with the way the Congress affairs were conducted in those days could have easily guessed at this stage that Sitaramayya was Gandhi’s man and that Gandhi was the real author of the joint statement.¹ Unaccountably, however, Bose failed to see this or, having seen, to heed the writing on the wall. It was clear that thenceforth it would be a fight, not between Bose and Sitaramayya, not even between Bose and the members of the Working Committee, but between Bose and Gandhi. He could have bowed gracefully to the Mahatma’s wishes and even earned a pat on the back for it. He was not pliant like Nehru, but foresight pointed to such a course. But the smell of battle had entered Bose’s nostrils, and he promptly issued another long statement on the 25th in which he took to task the seven leaders headed by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel for starting a public controversy by a statement “which was tantamount to moral coercion”. He returned to the charge of his colleagues being favourably disposed towards federation: “It is widely believed that there is a prospect of compromise on the

¹ See Patel’s letter to Nehru dated 8-2-1939, A Bunch of Old Letters, p. 322.
federal scheme between the Right-wing of the Congress and the British Government, during the coming year. Consequently the Right-wing do not want a Leftist president who may be a thorn in the way of a compromise, and may put obstacles in the path of negotiations.”

Bose declared that even at that late hour he was prepared to withdraw from the contest if a genuine anti-federationist like Acharya Narendra Deva would be accepted as the president. “If the Right-wing really want national unity and solidarity they would be well-advised to accept a Leftist as president. They have created considerable misapprehension by their insistence on a Rightist candidate at any cost, and by the unseemly manner in which they have set up a candidate who was retiring in favour of Maulana Azad.”

Bose went on in a challenging spirit: “In the exceptional circumstances which prevail just at this moment in this country, the presidential election is part of our fight against the federal scheme, and as such, we cannot afford to be indifferent to it. The real issue before the country is the federal scheme. All those who believe in fighting federation and in maintaining our national solidarity in this crisis, should not endeavour to split the Congress by insisting on a candidate who was voluntarily retiring.”

On the same day, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya issued a clarification why he could not withdraw in favour of Bose, as he had done earlier for Maulana Azad. He denied that any member of the Working Committee had entered into a compromise with the British on the question of federation. “Federation we want undoubted, but a federation on the lines contemplated by the British is sure to make India lop-sided—a country one side of which is whole, while the other is crippled.”

There followed an avalanche of statements and counter-statements—by Patel from Bardoli, by Nehru from Almora, by Rajendra Prasad from Patna and another by Bose from Calcutta. Patel asked Bose to note that “the procedure adopted for his own election last year was precisely the same as that which is being adopted now”. He contradicted the charge of being partial to the federal plan. “It pains me to find that Subhas Bose imputes motives to the signatories (of the Bardoli
statement) and to the majority of the Working Committee. I can only say that I know of no member who wants the federation. And, after all, no single member, not even the Congress President for the time being, can decide on such big issues. It is the Congress alone that can decide and therefore, the Working Committee collectively, when the Congress is not in session."

Rajendra Prasad’s rejoinder to Bose, however, was significant for a passage that reveals that the Working Committee’s opposition to federation was not so uncompromising and clear-cut as its members protested. It only buttressed Bose’s suspicions. Rajendra Prasad observed: “With regard to federation Bose said that the plan of Congress opposition to the federal scheme would be, on the whole, in accordance with the general policy and principles of Congress policy viz. non-cooperation. What steps this non-cooperation would take, whether there would be non-cooperation even at the stage of federal election, or at the stage of acceptance of office after election, was a matter of detail and tactics, which would be decided on the exigencies of the situation then existing.”

But the most bewildering statement of all came from Nehru. He said that he was clear in his mind that Bose should not stand for election since he felt “that his and my capacity for effective work would be lessened by holding this office at this stage”. But Nehru did not extend his support to Dr. Sitaramayya either! He failed to see what principles or programmes were at stake in the election, and thought that Bose’s emphasis on the fight against federation was misconceived: “I think it is time that we pushed away federation from our minds as something that cannot come because we will not have it, and thought more positively in terms of self-determination, of our own future apart from international reasons.” Instead of making a straight choice between the two contestants in the ring, Nehru lavished praise on Azad, who was out of it, and concluded by asking the delegates to forget persons and remember only principles.

In the three days preceding the election Bose issued two more statements in which he controverted his critics and pressed his charges even more vigorously: “Can anybody challenge the fact that the belief is widely held that during the coming year, a compromise will be effected between the British Government
and the Right-wing of the Congress? This impression may be entirely erroneous, but it is there all the same, and nobody can deny its existence. Not only that, it is also generally believed that the prospective list of ministers for the federal cabinet has been already drawn up.”

Bose again stressed that the two important issues involved in the election were democracy and uncompromising opposition to the federal scheme, and repeated his offer for standing down if the Old Guard accepted a genuine anti-federationist as president. In conclusion, Bose said: “If a contest does take place, the responsibility for dividing the Congress will devolve entirely on the Right-wing. Will they shoulder that responsibility or even at this late hour will they decide to stand for national unity and solidarity, on the basis of a progressive programme?”

Gandhi took no part in the controversy but he wrote an editorial in the Harijan on January 28, under the heading “Internal Decay”. One could read plainly in what way his mind was working: “Strife at Congress elections is becoming a common occurrence. Indiscipline of Congressmen is on the increase everywhere. Many make irresponsible, even violent speeches. Many fail to carry out instructions. Rome’s decline began long before it fell. The Congress will not fall the moment it has begun to decay. It need not fall at all if corruption is handled in time.

“Let no Congressman blame me for thinking aloud. Although I am not in the Congress, I have not ceased to be of it. Congressmen still expect me to give the call when, in my opinion, the time for action has come. What is more, if God so wills it, I feel that I have enough strength and energy in me to lead a battle much more strenuous than any I have fought.”

Gandhi concluded his editorial with a significant warning: “Out of the present condition of the Congress, I see nothing but anarchy and red ruin in front of the country. Shall we face the harsh truth at Tripuri?” Like Nehru, Gandhi also avoided naming his choice.

Both sides carried on intense canvassing, the weight of the Congress ministries being thrown in favour of the Old Guard’s candidate. Few expected Bose to win because of the big guns-ranged against him. But he was supremely confident. “I am
mathematically certain that I shall beat Sitaramayya," he told a journalist on the day of the election as he totted up some figures, using a phrase which General Montgomery was to make famous, years later, in his battles in the Western desert with Field Marshal Rommel. The result bore him out. Bose gained 1,580 votes against Sitaramayya's 1,375. The margin confounded Bose's critics and staggered the Old Guard.

The result of the election was received throughout the country with something bordering on disbelief. Nothing like this had ever happened before in the history of the Congress. Nobody had ever thought of challenging Gandhi openly, and had got away with it. It was not really Sitaramayya whom Bose had defeated, not even the Old Guard, but the Mahatma himself. And this is precisely how Gandhi reacted to Bose's victory: "The defeat is more mine than his (Sitaramayya's)," he declared in a statement on January 31. "I am nothing if I do not represent definite principles and policy. Therefore, it is plain to me that the delegates do not approve of the principles and policy for which I stand. I rejoice in the defeat.

"Subhas Babu, instead of being president on the sufferance of those whom he calls Rightists, is now president in a contested election. This enables him to choose a homogeneous cabinet and enforce his programme without let or hindrance."

Gandhi was not content with this. He virtually threw a gauntlet asking Bose to run the Congress without his support. He paid him a left-handed compliment: "After all, Subhas Babu is not an enemy of the country. He has suffered for it. In his opinion, his is the most forward and boldest policy and programme. The minority can only wish it all success. If they cannot keep pace with it, they must come out of the Congress. If they can, they will add strength to the majority. The minority must not obstruct on any account. They must abstain when they cannot co-operate. I must remind all Congressmen that those, who being Congress-minded remain outside it by design, represent it most. Those, therefore, who feel uncomfortable in being in the Congress may come out, not in a spirit of ill-will but with the deliberate purpose of rendering more effective service." (Emphasis added).

It was sporting of Gandhi to admit that the defeat was really
his, but one cannot help saying that the advice he gave to his followers was neither sporting nor democratic. Democracy presupposes that the verdict of an election is unquestioningly accepted, both by the majority and minority. But here was Gandhi calling upon the minority to abstain when they could not co-operate and to come out of the Congress. Obviously he was out to deny Bose the fruits of his victory, and to turn the tables against him at the earliest opportunity.

Bose seems to have belatedly realized the heavy odds he had taken on, though he could not have imagined even then what he was in for. In a statement issued on February 4, he said that it pained him to find that Mahatma Gandhi had taken the result of the presidential election as a personal defeat. He tried to remove the apprehension created in Congressmen’s mind about his policy by noting that there would not be any violent break with the past, either in the parliamentary or extra-parliamentary sphere. He concluded: “It will always be my aim and object to try and win Gandhi’s confidence for the simple reason that it will be a tragic thing for me if I succeed in winning the confidence of other people but fail to win the confidence of India’s greatest man.”

Unfortunately, this realization dawned on Bose too late. A student of the contemporary scene is indeed puzzled why Bose, who knew Gandhi’s dominant position in the Congress, did not sound him before standing for election, and why he persisted in the fight, even after he found the entire Congress leadership — including Nehru — ranged against him. As we have seen, throughout 1938, he was pulling on very well with his colleagues in the Working Committee, and there was not the least sign or hint of any difference of opinion between them on any important issue. In fact, Bose was acting in almost a self-effacing manner, which contrasted sharply with his later assertiveness.

There is little warrant for his observations made four years later in *The Indian Struggle*, that after the Munich Pact in September 1938, he launched open propaganda throughout India in order to prepare the people for a national struggle, which should synchronise with the coming war in Europe. This move, though popular among the people in general, was resented by the Gandhiites who did not want to be disturbed in their
ministerial and parliamentary work, and who were at that time opposed to any national struggle.\(^1\) What propaganda Bose was doing then, was as Congress president and not as an individual, and it was entirely endorsed and supported by the leading Gandhiites, none of whom, except C. Rajagopalachari and Govind Vallabhb Pant, was engaged in ministerial or parliamentary work. Much less justified was Bose’s view that “in the event of an international crisis, Gandhi would not seize the opportunity for attacking the British, and that Gandhi regarded a struggle with Britain in the near future as outside the domain of possibility (due probably to his old age.)”\(^2\)

It was true, of course, that Gandhi could not be hustled into any fight with his opponent until all peaceful means of settlement were explored. But Bose was grievously mistaken in imagining that on account of his old age, Gandhi regarded a struggle with Britain in the near future as “outside the domain of possibility”. That struggle began — on a low key no doubt — within a few months of the declaration of war, but within three years it culminated in the Quit India notice being served on Britain, in August 1942.

This was not the first time that Bose had deluded himself into believing that Gandhi was played out as a political leader. That was a recurring illusion. What was more serious was his barely disguised charge that the Old Guard was out to sell the party to federation, and the ill-concealed insinuation that it had even “entered into a conspiracy with the British Government and had provisionally formed a Federation Cabinet”.\(^3\) Certainly there was scope for legitimate differences over the precise manner in which federation was to be resisted. But this difference should not have been distorted into an accusation that the Old Guard — or Gandhi for that matter — had reconciled themselves to the working of federation, as they had done earlier regarding the provincial part of the Constitution.

Bose was a born fighter. He was impatient to see his country free. He was a man in a hurry. Possibly he considered himself a man with a mission. He had apparently convinced himself

\(^1\) *The Indian Struggle*, p. 332
\(^3\) V. Patel’s letter to Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, p. 322
that the country was ready and itching for a fight with the British, that the time was ripe and all that was wanted was a leader—himsel—to give the call. Even so, he should not have allowed himself to make wild charges which were calculated to alienate the sympathies of even a radical like Nehru. These charges were likely to invite vindictive retribution of those he had wronged. At least, he should have known his own limitations, and the unwritten rules of the political game.

Was he misled by an overweening ambition, which made him blind to harsh realities? Some of his friends thought so. Dilip Kumar Roy wrote to him: "You simply can’t afford to be blind to the probability that even if you were substantially right in your assessment of the political situation, this unseemly apparent eagerness to be re-elected would look too personal to be convincing. Nehru was surely right when he wrote to you that you hardly needed to cling to the president’s chair in order to make your great influence felt in the country.”¹

Nevertheless, one cannot but feel admiration for the fighting spirit which Bose displayed against overwhelming odds, and the victory which he won over no less a person than Mahatma Gandhi. Alas! it was soon to prove Pyrrhic.

¹ Netaji—The Man, p. 82
THE result of the presidential election was declared on January 30, 1939. The Congress session was scheduled to meet at Tripuri on March 7. Bose could have done much in this intervening period to consolidate his success. But he failed to do it. During the first week of February he attended a conference of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee at Jalpaiguri, presided over by his brother Sarat Chandra. The conference passed a resolution that a six months’ ultimatum should be given to the British Government—a recommendation which must have further annoyed and alarmed the Old Guard.

It was only on February 15 that Bose met Gandhi at Wardha. But the meeting proved infructuous and only added to the mis-apprehensions in Gandhi’s mind about Bose. The impression which the talks left on Gandhi’s mind was clear from a letter addressed by Nehru to Bose on April 20: “You were not keen on having his co-operation although you had asked him rather casually for it,” Nehru wrote. “It seemed that you were thinking in terms of forming a Working Committee of various persons whom you had already considered (or perhaps promised for this purpose). You were of course perfectly entitled to do so, but all this indicated that you were thinking in terms other than those of co-operation with Gandhi and his group.”

The only result of the Bose-Gandhi talks was the decision to hold a meeting of the Working Committee at Wardha on February 22 to discuss the agenda for the Tripuri session. But as misfortune would have it, Bose fell ill during his return journey to Calcutta and was in no condition to attend the proposed meeting. He therefore, sent a telegram on February 21 request-

1 A Bunch of Old Letters, p. 354.

150
ing its postponement. ‘His colleagues somehow interpreted this request as an expression of the President’s lack of confidence in them. Twelve of them promptly resigned from the Working Committee, doubtless with the knowledge and concurrence of Gandhi. Nehru did not actually resign, yet acted as if he had done so. Bose later strongly protested against such an interpretation and asserted that his telegram only conveyed a suggestion, and did not amount to a directive and that, in any case, the Working Committee was free to meet to transact routine business. But in the prevailing strained atmosphere, the twelve members remained unreconciled, leaving Bose’s brother Sarat Chandra as his only colleague on the Working Committee. All one can say is that the wording of the telegram lends itself to both interpretations, but in the existing situation his colleagues would have probably welcomed any pretext to deny their cooperation to Bose.

Soon after this Gandhi left for Rajkot where he remained for the next two months, conducting a futile controversy with its ruler. This is not the place to dwell on the propriety or development of the dispute. Its only bearing on the present narrative is that Gandhi confined himself to a remote corner of India and thus precluded all chances of reconciliation with Bose, before or during the Congress session. Though Gandhi was conspicuous by his absence at Tripuri, there is reasonable ground to suspect that he continued to guide the Old Guard by remote control from Rajkot. Moreover, the “fast to death”, which he undertook on the eve of the Congress session, diverted public attention from Tripuri. Unkind critics were not wanting to suggest that this indeed was a major reason why Gandhi undertook the Rajkot mission at that juncture.

The Tripuri session proved a complete contrast to that at Haripur, although it was organised on as grandiose a scale as its forerunner, with the usual trappings, side-shows and mammoth crowds. The president-elect defied his doctors in undertaking the long journey from Calcutta to Tripuri, but

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1 The telegram ran: *Sardar Patel, Wardha.*

**KINDLY SEE MY TELEGRAM TO GANDHIJI. REGRETFULLY FEEL WORKING COMMITTEE MUST BE POSTPONED TILL CONGRESS. PLEASE CONSULT COLLEAGUES AND WIRE OPINION.** — **SUBHAS**
having gone there, he found himself too ill even to read his address, let alone guide the deliberations. His Working Committee which had resigned, was completely against him; Gandhi was absent; Nehru was ambivalent, and there was a clear-cut division in the ranks of the delegates. Even those who had voted for him in the presidential election began to have second thoughts about continuing their support, in view of Gandhi’s attitude.

When the All-India Congress Committee began its proceedings on March 7, Bose lay in an invalid’s chair, with doctors in attendance on the rostrum. The twelve Working Committee members who had resigned were determined to hamstring the President. One of them—Govind Vallabh Pant—moved an ingenious resolution expressing the A.I.C.C.’s confidence in the old Working Committee, and urging the President to nominate the new Working Committee according to Gandhi’s wishes. The President thought that there was nothing in the constitution, or past practice of the Congress, to make such a resolution admissible. But he invited members’ opinions on it. The discussion that followed revealed wide divergence of views. The President ruled that the resolution could not be discussed by the A.I.C.C. but expressed readiness to put it before the Subjects Committee. Subsequently it was carried by a bare majority after an amendment which sought to take the sting out of it was thrown out.

Two hundred thousand people were present when the plenary session was inaugurated in the vast amphitheatre at Tripuri on March 10, 1939. President Bose was too weak to attend, and Maulana Azad took the chair. The presidential address, which was read by Sarat Chandra Bose, was the shortest on record. A year earlier, at Haripura, Bose had ranged over the entire Indian and international scene. At Tripuri he devoted himself only to a few important issues, the main being his favourite thesis of an ultimatum to the British Government. After referring to the abnormal situation created by the resignation of his colleagues and the explosive international situation, Bose observed: “The time has come for us to raise the issue of Swaraj, and submit our national demand to the British Government in the form of an ultimatum. The time is long past
when we could have adopted a passive attitude and waited for
the federal scheme to be imposed on us. . . . In my opinion we
shall submit our national demand to the British Government
and give a certain time limit within which a reply is to be
expected. If no reply is received within this period, or if an
unsatisfactory reply is received, we shall resort to such sanctions
as we possess in order to enforce our national demand. The san-
cctions that we possess today are mass civil disobedience or satya-
agraha. And the British Government today are not in a position
to face a major conflict like an all-India satyagraha for a
long time.

"What more opportune moment could we find in our national
history for a final advance in the direction of Swaraj, parti-
cularly when the international situation is favourable to us?
Speaking as a cold-blooded realist, I may say that all the facts
of the present-day situation are so much to our advantage that
one should entertain the highest degree of optimism. If only we
sink our differences, pool our resources and pull our full weight
in the national struggle, we can make our attack on British
imperialism irresistible."

On the second day of the session, M. S. Aney proposed that
in view of the President's health, the resolution on the mis-
derstanding that had arisen in connection with the presi-
dential election should be passed on to the A.I.C.C. for disposal
at a future date. The approval for this proposal by a clear ma-
ority was followed by uproarious scenes. Nehru who tried to
speak was interrupted for over an hour, which was an un-
precedented experience for him. Aney thereupon withdrew his
resolution to ease the situation. Jayaprakash Narayan was asked
to move the resolution on the national demand, which did not
include the ultimatum, as recommended by the President. Dele-
gates from Bengal tried their best to incorporate an ultimatum
clause in this resolution, but to no avail.

This was the first set-back for Bose. Another, and a more
galling one, was to follow on the third day of the session, when
Pant moved his resolution expressing confidence in Gandhi
and the former Working Committee and by implication, con-
veying lack of confidence in the President. The resolution in-
corporated a directive regarding the formation of the new Working Committee.

It said: "In view of various misunderstandings that have arisen in the Congress and the country on account of the controversies in connection with the presidential election and after, it is desirable that the Congress should clarify the position and declare its general policy.

"This Congress declares its firm adherence to the fundamental policies which have governed its programme in the past twenty years under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, and is definitely of opinion that there should be no break in these policies and they should continue to govern the Congress programme in future. This Congress expresses its confidence in the work of the Working Committee which functioned during the last year and regrets that any aspersions should have been cast against any of its members.

"In view of the critical situation that may develop during the coming year, and in view of the fact that Mahatma Gandhi alone can lead the Congress and the country to victory during such crisis, the Congress regards it as imperative that the Congress executive should command its explicit confidence, and requests the President to nominate the Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Mahatma Gandhi."

The resolution was passed by an overwhelming majority. It came as a slap on the face of the President. Still more galling was the insinuation that the President’s illness was feigned. Bose left Tripuri’s "morally sickening atmosphere" with a disgust for politics such as he had never felt before. If such was the consummation of politics, he asked himself, why did he stray away from his first love in life—the eternal call of the Himalayas? Had the time come for him to go back to the fountainhead of all love—the life divine? Bose spent days and nights pondering over such questions and praying for light, as he lay recuperating his health in his brother’s house at Jamadoba. Slowly a new vision dawned on him and he began to recover his equanimity and faith in his countrymen.

After all, Tripuri was not India, he told himself, and began to consider his next move. Obviously his hands were so bound by the Pant resolution that he could not do anything without
the agreement of Gandhi. So he entered on a prolonged correspondence with Gandhi which began with a telegram on March 24. An early meeting between them was not possible due to his own illness and Gandhi’s preoccupation with Rajkot. He also wrote a letter to Nehru (March 28) whose bitterness was only exceeded by its length—twenty-four typed sheets. He also gave uninhibited expression to his agony in an article titled *My Strange Illness* in the April issue of the *Modern Review*.

Bose’s first letter to Gandhi was dated March 25, in which after detailing the developments at Tripuri he asked the latter’s clarification and guidance on a number of issues. Gandhi’s letter, which had already been posted the previous day, was brief but pointed: “I saw the (Pant’s) resolution for the first time in Allahabadd. It seems to be quite clear. The initiative lies with you. I do not know how far you are fit to attend to the national work. If you are not, I think you should adopt the only constitutional course open to you.” This advice to resign was based on grounds of health. On April 2 Gandhi buttressed it on the ground of principle: “Taking all things into consideration, I am of opinion that you should at once form your own cabinet fully representing your views, formulate your programme definitely and put it before the forthcoming A.I.C.C. If the committee accepts the programme, all will be plain sailing and you should be enabled to prosecute it unhampered by the minority. If, on the other hand, your programme is not accepted you should resign and let the committee choose its president. And you will be free to educate the country along your own lines.”

In giving such advice, Gandhi had wittingly or unwittingly ignored the Pant resolution which had tied the president’s hand and left him no initiative or latitude at all, in the formation of the Working Committee. Bose was quick to point this out to Gandhi, and to place him on the horns of a dilemma as it were. On April 6 he wrote: “The important part of Pant’s resolution contains two points. Firstly, the Working Committee must command your confidence—implicit confidence. Secondly, it must be formed in accordance with your wishes. If you advise a homogeneous cabinet and such a cabinet is formed, one could perhaps say that it has been formed 'in
accordance with your wishes. But could it be claimed that it commands your confidence? Will it be open to me to get up at the meeting of the A.I.C.C. and tell the members that you have advised the formation of a homogeneous cabinet and that the new cabinet commands your confidence?

"On the other hand, if you advise the formation of a cabinet which does not command your confidence will you be giving effect to the Pant resolution, will you be doing the right thing from your point of view? I would beg of you to consider this aspect of the question. If you take cognisance of the Pant resolution, you will not only have to communicate your wishes regarding the new Working Committee, but you will, at the same time, have to advise the formation of such a committee as will command your confidence."

The charge that Bose wanted to stick to his own position and to have his own way is belied by the following alternative he suggested to Gandhi: "Please resume the national struggle for independence as we have been demanding and begin by delivering the ultimatum to the British Government. In that event, we all shall gladly retire from our official positions. If you so desire, we shall gladly hand over these positions to whomsoever you like or trust. But only on one condition: the fight for independence must be resumed." 1

Bose then made a sporting appeal to Gandhi: "If till the last you insist that a composite cabinet is unworkable and a homogeneous cabinet is the only alternative before us, and if you want me to form a cabinet of my choice, I would earnestly request you to give me your vote of confidence till the next Congress. If, in the meantime, we fail to justify ourselves by our service and suffering, we shall stand condemned before the Congress and we shall naturally and quite properly be kicked out of office. Your vote of confidence will mean the vote of confidence of the A.I.C.C. in the present circumstances."

In reply Gandhi only repeated his previous advice: "I cannot and will not impose a cabinet on you. You must not have one imposed on you, nor can I guarantee approval by the A.I.C.C. of your cabinet and policy. It would amount to sup-

1 Bose repeated this suggestion in his letter dated April 20.
pression. If you do not get the vote, lead the opposition till you have converted the majority."

Realising that all this correspondence led nowhere, Bose urged a meeting with Gandhi. On finding that the latter was tied to Rajkot, Bose wrote with some asperity: "I felt then (at Tripuri), and I still feel that Rajkot has taken possession of your soul at the cost of, and perhaps to the great misfortune of the Indian National Congress. To people like myself, Congress affairs—particularly at this juncture—appear to be a thousand times more important than the call of Rajkot."

This was a view shared by almost everybody except the blind followers of Gandhi. Nothing would have been lost—and events might have taken a different turn—if Gandhi had postponed the Rajkot struggle by a few weeks, and attended the Congress session, as repeatedly requested by Bose and the Reception Committee.

The abortive correspondence continued until Gandhi promised Bose that he would attend the A.I.C.C. meeting at Calcutta, at the end of April.

Those who study the correspondence at this distance of time cannot but feel that Bose emerges from the wordy exchange with most of the honours. His sincerity was beyond doubt; he earnestly pleaded for a gesture of sympathy, if not support from Gandhi. He countered argument with argument, and made several worthwhile proposals for breaking the deadlock. But Gandhi refused to oblige, and his reply to every concrete suggestion was a plea of non possumus. His suggestion to Bose to nominate his own men on the Working Committee was an obvious trap. Gandhi seemed determined to teach Bose a lesson—if not to break him.

Gandhi remained impervious even to the entreaties of Rabindranath Tagore who wrote to him on March 29: "Dear Mahatma, — At the last Congress session some rude hands have deeply hurt Bengal with an ungracious persistence. Please apply without delay, balm to the wound with your own kind hands and prevent it from festering." Gandhi's reply was curt: "Dear Gurudev,—I have your letter full of tenderness. The problem you set before me is difficult. I have made certain suggestions to Subhas. I see no other way out of the impasse."
The Bose-Nehru correspondence, alluded to earlier, will be discussed in a later chapter. But the bitterness felt by Bose against Nehru is reflected in a letter he wrote to his nephew, Amiya Nath Bose, on April 17: "Nobody has done more harm to me personally, and to our cause in this crisis, than Pandit Nehru. If he had been with us, we would have had a majority. Even his neutrality would have probably given us a majority. But he was with the Old Guard at Tripuri. His open propaganda against me also has done me more harm than the activities of the twelve stalwarts. What a pity!"

As irony would have it, unknown to Bose, Nehru was pleading his cause on the very day Bose sent his letter to Amiya Nath.

"Subhas has numerous failings," wrote Nehru to Gandhi, "but he is susceptible to friendly approach. I am sure that if you make up your mind to do so, you could find a way out."

"I realise the importance of Rajkot but I think you will agree with me that the larger Congress issue is infinitely more important, and is likely to govern all our activities. Therefore, I would beg of you to address yourself to the latter, even at the cost of your not attending Rajkot affairs for a while. The idea that you may not attend the A.I.C.C. meeting is alarming. That simply means that conditions should go on deteriorating and that the Congress should go to pieces... I wish you could have met Subhas. Quite apart from any feasible outcome of this visit, this could have been helpful in many ways.

"I think now, as I thought in Delhi, that you should accept Subhas as president. To try to push him out seems to me to be an exceedingly wrong step. As for the Working Committee, it is for you to decide. But I do think that the idea of homogeneity, if narrowly interpreted, will not lead to peace or effective working. Some kind of homogeneity there must of course be. Otherwise, we cannot function. I do not think that a few individuals in the Working Committee make any radical difference to the policy. Of course it is difficult to accept individuals whose *bona fides* one does not trust at all. But the principle of homogeneity should not be extended to differences in political approach, provided the common background of work is accepted. After all, we must remember that by having a homo-
geneous executive, we do not create a homogeneous Congress. The latter is easier of achievement if we have a larger homogeneity in view.\(^1\)

Although Nehru's arguments did not produce much effect on Gandhi's mind, they seem to have at least persuaded him to visit Calcutta at the time of the A.I.C.C. session. For some inscrutable reasons however, he refused to attend the session itself. He had earlier asked Sardar Patel not even to go to Calcutta.

Bose called on Gandhi immediately on his arrival in Calcutta, and had a long discussion. Gandhi stuck to his refusal to suggest any names for the Working Committee, in terms of Pant's resolution, and advised Bose to discuss with the ex-members the possibility of a mutual settlement. He handed Bose a letter incorporating this advice. When the A.I.C.C. session commenced on April 29, the President read out Gandhi's letter, confessed his failure to reach a settlement, and made a statement tendering his resignation.

"I regret very much that since the Tripuri Congress I have not been able to announce the personnel of the new Working Committee. But this was due to circumstances beyond my control. Owing to my illness, I could not proceed to meet Mahatma Gandhi. In lieu thereof, I started correspondence with him. This enabled us to clarify our ideas and viewpoints, but did not bring us to a settlement.

"After Mahatmaji's arrival in Calcutta we have had protracted conversations, but unfortunately they did not lead to any solution. Mahatmaji's advice to me is that I should myself form a Working Committee, leaving out the members who resigned from the previous Working Committee. But this advice I cannot give effect to for several reasons. To mention two of the principal reasons, I may say that such a step would be contrary to the directions in Pantji's resolution, which provides inter alia that the Working Committee should be formed in accordance with the wishes of Ghundiji, and it should command his implicit confidence. If I formed such a committee as advised above, I would not be able to report to you that the committee commanded his implicit confidence. Moreover my conviction

\(^1\) A Bunch of Old Letters, pp. 379-80
is that in view of the critical times that are ahead of us in India and abroad, we should have a composite cabinet commanding the confidence of the largest number of Congressmen, possibly reflecting the composition of the general body of the Congress."

Bose then detailed the prolonged efforts he had made to arrive at some understanding with Gandhi: "Since I could not implement Mahatmajji's advice, I could only repeat my request that he should kindly shoulder the responsibility vested in him by the Tripuri Congress and nominate the Working Committee. And I told him that whatever committee he appointed would be binding on me, since it was my determination to implement Pantji's resolution.

"Unfortunately for us, Mahatmajji felt himself unable to nominate the Working Committee. As a last step, I tried my best to arrive at an informal solution of the problem. Mahatmajji told me that the prominent members of the previous Working Committee and myself should put our heads together and see if we could arrive at an agreement. I concurred, and we made the attempt. If we had succeeded in coming to a settlement, we could then have come up before the A.I.C.C. for formal ratification of our informal agreement. Unfortunately, though we spent several hours in discussing the matter, we could not arrive at a settlement. I have, therefore, to report to you with deep regret that I am unable to announce the personnel of the Working Committee."

Bose, therefore, felt constrained to submit his resignation: "I have been deeply pondering as to what I should do to help the A.I.C.C. in solving the problem that is now placed before it. I feel that my presence as president at this juncture may possibly be a sort of obstacle or handicap in its path. For instance, the A.I.C.C. may feel inclined to appoint a Working Committee in which I shall be a misfit. I feel, further, that it may possibly be easier to settle the matter, if it can have a new president. After mature deliberation, therefore, I am placing my resignation into your hands."

Bose then requested Sarojini Naidu to preside over the meeting. Nehru made a suggestion that Bose should be requested to withdraw his resignation and nominate afresh the Working
Committee which functioned in 1938. As for the infusion of fresh blood, Nehru said that two members of the committee would soon be resigning. This would enable Bose to nominate two new members in consultation with his colleagues. Bose did not agree to Nehru's suggestion. Some Bengal delegates resented this move, and said that Nehru's resolution was only meant to impose the former Working Committee on Bose and to humiliate him. Ugly scenes followed in which the members of the Working Committee were subjected to indignities.

When the A.I.C.C. met the following day, Nehru asked Bose to give a definite reply whether his proposition had his approval and he was prepared to withdraw his resignation.

Bose replied that he felt honoured that Nehru should have moved a resolution requesting him to withdraw his resignation. But he had not offered it in a light-hearted manner and therefore he had to ponder deeply before arriving at a decision. He proceeded: "Last year, at Haripura, I made three changes in the personnel of the previous cabinet. My own view definitely is that there should be an inclusion of fresh blood every year. To ensure continuity of policy, a majority of the old committee members may remain. But in a vast country like India the highest executive of the Congress should not be made the close preserve of a group of individuals. A change should, therefore, be made every year under the normal circumstances.

"If we want a strong cabinet with a dynamic urge, it is necessary for us to put representatives of different shades of opinion in the Congress, giving the majority to those who will ensure continuity of policy. If we do not allow this inclusion of fresh blood, the cabinet will lose in power and potency."

Bose indicated his willingness to withdraw his resignation only if his views received due consideration: "It may be argued that such composite cabinets will be too heterogeneous to function properly. But such an apprehension is unfounded. Within the A.I.C.C., or within the Congress, there are different shades of opinion. But do we not have a large measure of agreement among ourselves? Are we not all of us anti-imperialists who accept the present constitution and creed and policy of the Congress? Are not all Congressmen homogeneous in this sense vis-a-vis the world outside?"
"Let us face the fact that the Congress has changed its composition to some extent since 1921. The change should be reflected in the composition of the Working Committee also so that the committee may be truly representative of the general body of the Congress. We should not forget the latent implications of voting at the last presidential election. Shall we not move with the times, see the writing on the wall, and adjust ourselves to it?

"I do not know exactly the mind of the A.I.C.C. today, but I respectfully submit that if you desire that I should continue as president, you should be good enough to show consideration for the views indicated above. If, however, you think otherwise, you should kindly release me from the responsibility of presidency... What does it matter if I am not in the presidential chair? My services will always be at the disposal of the Congress and the country, for what they are worth. I claim to have sufficient patriotism and sufficient sense of discipline to be able to work as an ordinary soldier in this great fight for India's political and economic emancipation."

Sarojini Naidu made another appeal from the chair to Bose to accept Nehru's resolution and asked him to give a definite reply.

Bose said: "In the statement which I have just made before the House, I thought I made my position perfectly clear. I have nothing to add to what I have stated therein. As to my attitude on the question of resignation, as I said at the beginning, I submitted my resignation in an entirely helpful spirit. If you ask me here and now to give my final reply, as the chairman has asked me to do, I can say that my reply can only depend on the form of the resolution to be adopted by the A.I.C.C. At this stage I do not know what resolution will be adopted by the A.I.C.C., and until I know that, it is impossible to give a final reply."

Nehru and Mrs. Naidu considered this reply too vague, and the former asked leave to withdraw his resolution. The chairman requested the members of the A.I.C.C. to elect a new president. Rajendra Prasad succeeded Bose.

Opening the proceedings on the concluding day of the A.I.C.C. session the new Congress President informed the
members that he had decided to appoint the old Working Committee, and that Gandhi had approved of it. Bose as well as Nehru declined to serve on the Committee; the latter, however, promised his co-operation. Self-respect demanded that Bose should cease to be a member of the Congress Working Committee. Within another three months he was disqualified with bell, book and candle from being a member of any elective Congress Committee for three years. This meant virtual expulsion from an organisation to which he had devoted eighteen years of his manhood, more than half of which had been spent in prison or in exile. All these years he had known nothing but struggle, suffering and sacrifice for the great cause of the country's freedom. What thoughts must have surged in his mind as he surrendered his office! Did he recall his last days in Cambridge when he joyously renounced his I.C.S. appointment? Or his apprenticeship with the great C. R. Das, who also had resigned his presidency of the Congress seventeen years earlier? Did not Das return in triumph at the head of the Swaraj Party? Could history not be repeated?

Or did Bose dwell in his mind over the lonely days of incarceration in Mandalay? (But he was always lonely, a man alone, even in the midst of crowds. Was he not a mystic to whom godhead was the only reality?) Did he ruminate over his efforts at successive annual sessions to give a Leftist turn to Congress policy?—The long years of his forced wanderings in Europe where also he was constantly engaged in the service of the motherland, in whatever way it was possible? And then his election as president of the Haripura session, the huge procession, the tumult and the shouting, the plaudits of a hundred thousand people. Soon after came the trial of strength at Tripuri, where he ranged himself against the entire Congress hierarchy and won—but only to lose.

Why did Bose lose? If he could win the election despite bitter opposition, why did he not try to gain the backing of the All-India Congress Committee? Why did he not take Gandhi at his word, appoint his own Working Committee, and face the A.I.C.C. with a fait accompli? Maybe he would have been worsted and forced to resign. But at least he would have gone down fighting, flag flying, instead of tamely surrendering
as he did at Calcutta. Why did he show an excessive anxiety to receive the blessings, if not the support, of Gandhi, as his correspondence with the Mahatma shows? Had he not declared innumerable times that Gandhi was a spent force, a back number?

The realisation of his own intrinsic weakness seems to have dawned on Bose in the very hour of his triumph. He somehow suddenly discovered that Gandhi's position was unassailable, that Gandhi was Congress, and that nothing could be done in the Congress without his support, much less against his wishes. He also discovered that the Old Guard was too strongly entrenched in the Congress to be easily thrown out. Bose discovered above all that his hope that Nehru would join hands with him in giving a radical reorientation to the Congress was altogether misplaced. On the other hand, Nehru considered Bose's re-election "a setback for the real Left". What an irony! In spite of his frequent nagging doubts about Gandhi's leadership, Nehru would never desert him. The emotional nexus between them was even stronger than their political ties. Bose, therefore, might well have spared himself the bitterness which he felt over Nehru's conduct. It was true to type.

Perhaps Bose's illness since his election accounts a good deal for the tragic denouement. His capacity for clear thinking was probably clouded. He could not talk things over with Gandhi as he desired. He could not meet Nehru until late in April. He could not take any independent advice from friends. At Tripuri itself, he was incapacitated from taking any active part in the proceedings, much less from mustering the support of the delegates. Indeed, he would have been well advised not to go to Tripuri at all, in the condition he was in. A sick general should never lead his forces into battle. Instead of gaining kudos he invites only ridicule.

Nothing could have been so deadly and yet so seemingly bland as the resolution moved by Pant at Tripuri. It should have been countered then and there but Bose and his supporters failed to do so. Once it was passed, there was no escape from eventual resignation in whatever way he acted, especially when Gandhi refused to oblige Bose in the least, despite his repeated pleas and prayers.
Gandhi is considered by many a politician-saint. Apparently in his dealings with Bose, the politician had the better of the saint. "Of all the participants," said a commentator who had no reason to sympathise with Bose, "only Gandhi had a clear and consistent objective—to oust Bose." Even so devoted a follower of Gandhi (and Bose’s opponent in the presidential election) as Pattabhi Sitaramayya wrote: "Why did Gandhi resent a second term to Subhas? That even after his election, Gandhi was not reconciled to it was a fact about which no unnecessary secrecy was maintained. Subhas must have valued his second term only to reorganize the Congress on lines adumbrated by him from Vienna. That alone, if nothing else, would be ground enough for Gandhi to resist such an endeavour. Whether Gandhiji had any further grounds to justify his attitude, he alone must be able one day to say."

There is another, somewhat fantastic explanation offered by A. K. Majumdar on the basis of information supplied to him by K. M. Munshi: "Bose, when he was in Bombay in 1938, was in active contact with the German Consul. He would take great precautions while meeting the Consul. For example, he would go to a friend’s house for lunch, after which he would retire for rest, and all the guests would naturally depart. He would then change his dress, disguise himself sufficiently to hide his identity, and go to meet the Consul in the house of another friend, changing his taxi on the way. However, some coded messages from the Consul to Germany were intercepted by the British Secret Service in 1938, and sent to the Government of India who managed to forward them to Gandhiji, through Munshi. Netaji’s secret activities took Gandhiji entirely by surprise and he decided that he (Netaji) should not be re-elected President of the Congress. This led to his opposition to Netaji’s re-election, and after the latter was re-elected, to withhold co-operation, which forced him to resign."

This reads like a thriller and should be taken as such. For although the story (complete with the change of taxis *en route*) might be in character with Bose, those who know Gandhi are

1 Michael Brecher, Nehru, a Political Biography, p. 245
3 Advent of Freedom, p. 155
more than sure that he would not have believed the story without seeking an immediate clarification from Bose. He did not do so though he was in continuous correspondence with Bose throughout the year.

(Munshi adds, for good measure, that he was shown the draft of a treaty which Netaji had entered into with Japan through Lala Shankarlal — "later after 1942, I think". This need not concern us here, though it might have made the flesh of truthful and non-violent Congressmen creep.)

As it was, Gandhi refused to clarify his exact position in all his protracted correspondence with Bose. Soon after Bose's resignation, addressing a Gandhi Seva Sangh session at Brindaban in Bihar, Gandhi explained his fundamental differences with Bose as emanating from the latter's proposed ultimatum to the British Government. Gandhi felt that it was impossible to launch and conduct a non-violent movement because of the prevailing violence and corruption. He reiterated this argument in a press interview, a few days later at Rajkot.

But does this difference of opinion justify the tactics Gandhi adopted? Bose could have been talked out of an ultimatum if only Gandhi had cared to convince him. Or at least, a compromise could have been arrived at on this issue. Gandhi's ill-timed pre-occupation with the trivial problem of Rajkot, when his presence was most needed at Tripuri, began with a fast and ended in a fiasco. But many wondered whether this fiasco was less uncomplimentary to him than his victory over Bose. "It was one of the extremely few occasions," says Hiren Mukerjee, "when the great man, so cool and collected in his dignity, seemed small and peevish." As for the Old Guard, however vindictive it felt towards Bose, it would have loyally abided by whatever advice Gandhi gave. But Gandhi used it only as an instrument to smite down Bose. It was non-violent liquidation at its smoothest.

2 *The Gentle Colossus*, p. 78
WHATEVER his earlier vacillation, Bose bore himself with dignity in his hour of defeat. He chastised those who had shouted down Nehru, Rajendra Prasad and other leaders at the A.I.C.C. session. "The dignity and forbearance which you have shown in the midst of a most aggravating situation," Tagore told him, "has won my admiration and confidence. The same perfect decorum has still to be maintained by Bengal for the sake of her own self-respect, and thereby to help to turn your apparent defeat into permanent victory."

It was probably at this time, that the Poet wrote his glowing eulogy to "Desh-Nayak Subhas Chandra", which was to see the light of day seven years later, in 1946—long after both Tagore and Bose had passed away.

"Poets in the East have ever voiced their peoples' tribute to the national heroes", wrote Rabindranath, "and as Bengal's poet, I today acknowledge you as the honoured leader of the people of Bengal. It has been assured in our scriptures that from time to time, the eternal principle of good arises to challenge the reign of evil. When misfortunes from all directions swarm to attack the living spirit of the nation, its anguished cry calls forth from its own being, the liberator to its rescue.

"Subhas Chandra, I have watched the dawn that witnessed the beginning of your political sadhana. In that uncertain twilight there had been misgivings in my heart, and I had hesitated to accept you for what you are now. Now and again, I have felt hurt by stray signs of your weakness and irresolute hesitancy. Today you are revealed in the pure light of the midday sun, which does not admit of apprehensions. You have come to absorb varied experience during these years. Today you bring your mature mind and irrepressible vitality to bear upon the
work at hand. Your strength has sorely been taxed by imprisonment, banishment and disease, but rather than impairing, these have helped to broaden your sympathies—enlarging your vision so as to embrace the vast perspective of history beyond any narrow limits of territory. You did not regard apparent defeat as final; therefore, you have turned your trials into your allies. More than anything else, Bengal needs today to emulate the powerful force of your determination, and your self-reliant courage.

"With patience we are sure to reach our great end if only we can all work together. But why should there be a big "if"? Why should we be faint on faith? Let it be your untiring mission to claim of your countrymen the resoluteness, the unyielding will to live and to conquer, strengthened by the inspiration of your own life. Let Bengal affirm in one united voice that her deliverer's seat is ready, spread for you. Let her recriminations and self-insults vanish for ever in your person. Let everything mean and cowardly be put to shame by the magnitude of the task awaiting us. May she offer you honour worthy of a leader, of retaining her self-respect in trials as well as triumphs.

"As I feel that you have come with an errand to usher a new light of hope in your motherland, I ask you to take up the task of the leader of Bengal and ask my countrymen to make it true.

"Let nobody make such a grievous mistake as to think that in a foolish pride of narrow provincialism, I desire to see Bengal as an entity separate from the rest of India, or dream of setting in my own province a rival throne to the one on which is seated a majestic figure representing a new age in the political history of the world. What I have tried to express is my wish that Bengal should in every way be worthily related to the vaster body, so that she will not be relegated to a back seat, that her membership in the body politic may be complete and fruitful. I have no doubt that the blessings of Mahatmaji will always be with you...

"Long ago at a meeting, I addressed my message to the leader of Bengal who was yet to arrive. After a lapse of many years, I am addressing one who has come into the full light of recognition. My days have come to the end. I may not join him in the fight that is to come. I can only bless him and take my
leave, knowing that he has made his country's burden of sorrow his own, that his final reward is fast coming in his country's freedom."

Rabindranath wanted to invite Bose to Shantiniketan, and present him with this address which was ready in print in May 1939. For some reason, however, the function was never held, and the address was not circulated till it was published on the birth anniversary of the Poet on May 8, 1946, five years after his death. The address shows how indignant the Poet was over the scurvy treatment meted out to Bose by his opponents.

April 30, 1939, marked a turning point in Bose's career. Though there was no apparent intention in his mind, then, to leave the Congress, or the remotest inkling of his ever going out of the country, he might well have thought that there was no future for him in that organisation, and perhaps in the country, as long as Gandhi dominated the scene. His attempts to carry the Congress with him for an early fight with the British Government had not only failed, but backfired. He himself was thrown out and discredited in the eyes of the faithful.

The chances of forming a rival party to the Congress were dim, and for the moment, at any rate, Bose desired—and had promised in his resignation speech—to conduct himself as its loyal soldier. But his activities would always be suspect; he would ever be considered a rebel, someone out of the pale. It was not in his nature to remain inactive, or to submit meekly. "Struggle", was his middle name and he remained true to it. Within three days of his resignation, he announced the formation of a new party within the Congress, to be called the Forward Bloc. Its object was "to rally all the radical and anti-imperialist progressive elements in the country on the basis of a minimum programme, representing the greatest common measure of agreement among the radicals of all shades of opinion". Bose became its president and Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar was appointed vice-president.

According to Bose the Forward Bloc was a product of historical necessity. It was "the expression of the time-spirit". It gave "vocal expression to the vague feelings, hopes and aspirations which stirred the masses". The three-fold task before the Forward Bloc was defined as Left-consolidation, winning over the
majority in the Congress to its viewpoint, and resumption of the national struggle in the name of, and with the united strength of the Congress.

An All-India conference of the Forward Bloc was held in Bombay on June 22, 1939, to draw up its constitution and programme. The constitution made it clear that it was an organisation within the Indian National Congress, and was meant to serve as a common platform for all Left elements inside the Congress. Its goal was complete political independence for India, and the establishment of a socialist state. Only primary members of the Congress could be eligible to the membership of the Forward Bloc. The more important planks of its programme were defined as follows:

(1) While every Indian should have full freedom of worship, religion and mysticism should not dominate politics and political affairs. Political affairs should be guided by political, economic and scientific considerations only.

(2) Strenuous efforts should be made to fight provincialism and communalism, which have been accentuated since the inauguration of provincial autonomy.

(3) Any corruption that may exist among Congressmen whether it may be the result of the attempt to capture the Congress machinery or whether it has appeared in the wake of office acceptance — should be stamped out.

(4) The Congress should be freed from the influence of the vested interests and from the domination of the Congress ministries. Democracy should be restored within the Congress, and should replace the present authoritarian policy. Simultaneously the Congress organisation throughout the country should be radicalised and activised.

One of the main resolutions adopted by the conference advocated countrywide preparation for an anti-imperialist struggle, to be launched in British India as well as in princely states, so as to take advantage of the rapidly gathering clouds of war, for the overthrow of foreign rule.

The relation of the newly formed Forward Bloc to the existing Leftist parties and groups was a ticklish matter. Bose naturally wanted all Leftists to merge their separate identity into one organisation for the execution of an agreed minimum
programme. For obvious reasons such as mutual distrust and rivalry, this was not found possible, nor could any other party allow its members to join the Forward Bloc in their individual capacity. The Bloc, therefore, had necessarily to function more as a platform than as a party. It did not even remotely approach the "Samyavadi Sangh", which Bose had nursed in his mind for several years.

Curiously, therefore, the most important result of the first conference of the Forward Bloc was the emergence of the Left Consolidation Committee. The units comprising it were the Congress Socialist Party, the National Front (as the Communists called themselves then), and the Radical Democratic Party, apart from the Forward Bloc. All these units had an equal status, and the Left Consolidation Committee could act only when there was unanimous agreement among all of them. The Left Consolidation Committee was thus an amorphous mass, "a mechanical mixture, not a chemical compound", which carried within it the seeds of its own disintegration.

The Left Consolidation Committee made its presence felt at the meeting of the All India Congress Committee, which was held soon after the Forward Bloc’s conference. It could not, however, prevent the passing of two resolutions which were primarily intended to stifle the challenge posed by the Leftists. The first relating to satyagraha said that no Congressman may offer or organise any form of satyagraha without the sanction of the provincial Congress Committee concerned. The second resolution directed that any difference arising between the Provincial Congress Committees and the Congress Ministries should be referred to the Parliamentary Sub-Committee of the Congress Working Committee. These resolutions, which were interpreted as a direct challenge to the growing Leftist forces in the Congress, were vigorously though vainly opposed by Bose, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and other leaders.

The second resolution virtually subordinated the Provincial Congress Committee to the Congress Ministries, and the party organisation to the legislatures. Several provincial Congress Committees passed resolutions calling into question these resolutions, and organised meetings to condemn them. The Left Consolidation Committee, under the lead of Bose, gave a call
to organise July 9 as a protest day against the A.I.C.C.'s resolutions, and as an assertion of the inherent democratic right of Congressmen to ventilate their grievances. Rajendra Prasad, the Congress President, issued a warning against the proposed demonstrations, which were, nevertheless, held at several places. Incidentally the Radical Democratic Party (M. N. Roy group) did not join in observing the protest day, and withdrew from the Left Consolidation group. This was the first precipitate desertion from it.

As a former Congress President, Bose was asked to submit an explanation for his conduct, which he did in vigorous terms. He argued that it was his constitutional right to give expression to his views regarding any resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. Denial of this constitutional right was, he maintained, tantamount to suppression of civil liberty within the Congress. If his explanation was not considered satisfactory by the Working Committee, he took full responsibility for the demonstrations, and expressed readiness to face cheerfully any disciplinary action taken against him. That action quickly followed. By a resolution drafted by Gandhi, Bose was declared disqualified as president of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. He was also debarred from being a member of any elective Congress committee for three years, from August 1939.

This expulsion—for that is what it amounted to—was a logical sequel to all that had happened during the preceding six months, since Bose's victory in the Congress election. It was also the logical precursor of what was to happen in subsequent years. The Old Guard would not be satisfied with merely frustrating his success, or forcing his resignation. He would remain a thorn in their side so long as he was allowed to hold any position of vantage in the Congress organisation. In an editorial in the Harijan, Gandhi confessed that he was the author of the expulsion resolution, and tried to make his position clear: "I can say that the members of the Working Committee would have shirked the duty of taking action if they could have. It was easier for them to have a colourless resolution than to have one which was no respecter of persons . . . Subhas Babu has invited action. He had gallantly suggested that if any action was to be taken, it should be taken against him as the prime mover. In
my opinion, the action taken by the Working Committee was the mildest possible. There was no desire to be vindictive. And surely the word 'vindictiveness' loses all its force and meaning when the position of Subhas Babu is considered."

In a statement issued on August 19, Bose "welcomed the decision virtually expelling me from the Congress for three years. This decision is the logical process of 'Right-consolidation' which has been going on for the last few years and which has been accentuated by the acceptance of ministerial office in the provinces. The action of the Working Committee has served to expose the real character of the present majority party in the Congress, and the role it has been playing. The punishment accorded to me is, however, thoroughly justified from its point of view.

"By trying to warn the country about the continued drift towards constitutionalism and reformism, by protesting against resolutions which seek to kill the revolutionary spirit of the Congress, by working for the cause of Left-consolidation and, last but not least, by consistently appealing to the country to prepare for the coming struggle, I have committed a crime for which I have to pay the penalty.

"To members of the Forward Bloc, to Leftists in general, and to the public at large, I would appeal to remain calm and collected in face of the above provocation, and to continue working with increasing patience and perseverance. What does it matter if I am victimised today? I shall cling to the Congress with even greater devotion than before, and shall go on serving the Congress and the country as a servant of the nation. I appeal to my countrymen to come and join the Congress in their millions, and to enlist as members of the Forward Bloc. Only by doing so, shall we be able to convert the rank and file in the Congress to our point of view, secure a reversal of the present policy of constitutionalism and reformism, and resume the national struggle for independence with the united strength of the Indian people."

On September 3 the Second World War broke out with Hitler's invasion of Poland. By a special ordinance the Governor-General declared India a belligerent country, dragging it into the war even without a formal consultation with its leaders. The
Congress, by its previous resolutions on the subject (the War, after all, was expected for a long time) was committed to resist the exploitation of India’s resources for an imperialist war. The Congress Working Committee, however, which met soon after, decided to mark time by merely demanding of the British Government, a clear enunciation of its war and peace aims. It did not take any decision “so as to allow for the full elucidation of the issues at stake, the real objectives aimed at and the position of India in the present and in the future”. It invited the British Government “to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims were, in regard to democracy and imperialism, and the new order that is envisaged, in particular, how these aims were going to apply to India and to be given effect in the present.”

Bose, who was surprisingly invited to attend the Working Committee meeting, opposed this stand, and strongly pleaded with the committee to give an ultimatum to the British Government as he had urged in his presidential address at Tripuri. His plea being disregarded, he convened an Anti-Imperialist Conference at Nagpur in October, and there reminded the Congress of its past commitments against participation in the war, and called on the nation to utilise “Britain’s difficulty as India’s opportunity” to win freedom.

In August Bose had launched the Forward Bloc as a weekly journal of the new organisation. In signed editorials week after week he vigorously expounded the aims and objects of the Bloc, and tried to popularise it among the masses. Their polemics make interesting reading even now, and show what a trenchant pen Bose wielded. Exposition, attack, thrust and parry, irony, raillery—all the dialectical weapons were wielded by Bose with consummate skill. The first editorial (August 6, 1939) aptly titled Why Forward Bloc justified the formation of the new party with his favourite Hegelian Dialectic:

“Out of the conflict between ‘thesis’ and ‘antithesis’, ‘synthesis’ is born. This ‘synthesis’, in its turn, becomes the ‘thesis’ of the next phase of evolution. This ‘thesis’ throws up an ‘antithesis’ and the conflict is resolved by a further ‘synthesis’. Thus the wheels of progress move on.”

Bose illustrates this theory as follows: “In every movement that is living or dynamic, there is a latent Left—a latent anti-
thesis, if you will. This latent Left wing becomes manifest in
the fullness of time, and through it, further growth and develop-
ment take place. The Gandhiites of 1920 were the Left wing
in the Congress, but it does not follow therefrom that they are
the Left wing today. The Leftists of yesterday, often, if not
always, become the Rightists of tomorrow. To say that there
should be no differentiation between Right and Left within the
Congress of today, and to agree that the Congress, as a whole,
is Left, is talking arrant nonsense."

"Today", the editorial proceeded, "The slogan of 'unity at
any price and under all circumstances' is a convenient slogan
in the mouths of those who have lost dynamism and revolu-
tionary urge. Let us not be led away by its fascinating appeal.
When the All-India Congress Committee met in Calcutta on
the 29th April 1939, to settle the problem of the new cabinet
or working committee, it was found that the Left wanted to
coeperate with the Right, and their slogan was that of a com-
posite or mixed cabinet. The Right, however, was not prepared
to co-operate with the Left, and their slogan was that of a hom-
geneous cabinet. Consequently, it was the Rightists who ended
compromise, co-operation and unity. The Right wing today
wants nothing less than complete surrender on the part of the
Left."

An editorial on August 19, titled Our Critics, indignantly
repudiated the charge that the Forward Bloc was drawing into
its fold opportunists and fascists: "To accuse the Forward Bloc
of opportunism is amusing indeed. A member of the Bloc has
to fight on two fronts—British Imperialism and Congress
Bureaucratism—and has to suffer persecution at the hands of
both. From the personal point of view he has nothing to gain
but everything to lose. The line of least resistance, and the path
of opportunism, however, take one straight to the Rightist
camp."

About the fascists: "It is difficult to understand what exactly
is meant by 'fascist' in an Indian context, if the word is used
in its scientific or technical sense. Nevertheless, if by 'fascist'
is indicated those who call themselves Hitlers, super-Hitlers, or
budding Hitlers, then one might say that these specimens of
humanity are to be found in the Rightist camp."
Gradually Bose's tone became more bitter and he started a scathing criticism not merely of the Congress policy generally but also of Congress leaders personally, including Nehru and Gandhi. For instance, he blamed the former for resisting mass pressure: "The mass-pressure is there all right, but the Congress Working Committee including our erstwhile Leftist leader, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, has, under the Mahatma's leadership, succeeded in resisting it so far. The Committee today has no existence of its own; it is but the shadow of Mahatma Gandhi, in whose favour it has voluntarily abdicated. But Mahatma Gandhi is no longer the dictator of the Indian National Congress. He is the dictator only of the Right wing of the great organisation, and of some erstwhile Leftist leaders—for the Left wing will most definitely not take orders from him blindly." (December 30, 1939).

Bose also poked fun at spinning one's way to Swaraj: "Soon after the Congress ministries tendered their resignation, the official organ of the Congress High Command (the Harijan) declared that the hour had come 'to clear the decks'. Many such hours have passed since then but nothing has transpired so far. While the decks were being cleared by the official organ, 'War Councils' were set up in some provinces. These 'War Councils' we are informed, are now busy spinning with all their commanders. Under the order of the Congress Working Committee we have to spin yarn, and spin our way to Swaraj. With such a potent weapon in our hands, constituent assemblies become superfluous."

On the convening of a constituent assembly, Bose had firm and historically correct views. He observed in an editorial dated December 23: "The latest stunt which has been devised to stave off a struggle, and which may, in time, prove to be the greatest fraud perpetrated on the Indian people by their own leaders, is the proposal of a constituent assembly under the aegis of an imperialist government. We have made some serious study of history and politics, and in our view a constituent assembly, if it is not a misnomer, can come into existence only after the seizure of power... Only a provisional national government can (then) summon a constituent assembly for framing a detailed constitution for India. This assembly which
is now being proposed by the Congress Working Committee may be a glorified All-Party Conference, but it is certainly not a constituent assembly."

Bose frequently reverted to this subject in the columns of the *Forward Bloc*. He cited the examples of Russia and Ireland where the firm action of the Bolsheviks and the Sin Fein leaders saved their respective nations from the trap of a constituent assembly. He urged the Congress not to have anything to do with a similar body until it could convene one as a provisional national government.

After the formation of the Forward Bloc, Bose visited almost all the provinces from the North-West Frontier to Madras, to popularise the new party. The tour proved a personal success for Bose and, in most places, he secured good support for the Bloc although Congress leaders kept themselves severely aloof from him. Nevertheless, the public response was heartening. What hurt Congress leaders most was Bose’s criticism of the Congress policy on spinning and prohibition. Both were the current ‘sacred cows’ of Congressmen.

Bose said in a statement issued on the eve of the Independence Day (January 26, 1940) : “The political significance that is being given to spinning and the manner in which it has been quietly converted by the Congress High Command into a method of political struggle, need unequivocal condemnation; consequently the members of the Forward Bloc would be perfectly justified in organising separate meetings and demonstrations on Independence Day.” This statement naturally stung Gandhi to the quick. “The spinning wheel abides,” he insisted in an editorial in the *Harijan*. He also pleaded guilty to Bose’s charge that he had consistently resisted a fight with the British Government on the plea of violence and corruption in the Congress and out of fear of Hindu-Muslim riots, which might follow the launching of a civil disobedience movement. “I wholly endorse Subhas Babu’s charge that I am eager to have a compromise with Britain, if it can be had with honour. Indeed, satyagraha demands it. Therefore, I am in no hurry.”

In March 1940, the Anti-Compromise Conference was held at Ramgarh, Bihar, under the joint auspices of the Forward Bloc and the Kisan Sabha, over which Bose presided. In his
address he called for an uncompromising war with imperialism. "The present age is the anti-imperialist phase of our movement. Our main task in this age is to end imperialism and win national independence for the Indian people. When freedom comes, the age of national reconstruction will commence, and that will be the socialist phase of our movement. In the present phase of our movement, Leftists will be those who will wage an uncompromising fight with imperialism. Those who waver and vacillate in their struggle against imperialism—those who tend towards a compromise with it—cannot by any means be Leftists. In the next phase of our movement, Leftism will be synonymous with socialism, but in the present phase, the words 'Leftist' and 'Anti-imperialist', should be interchangeable."

The Anti-Compromise Conference resolved that "the sixth of April, the first day of the National Week, should mark the commencement of country-wide satyagraha against the war effort, and the nefarious designs of British imperialism; that the day should symbolise the resolve of the Indian people to withdraw themselves from forcible participation in the war, and to make the final effort for the achievement of India's independence. Once the struggle began, there was to be no rest, no break, no Chauri Chaura as in 1922, no Delhi Pact as in 1931, no side-tracking of the struggle, as happened in 1933, when the Harijan movement was launched."

The conference issued a call "for initiating and intensifying local struggles of workers and peasants and co-ordinating them with the vast national struggle of the people by rallying all the anti-imperialist radical and progressive forces, in the country under a common banner, the banner of liberty and under a common slogan of 'Freedom, Peace and Bread'."

Ramgarh was thus a milestone for the Forward Bloc, which decided to launch a struggle of its own. Unfortunately, Ramgarh also marked the disintegration of the Left Consolidation Committee. The Congress Socialist Party left the Committee on the ground that a country-wide struggle was premature. In fact, it had aired its differences with the Forward Bloc right from its inception, as also with Bose personally. In spite of his past association with the Congress Socialists, they never looked upon him as one of them. His devotion to nationalism of an extreme
type, they thought, was stronger than his faith in socialism. They also seem to have been influenced by Nehru’s criticism of the Forward Bloc as a haven for all sorts of people—opportunists, those who had one or other grievance against the Congress High Command, and men who “if the war broke out in Europe would favour the countries which politically inspired them viz. Germany and Italy”. Another reason for the cold-shouldering of the Forward Bloc by the Congress Socialist Party was its fear that the Bloc may not long remain in the Congress.

The National Front (the Communist Party), also refused to join the struggle, although it was clamouring all the while for mass action, and dissociated itself from the committee. Bose stigmatised the action of the National Front as a “dog in the manger” policy. In 1930 its members criticised those who had joined the struggle as ‘counter-revolutionaries’. In 1940 they were condemning them as ‘disrupters of unity’. Little could Bose have imagined that the volte face of the Communist Party would be complete 14 months later with the assertion that the imperialist war had been transformed into a People’s War with Hitler’s invasion of Russia, and that it would attack the Forward Bloc as a “fascist fifth column”, and brand Bose as “traitor, hangman and puppet of the Axis Powers”.

Within a week of the struggle launched by the Forward Bloc, many of its prominent leaders were arrested. “Destiny has forced us to act as the spearhead of the struggle and the vanguard of the national army”, Bose declared, and called on his followers to go on with the fight despite the arrest of their leaders.

In his presidential address to the second conference of the Forward Bloc held at Nagpur in June 1940, Bose asked the question “What has been our actual achievement during the past year?” His own reply was fourfold: “In the first place, we can claim to have successfully resisted the tendency towards constitutionalism and compromise within the ranks of the Congress. Secondly, we have so far frustrated all attempts to secure the co-operation of the Congress in the prosecution of the war. Thirdly, we can perhaps claim that we have succeeded in creating an atmosphere of struggle. Today the talk of a struggle is everywhere in the air, and the more our people talk of it, the more will they move away from a compromise. Lastly, we can
claim that at Ramgarh we launched our struggle with such strength and resources as we possessed. During the last three months a large number of our fellow-workers (including nine members of the Working Committee of the Forward Bloc) have been arrested."

It may be noted in passing, that the Congress Ministries had resigned in October 1939, though this was considered by at least one Chief Minister as only "three months' holiday".

That Bose's influence was indirectly responsible for the Congress Working Committee's resolution directing Congress Ministries to resign is evident from a conversation between the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, and K. M. Munshi on January 12, 1940.

**LINLITHGOW**: I think it was a mistake to have left office. Perhaps there were reasons on your side which I cannot appreciate.

**K. M. MUNSHI**: Yes, we could not have continued long in office unless we had obtained a share in the Centre which could justify our being there. For instance, Subhas would have made our task very difficult.

**LINLITHGOW**: You think Subhas formidable. I do not think so.

**K. M. MUNSHI**: Not in that sense, but if we had been in power he would have got himself arrested only in order to make our position difficult.¹

In view of the secession of other groups from the Forward Bloc, the Nagpur Conference resolved that the Bloc would thenceforth function as a party. "It will be a party within the Congress with mass membership. The objective of the Forward Bloc will be the capture of political power by the Indian masses as early as possible, and the reconstruction of India's national economy on socialist basis."

At Nagpur Bose coined a new slogan for the Forward Bloc: "All power to the Indian people, here and now."

In his speech, while discussing the war situation, Bose

¹ A. K. Majumdar, *Advent of Independence*, p. 396
visualised the likely defeat of Britain. Mussolini had joined the war on June 10, Paris had fallen on June 13 and Marshal Petain was about to capitulate, leaving Britain alone to face the Nazi might. Bose was not alone then in indulging in such a doleful prophecy. Indeed, if Nirad Chaudhury is to be believed, Bose had told him in June 1940, “I predict that England will accept defeat and surrender by July 16”. This forecast was falsified by the heroic “Battle of Britain”, in which by a superhuman effort, Britain repelled Hitler’s blitz, and rendered forever impossible the threatened Nazi invasion. But the obviously mistaken and perhaps wishful thinking was to colour Bose’s judgment and to lead to his escape from India to Germany, seven months later.

The Nagpur Session was virtually to mark the end of Bose’s active association with the Forward Bloc, as he was arrested the following month. The rank and file of the Bloc carried on as gamely as it could, in the absence of Bose and other leaders. That it remained a militant organisation which could not be ignored by the British Government, was proved by the fact that it was declared illegal on June 22, 1942, more than a month before the Congress gave the call for Quit India on August 8. Bose’s hope, expressed in his Nagpur address, that the Forward Bloc would have “a role to play in the post-struggle phase of our history,” however, has scarcely been fulfilled.

After the Conference was over, Bose went to Wardha to meet Gandhi. Their talks proved futile. Neither of them could have imagined then that this was to be their last meeting. From Wardha Bose went to Bombay and stayed there for a few days. Notable among his engagements in Bombay was the visit he paid to Veer Savarkar, the veteran revolutionary and Hindu Mahasabha leader. What transpired during their talks, nobody knows for certain, but Savarkar’s private secretary claimed fourteen years later, in a letter to K. C. Das, that it was Savarkar who suggested that Bose should go to Germany. “A definite suggestion was made to Subhas Babu by Savarkarji that he should try to leave India and undertake the risk of going over to Germany to organise the Indian forces, fallen in German hands as captives, and then with the German help should

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1 Hugh Toye, *The Springing Tiger*, p. 60. Toye, however, does not mention the exact source of his quotation.
proceed to Japan to join hands with Rash Behari Bose. To impress this point Savarkarji showed to Subhas Babu a letter from Rash Behari Bose, written just on the eve of the Japanese declaration of war."\(^1\)

The story becomes suspect for the simple reason that the Japanese did not declare war until 17 months later, though it was entirely in character for Savarkar to put such a proposition before Bose.

\(^1\) Quoted on pp. 94-95, Appendix VI of *The Two Great Indians in Japan* by J. G. Ohsawa, Kusa Publications, 123/1 Upper Circular Road, Calcutta.
CHAPTER 19

GIVE ME LIBERTY OR GIVE ME DEATH

THE Congress Working Committee passed a resolution in August 1939 removing Bose from the presidentship of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. The B.P.C.C., however, affirmed full confidence in him. It resolved that while the final decision of the Working Committee was pending, the post of president be kept vacant and that all business be transacted in consultation with Bose. The general body of the B.P.C.C. endorsed this decision by 213 votes to 138 on August 80. The Congress Working Committee promptly ordered that this resolution be expunged. Although a new president was elected thereafter, the B.P.C.C. continued to be guided by Bose. The Congress Working Committee therefore virtually suspended the B.P.C.C. and handed over its administration to an ad hoc committee, headed by Maulana Azad. This drastic step was taken apparently under the suspicion that the B.P.C.C. helped to finance the Forward Bloc—a charge which was disproved by an auditor’s probe. The ad hoc committee was dissolved when a new B.P.C.C. was formed. But all these developments created bitter dissensions in the political life of Bengal and involved Bose in personal wrangles.

Bengal, meanwhile, was suffering the full rigour of the Ordinance Raj, the most obnoxious feature of which was the banning of public meetings. Though Bose had defied this ban on January 31, 1940, at Shraddhananda Park in Calcutta, surprisingly, no action was taken against him. From that day, this particular ban was ignored by the public.

A special session of the Bengal Provincial Conference, held at Dacca on May 25, 1940, attracted a large number of delegates. Its main resolution called upon people to demolish all monuments of political servitude which militated against
national consciousness. Particular mention was made of the Holwell Monument, which had stood in Calcutta for 150 years as a reminder of slavery and humiliation. The conference decided to observe July 8, 1940, as Sirajuddowla Day, in honour of the last independent king of Bengal. That day was also to mark the commencement of the campaign against the Holwell Monument. Maulana Fazlul Huq, Chief Minister of Bengal, announced that the Government itself was contemplating the removal of the monument. Nevertheless, Bose affirmed his decision to march at the head of the first batch of volunteers to demolish it on July 8. But he was arrested the previous day under Section 129 of the Defence of India Rules and taken to the Presidency Jail.

Although the arrest provoked protests from all over the country, neither the Congress Working Committee nor Gandhi had a word to say against it, on the technical plea that Bose had not defied the law with its permission. Gandhi went to the extent of justifying this inaction in the Harijan: "The arrest of a big man like Subhas Babu is no small matter. But he has laid out his plan of battle with deliberateness and boldness. He thinks that his way is the best. He honestly thinks that the Working Committee's way is wrong, and that nothing good will come out of its procrastination. He told me in the friendliest manner that he would do what the Working Committee had failed to do. He was impatient of delay. I told him that if, at the end of his plan, there was Swaraj during my life-time, mine would be the first telegram of congratulation he would receive. And if, while he was conducting his campaign, I became a convert, I should wholeheartedly acclaim him as my leader and enlist under his banner. But I warned him that his way was wrong. My opinion, however, matters little."

And so began Bose's eleventh term of imprisonment, which was also to prove his last. During the previous sixteen years, he had become a seasoned jail-bird, and he must have quickly settled down in the familiar routine of the Presidency Jail.

As events were to prove, this was the last time Bose was to remain His Majesty's guest. His various moods and processes of thinking in prison, at that time, are thus of great interest to the psychologist as well as the historian. There seems no reason
to believe that when, on the evening of July 2, he was locked up behind prison bars, any unusual thoughts were at the back of his mind. Though he had actually broken no law, he had emphatically asserted his intention to do so. And intent, in the eyes of the Government was as good as the offence. No official explanation or justification was forthcoming when Bose was put under detention on July 2nd. It was only when Mr. Amery, Secretary of State for India, made an announcement in the House of Commons, did the world know that Bose’s arrest was connected with the stir for removal of the Holwell Monument. The following month, when the Bengal Government decided to remove the monument on its own, a number of people who had been arrested were released. Bose who continued to be in jail, was now charged under Section 26 of the Defence of India Rules, instead of Section 129 (under which he was originally arrested). While the latter provided only for temporary detention, Section 26 allowed permanent detention!

Simultaneously with this change in the original order, came the Government’s decision to launch a prosecution against Bose under Section 38 of the Defence of India Rules, for three speeches delivered by him months earlier and for an article in the Forward Bloc. A further twist was given by launching the cases before two separate magistrates. Thus a unique situation was created whereby Bose was detained permanently without trial under one section of the D.I. Rules, and was proceeded against in two different courts under another section of the same Rules. There could be no greater exhibition of executive fiat under the cover of judicial process. When, in one case, Bose’s counsel applied for bail, it was granted with the frank magisterial confession that his permission would necessarily remain ineffective so long as the accused was detained under Section 26!

Despite his detention, Bose was elected a member of the Central Legislative Assembly. Immunity from arrest and imprisonment, while a legislature is in session, is a cherished right of a member of British Parliament. But such a right was then unknown in a subject country like India though, in a memorial to the Government, Bose cited the instance of a convicted
prisoner being allowed to attend a session of the Burmese Legislative Assembly.

This vindictive persecution naturally made Bose bitter as much against the British Government as against the so-called popular ministry in Bengal. He was also angry with the Congress High Command, which had sent him into the wilderness. "The more I think of Congress politics," he wrote to his brother, Sarat Chandra Bose, on October 31, "the more convinced I feel that in future we should devote more energy and time to fight the High Command. If power goes into the hands of such mean, vindictive and unscrupulous persons when Swaraj is won, what will happen to the country?"¹ When he heard that the Congress had launched the "individual civil disobedience movement", he warned a friend not to feel obliged to jump into the fray and court arrest. "We do not take orders from Wardha," he told him.

Just then the curtain dropped on the Vithalbhai Patel Will case, with the handing over of the sum in dispute to Maulana Azad for the creation of a public trust, thus nullifying the wish of the deceased to hand over the amount to Bose for foreign propaganda. Bose was provoked to comment: "One is forced to wonder which is a greater menace to India's political future—the British bureaucracy or the Gandhian hierarchy. Idealism that is devoid of realism, and whose only content is a frothy sentimentalism of a sanctimonious character, can never be fruitful of results."

As one month succeeded another, Bose began to brood over the future. He could very well see that his detention was not likely to end within the foreseeable future. It would go on interminably—at any rate, until the end of the war. Imprisonment was no novelty to him. He was accustomed to prolonged incarceration in Burma and India, and also to years of exile in Europe. But the times were different. Britain was involved in a life-and-death struggle, and now was the right moment to turn Britain's difficulty into India's opportunity. The ideological considerations over the war, which had initially affected Gandhi and Nehru, left Bose cold. He recalled the Gita in which Lord Krishna had resolved Arjuna's scruples over fighting against

¹ Crossroads, p. 328
his own kin. Such scruples were unworthy of a warrior, Krishna told Arjuna.

Here was Britain fighting ostensibly for freedom and democracy while holding India in fetters. Could he not help to break the fetters by joining hands with the enemy, especially in view of the fact that Gandhi had set his face against an ultimatum to the British Government? Bose must have asked himself this question in a moment of frustration which was also a moment of illumination. Time and tide wait for nobody—certainly not the tide of war which has to be taken at the peak or not at all. Could he not somehow free himself from the stone-walls and iron bars of the Presidency Jail, and later on, escape from the bigger jail that was India to Russia, to Italy, to Germany, to Japan, to any country from which he could wage an armed struggle against Britain?

If the vision was dazzling, the difficulties that lay in its path were staggering. Bose knew how similar efforts of isolated revolutionaries in the First World War had ended in dismal failure. He was alone—without funds, without any well-knit organisation to back him, without any established contacts with foreign governments. The German radio might have ostensibly supported the Forward Bloc, of which he was the leader, but Bose could not forget what Hitler had written in Mein Kampf about "a few Asiatic mountebanks who put themselves as the champions of Indian freedom". He knew what Mussolini had done in Abyssinia. He also knew what Japan's "co-prosperity sphere in East Asia" really implied.

Bose was no mountebank and he wanted to be nobody's tool. But desperate diseases call for desperate remedies, and here was an occasion when he would be justified in taking on any odds, in engaging himself in any wild gamble, if thereby he could bring the freedom of his country nearer. Was not Churchill to say within a few months, when Hitler invaded Russia, "I would willingly shake hands with the devil himself if it meant saving my country."

Those who accuse Bose of escaping to Germany (and later joining hands with Japan) because of fascist leanings, are blind to such idealistic considerations. Bose was a karmayogi, a man of action, who never lost himself in dialectical hair-splitting
over means and ends. If the ends were unselfish and noble, if they involved the liberation of 350 million people, they justified every possible means. After all, nothing would be greater and nobler than trying to regain a nation's freedom. 'Give me liberty or give me death!'

Death! Yes, he would have to pass through the portals of death if he was to win liberty, first for himself and then for his country. He must be prepared for martyrdom if he was to free himself from prison, and, again afterwards, in the actual battle for freedom.

It is not clear when such thoughts first crossed Bose's mind. The idea of martyrdom is a fire which feeds upon itself. The would-be martyr is possessed by a single thought— an idee fixe. All lesser considerations lose their meaning. The supreme sacrifice is all. Everything else is vain and transitory. And true to time-honoured Indian tradition, which had been given a political validity by Gandhi, the martyrdom could be only through a fast to death. A Shivaji could escape from a Moghul prison by hiding himself in a box of sweetmeats. A de Valera could flee from a British prison by means of a faked key. But Indian prisons were built to render such easy escapes impossible. Yes, a fast unto death was the only way to martyrdom, and, maybe, the way to another life. Did not Gandhi gain his ends more than once simply by undertaking a fast to death? The Mahatma did, and Bose himself had come out successful from his earlier fasts. But Terence McSwinney perished in the attempt, and so did Jatin Das only a few years earlier. Similar was the fate of many other unknown patriots in the Andamans.... But it did not matter what his own fate might be.

According to a broadcast he made on July 9, 1943, from Japan, it took Bose fully three months of prayer and meditation to decide if he had strength enough to face death in fulfilling his duty. Before he could slip out of India, he had to get out of prison first, and in order to do so he had to go on a hunger strike. The logic was simple yet compelling. He had convinced himself that he had a historic task to fulfil abroad and the only way to discharge it lay through martyrdom—a fast to death. By the end of October 1940, his mind was made up. In a letter to the Superintendent of Presidency Jail, dated
October 30, he wrote: "There is no other alternative for me but to register a moral protest against an unjust act, and as a proof of that protest, to undertake a voluntary fast." In keeping with his religious temperament, he had taken a solemn vow to that effect on Kali Puja Day, and nothing would now come in the way of discharging it.

The fast was to begin on November 29. On the 26th he sent letters to the Governor of Bengal, the Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers recounting all the injustices and illegalities that were being heaped upon him, and informing them of his determination to fast to death. Its last few paragraphs are illuminating:

"Life under existing conditions," wrote Bose, "is intolerable for me. To purchase one’s continued existence by compromising with illegality and injustice goes against my very grain. I would throw up life itself rather than pay this price. Government are determined to hold me in prison by brute force. I say in reply: ‘Release me or I shall refuse to live’—and it is for me to decide whether I choose to live or to die. Though there may be no immediate, tangible gain, no suffering, no sacrifice is ever futile. It is through suffering and sacrifice alone that a cause can flourish and prosper, and in every age and clime the eternal law prevails—the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church."

Then follow these deeply moving words:

"In this mortal world everything perishes, and will perish, but ideas, ideals and dreams do not. One individual may die for an idea, but that idea will, after his death, incarnate itself in a thousand lives. That is how the wheel of evolution moves on, and the ideas, ideals and dreams of one generation are bequeathed to the next. No idea has ever fulfilled itself in this world except through an ordeal of suffering and sacrifice.

"What greater solace can there be than the feeling that one has lived and died for a principle. What higher satisfaction can a man possess than knowledge that his spirit will beget kindred spirits to carry on his unfinished task. What better reward can a soul desire than the certainty that his message will be wafted over hills and dales, and over the broad plains, to every corner of his land and across the seas to distant lands? What
higher consummation can life attain than peaceful self-immolation at the altar of one's cause?

"Hence it is evident that nobody can lose through suffering and sacrifice. If he does lose anything of the earth, he will gain much more by becoming the heir to a life immortal. This is the technique of the soul. The individual must die, so that the nation may live. Today I must die so that India may live, and may win freedom and glory."

The letter concluded with a message to his countrymen—the last to be given from Indian soil:

"To my countrymen I say: Forget not that the greatest curse for a man is to remain a slave. Forget not that the grossest crime is to compromise with injustice and wrong. Remember the eternal law: You must give life if you want to get it. And remember that the highest virtue is to battle against iniquity, no matter what the cost may be."

The fast began on November 29. There seemed to have been some plan of forcibly feeding Bose, for he delivered a stern warning against it to the authorities on December 5. He told them that in the event of forcible feeding he would have to counter it by seeking the means of committing suicide. For one who had turned his back on life, there were a hundred ways of reaching death. The responsibility for this would rest on the Government, which was requested to allow him to meet his end peacefully. That very day Bose was released. The two prosecutions, however, still hung over his head.
CHAPTER 20

THE GREAT ESCAPE

THE man who returned to his house at 38/2 Elgin Road, Calcutta, on December 5, 1940, was not the same Subhas Chandra Bose who was taken away from it five months earlier. He was a ghost of his former self. Bose was in a state of complete physical exhaustion. He was under house arrest, with sixty-two policemen keeping a round-the-clock watch over his movements. Doctors, who were greatly concerned about his condition, issued a warning to his relatives and friends not to disturb him at all.

At this time a plea was made to Gandhi to withdraw the disciplinary measures against Bose in view of the critical condition of his health. But Gandhi refused to do so, unless an apology was first tendered by him for indiscipline.

Bose’s comment on this attitude was typical. He said:

“At school I once read a poem on William Tell, the greatest hero of Switzerland. It ran:

My knee shall bend, he calmly said,
To God and God alone;
My life is in the Austrians’ hand,
My conscience is my own.

1 The observations of Bose during his stay in Kabul, quoted in this chapter, are based on the recollections of Uttam Chand, who befriended him there. Uttam Chand’s reminiscences were first written in Urdu, while he was in the Rawalpindi Jail in 1945. They were translated into English and published by the Hindustan Times, Delhi, in a series of articles, and later, as a booklet under the title When Bose was Ziauddin by Rajkamal Publications, Delhi. Bhagat Ram Talwar, who accompanied Bose from Peshawar to Kabul under the alias of Rahmat Khan, published his own recollections in a series of articles in the Blitz Newsmagazine, Bombay in March, 1968.
“I am not aware of any wrong that I have committed in my political career. Consequently, my reply to the Mahatma will be on the above lines with a few verbal changes.”

Physical restrictions on his movements suited Bose mentally also very well. He had to prepare his plans for the escape from India in the strictest seclusion and secrecy. There is some reason to believe, however, that he had not made up his mind finally about this, at any rate, during the first few days after his release. His interest in political developments in India, and especially in Congress affairs in Bengal, was still keen. Between December 10 and 24, he issued a number of statements on the Bengal Congress tangle which were marked by his usual polemical vigour. His main target was Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, whom he dubbed “the Grand Moghul of the Bengal Congress”. He also sent a letter to Gandhi, requesting him again to give a call to the nation. He seems to have still entertained a sneaking hope that the Congress would soon launch a mighty campaign against the British in which he would take full part.

The impression that Bose refused to meet anybody is also mistaken. All that happened was that under the orders of his doctors, the interviews were confined to the morning. When during a hearing of the case, his counsel asked for a postponement on the plea of health, the magistrate asked him how, if Bose was so ill, he could give interviews to so many people. The counsel gave a telling reply: “Granting interviews to the people, Sir, is part of my clients’ treatment. How can he improve if these interviews are refused? They are of the very life-blood of his existence. For a politician there could be no greater punishment than to be deprived of such discussions.” Postponement was granted.

By the end of December, his mind seems to have been finally made up. He had already confined himself to his room. He had grown a beard. Soon he severely restricted the number of his visitors though his close friends had free access to him.

Dr. N. B. Khare, who met Bose early in January, describes the scene thus: “I was taken into a room where Subhas Babu was lying in his sick bed. He had grown a beard and moustache, and there were articles of prayer and worship near his bedstead.
Nearby was lying a copy of the Gita or some other scripture, and on his bed was a rosary. Life-size portraits of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Vivekananda, and other saints, adorned the walls. I was surprised when I entered. I thought I had missed my way and entered the ashram of a sadhu, instead of the room of a politician.

"No one was allowed to enter this room unless he enjoyed the absolute confidence of Subhas Chandra Bose. It appeared that even servants and members of the household were not allowed. Food was served in a peculiar way. Plates of food were moved into the room through a window, by means of an aperture made for the purpose. From all this, it could be easily gathered that the atmosphere of this room appeared mysterious."

Nathalal D. Parikh, his Bombay host, stayed with him for a week till January 5, 1941. Mukundlal Sarkar had a five-hour talk with him on January 16. Parikh and Sarkar, among other close friends, seem to have been taken into confidence about his proposed escape.

A story was spread, however, that Bose was devoting himself entirely to meditation and spiritual contemplation, that he had turned his back on mundane affairs, and that he was likely to follow the example of Aurobindo Ghosh, the great revolutionary of Bengal, who had retired to an ashram in Pondicherry thirty years earlier and become a yogi. This story was thoroughly plausible in view of Bose's religious inclinations; had he not run away from home and gone to the Himalayas while yet in his teens? Everything in the tradition of Bengal's revolutionaries, and Bose's own spiritual temperament, pointed to such a course.

And so as the cold days of January passed, preparations were gradually finalised. Bose gave his last political instructions to Sarkar, and personal messages to a few relatives, and thereafter, practically locked himself in his room, water and food being passed to him through a window. The date on the new year calendar was January 16. The hands of the clock ticked slowly till they indicated an hour past midnight. Fifteen minutes later he had passed the gate of his house, which was closely guarded.

1 My Political Memoirs, p. 46.
by a posse of policemen, and was speeding towards liberty, in
the greatest adventure of his life, which was also to prove the
most dramatic mission for the attainment of freedom. Sisir
Kumar Bose, his nephew, who accompanied him on the first leg
of the flight, gave an account of the escape:

"We actually left on January 17, 1941, in a car, myself and
Netaji being its only occupants. It was a thrilling drive on a
moonlit night. We left when most of the members of the house
had gone to sleep. Netaji was dressed as an upcountry Muslim.
He had with him a suit-case, bedding and an attache case.
From Elgin Road, we had to take the Grand Trunk Road, and
after a whole night's drive at top speed, we hid ourselves at
a certain place for the day and, in the evening, we resumed the
journey by car. We reached Gomoh, about 210 miles from
Calcutta, from where Netaji got into a train for northern India,
in the early hours of January 18. I left him in front of the
station and parted there. The last words of Netaji were: 'I am
off, you go back.' "¹

So well-kept was the secret of Bose's escape that the news was
broadcast only on January 26, which happened to be the
Independence Day. It let loose a flood of speculation—and a
frantic man-hunt by the police. The first reaction was that
Bose had left either for Pondicherry or the Himalayas. The
theory was supported by his relatives. Messengers were sent to
search for him at religious centres, and it was even reported
that he had been found at Jharia.

Gandhi sent a telegram to Sarat Chandra Bose on January
29: "Startling news about Subhas. Please wire truth. Hope
all well.—Bapu." The reply was: "We as much in dark as
public about Subhas's whereabouts and intentions, and even the
exact time of leaving. No news in spite of best efforts for last
three days. Circumstances indicate renunciation."

There were others who thought that Bose had boarded a
Japanese steamer in Calcutta. There was even an ugly rumour
that the Government had secretly done away with him. The
mystery was maintained for over a year, until Bose began his
broadcasts over the Berlin Radio, though even then his exact
whereabouts were unknown. To add further piquancy to the

¹ Das Gupta: *Subhas Chandra*, p. 199
situation, Reuters flashed on March 28, 1942, the news that Bose was killed in an air-crash near the coast of Japan. It was soon contradicted. For over a year, like the elusive Scarlet Pimpernel, Bose was reported to be here, there, and everywhere.

On January 19, there alighted at Peshawar railway station a bearded man in fez, sherwani and baggy pyjamas. To a fellow passenger, he gave his name as Maulvi Ziauddin and said he was an insurance agent by profession. A car that was awaiting him, took him to a hotel near the Dabgari Gate. From there he was taken to the house of Abad Khan. It is not clear how many days Bose—for Maulvi Ziauddin was his assumed name—stayed in Peshawar but it is obvious from Abad Khan’s deposition to the police that some delay and difficulties were encountered in arranging for his journey to Kabul, his immediate destination. When the arrangements were at last finalised, Bose left Peshawar by car accompanied by Bhagat Ram Talwar, who passed as Rahmat Khan. They turned off the main Kabul road before Jamrud, the great fort which guards the entrance to Khyber Pass.

Along a country track, they drove till the car could go no further. Then, after a night in a tribal village they set out on foot for the Afghan frontier escorted by two armed Pathans. Bose and Bhagat Ram were disguised as Ghilji Pathans. Armed with a certificate from the Khan of Lalpura, they professed to be inhabitants of the free tribal area. To hide his ignorance of Pushtu, Bose now passed as the dumb and deaf elder brother of Rahmat Khan, proceeding to the shrine of Sukhi Sahib in Afghanistan. The journey was not without hazard, the last night, after crossing the Kabul river on a raft made of goatskins, being spent by them as hitch-hikers on top of luggage piled in bus. It was freezing cold, and the only way to keep warm was by gulping hot cups of tea whenever the bus halted at wayside stops.

When Bose at last reached Kabul, he was dead tired, and apparently at a dead end. He was an utter stranger to the place, and Bhagat Ram was no better. They had no friends on whom to count. They did not know the local language. They did not even know where to seek shelter until somebody

1 The National Archives, Delhi
in the bazaar pointed to a serai, which was hardly fit for human habitation. But there was no other alternative, and in the plight they were in even that hovel was welcome, to rest their weary limbs and to protect them from the bitterly cold winds that raged outside. All that they had for food that evening was bread dipped in tea. When Bose got up next morning his real problem began — making contacts with foreign embassies for asylum and help to travel to Europe. He had to spend nearly two anxious and suspense-racked months in Kabul before he could secure help from the Italian Consul. So desperate was Bose till then that he seriously thought of smuggling himself across the Russian border. He told Uttam Chand, an Indian radio dealer in Kabul, to whose house he had moved from the serai, that he would rather risk rotting in a Russian prison than stagnating in Kabul. At least there was some hope of reaching Moscow through Russian prisons.

And strange as it may seem, it was to Russia and not to any Axis country, that Bose wanted to go. It sounds stranger still that he had made no definite plan about his destination, much less any arrangements to reach it before escaping from Calcutta. In Kabul all was left to improvisation and luck. It was not long before Bose realised the risk and danger inherent in this uncertainty. There is little doubt that if the Afghan Government had learnt about Bose's presence in Kabul, he would have been unceremoniously turned over to the Government of India, as his host was sixteen months later.

Not that Bose was not in touch with the German or Japanese representatives in India. N. G. Ganpuley, who joined him in Germany, had arranged a meeting for Bose with "some top-ranking officers of the ruling National Socialist Party" who happened to be in Bombay in February 1939. The meeting lasted till three in the morning.¹ This is corroborated by A. K. Majumdar though the highly coloured version he gives of Bose's meeting with the German consul in Bombay appears scarcely credible.²

Whatever be the truth about these earlier contacts, the fact remains that neither the German nor the Japanese Legation in

¹ *Netaji in Germany*, p. 186
² *Advent of Independence*, p. 155
Kabul lifted its little finger to help Bose. Nor was he at first inclined to go to Germany, or much less, to Japan. He had expressed his intention to go to Moscow, first to Abad Khan in Peshawar and then, repeatedly to Uttam Chand in Kabul. During one of their talks, Uttam Chand asked Bose what his main object in going to Moscow was. Bose replied: "The Russians and the Germans have just concluded a non-aggression pact. Germany is at war with Britain. Russia is an enemy of Britain. This is the time to go to Moscow and do propaganda for Indian freedom." Again, "Today, Russia is the only country which can help to liberate India. No other country will help us. This is why I do not want to go anywhere else but to Moscow."

But attempts to establish contact with the Russian Ambassador failed, and Bose was reluctantly compelled to explore the possibilities of going to Berlin or to Rome. Even then his sights were on Moscow. "Since there is now only one route to Europe, and that lies via Moscow, I shall get down at Moscow, or arrange through the Russian Embassy in Berlin or Rome to go back to Moscow." Even when it appeared clear that the Russians were disinclined to give him any help, Bose felt: "But for this those who organised my coming here are responsible. If they had sent me along with a person who had previous contact with the Soviet Embassy, I am sure the Ambassador's attitude would have been different. . . . The idea that they do not want me does not make sense." Again, "My absolute preference is for Moscow. Only it will be easier to go to Moscow from Berlin or Rome than here. And then there is another vital consideration. The Russian Ambassador here has refused to help me and the Russian Government has refused me passage through their country. It is quite possible they may not be wanting me and may not countenance my stay in their country. At the Russian Legation, in Berlin or Rome, I will find out if they can arrange to send me to Moscow. If they refuse, I will be forced to stay on in the Axis countries."

Bose was not at all happy about going to Berlin or Rome. "For forty-five days," wrote Uttam Chand, "Bose Babu was with me, and not once during this period did I hear one good word for the Axis from his lips. He hated them as much as the British. I am sure when he reached Berlin, he must have made another
attempt to get to Russia, through the Russian Embassy. But he must have failed again; and the declaration of the Russo-German war must have finally dashed his hopes of reaching Russia."

In the event it was providential that Bose did not receive asylum in Moscow. For within three months of his reaching Berlin, the Nazis invaded Russia which consequently became an ally of Britain. Had Bose gone to Russia, his future fate could be easily imagined. As it was, he soon became the target of Russian propaganda and was labelled as the "notorious would-be Quisling of India" among other epithets.

While the search for an asylum was on, Bose's stay in Kabul was becoming more and more risky. At the serai where he and Bhagat Ram had first put up, they became the object of the greedy attention of an Afghan policeman, who extracted frequent bribes from them by the threat of dragging them to the police station for questioning. In view of the growing risk of exposure and eventual betrayal to the British Government, they sought refuge with Uttam Chand. The latter was taken aback when Bose's presence in Kabul was made known to him by Bhagat Ram. There was obviously great risk in giving shelter to such a man, but the patriot that Uttam Chand was, he sheltered Bose and Bhagat Ram in his house for six long weeks, and extended every possible help in arranging contacts with foreign embassies.

While Uttam Chand and Bhagat Ram were busy with it, Bose had to shut himself up all the twenty-four hours of the day in his room. He could not risk recognition; any Indian might be a British agent, any Afghan a policeman in disguise. He had to leave Uttam Chand's house soon after owing to the inquisitiveness of a neighbour. But after some days in another serai where he fell ill, he had to return to Uttam Chand's house. Nor could he approach any embassy personally for he had only his word to establish his identity. Though the Russians were unapproachable and the Germans lukewarm, the Italian Charge d'affaires, Alberto Quaroni, evinced sympathy and interest, and promised to do what he could to send Bose to Rome or Berlin. But prolonged delay occurred in finalising the arrangements which worried and depressed Bose. He was disgusted with his continued stay in Kabul and was prepared to take any risk in
leaving for Russia. Uttam Chand accordingly found a guide, who undertook to smuggle Bose across the Afghan border into Russia for seven hundred Afghani rupees. Just then, however, word was received from Quaroni that all difficulties were resolved and that couriers would soon be arriving from Rome to escort Bose. He was asked to visit a certain place for being photographed for a passport. Preparations for the journey, including the purchase of a couple of suits and a hat, were quickly made. A passport under the name of Signor Orlando Mazzotta was got ready. Meanwhile, the couriers arrived and Bose was asked to reach the house of Quaroni by 8 p.m. on March 17.

The next morning he was on the highway from Kabul to Bokhara, bound for Moscow en route to Berlin. He was accompanied by two Germans and an Italian. They had to travel through the high passes of the Hindu Kush, the dead expanse of the Afghan steppes and to cross the Oxus until they reached the fabled city of Samarkand. On March 20 they left Samarkand by rail for Moscow. The party ultimately flew on March 28, 1941, into Berlin, which was to become the headquarters of Bose for the next twenty-two months. Considering the initiative taken by the Italians in arranging for Bose’s journey from Kabul, it is somewhat surprising that they should not have insisted on taking him to Rome. Presumably Bose’s own wishes proved decisive. As for contacting the Russian Government personally, on which Bose was so keen in Kabul, the opportunity was not taken in Moscow. Nor did it arise subsequently in Berlin.

Three months after Bose’s departure from Kabul, Uttam Chand received a message from Bose: “Namaste! I am very grateful to you for what you have done. I shall never forget it all my life. — Ziauddin.”
CHAPTER 21

THIS IS SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE SPEAKING

WHEN Bose arrived in Berlin he was entirely on his own. Not only did he not have any credentials from the Indian National Congress, but it was also known to the German Foreign Office that he had been expelled from it. Nor could his presidency of the Forward Bloc carry much weight. It was well known that Bose was a top-ranking national leader who was thick in the fight for Indian freedom. But his aims and intentions in seeking asylum in Berlin were not clear. When he arrived in Berlin, therefore, the German Government hardly knew what to do with their uninvited guest except to keep a close watch on him.

There was no Indian revolutionary nucleus in 1941 like the one during the First World War. The Germans must have bitterly remembered how all their efforts to promote an insurrection in India then had come to naught. Far from harbouring any sympathy for the independence of India, Hitler had a soft corner for the British Empire despite Germany being then locked in mortal combat with it. According to the secret terms of the Russo-German Pact in 1939, India had been recognised as falling within the Russian sphere of influence after the collapse of Britain. Hitler, therefore, could not openly undertake any contrary commitment so long as the pact was in operation.

Bose had paid frequent visits to Germany during his four years' exile in Europe and had a certain admiration for the Nazi achievements. But his name was not known to the German people at large, nor had he established any contacts with the Nazi hierarchy in Germany, as he had done in Italy. Mussolini would have extended to him every possible help, but Bose preferred to stay and work in Germany. For one thing, he was doubtful of the assistance that the Italians were in a position
to give him and, secondly, Rome, with the free Vatican City in its midst, was a nest of foreign spies where it would be impossible to maintain secrecy. Bose, therefore, decided to stay in Berlin despite its lukewarm attitude to his ambitious plans. Incidentally, Bose came to be known as Chandra Bose (not Subhas Chandra Bose) during the war years in Germany and in the rest of Europe. He was prepared for the delays and even rebuffs he would encounter in attaining his objectives. He was aware of the German lack of interest in Indian affairs. "Indians staying in Germany had very unpleasant experience of this attitude. At no time after the First World War, was the German Foreign Office so reluctant and evasive in supporting any activity, or entertaining any complaint of a political nature, against England by the nationalist Indians staying there, as was the case in the period between 1938 and 1939."¹

Bose's patience was thus strained to the utmost in getting the German Government interested in the cause of Indian independence. At first the Germans were extremely suspicious of him and in fact, according to Girija Mikerji, for several months he remained in a hotel almost under house arrest. Even later, his telephone was regularly tapped, and his personal belongings periodically searched by some unknown persons. He had, therefore, to give strict instructions to his colleagues not to speak to him in English over the telephone.² He had to spend several days in enforced idleness and often felt despondent and even desperate. Sometimes, even a feeling of frustration overtook him and he wondered whether his coming to Germany was at all worth the hazards he had passed through.

On April 9, 1941, Bose presented an exhaustive memorandum to the German Government³ outlining his plan for co-operation between the Axis powers and India. It was divided into six sections as follows: (A) Work in Europe; (B) Work in Afghanistan; (C) Work in the Tribal Territory; (D) Work in India; (E) Question of Finance and (F) Military Aid for destroying British Power in India. It was work in Europe that was of immediate concern to him. He especially requested that

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¹ N. G. Ganpuley : Netaji in Germany, pp. 33-344
² See Girija K. Mikerji : This Europe, p. 124
³ See The Indian Struggle, pp. 419-30
A “Free Indian Government” should be set up in Berlin. A treaty should be entered into by the Axis powers with the “Free Indian Government”, providing for India’s independence in the event of an Axis victory. (3) Propaganda, particularly through the radio should be started, calling upon the Indian people to assert their independence, and to rise in revolt against the British authorities. Broadcasting would be done in the name of Free India Radio Station.

A reference to Japan in the explanatory note attached to the memorandum shows how Bose was shrewd enough to forecast accurately the cataclysmic developments that were to overwhelm the Far East within eight months. “The overthrow of British power in India,” wrote Bose, “can, in its last stages, be materially assisted by Japanese foreign policy in the Far East. If Japan decides on expansion southwards, it will lead to an open clash with Great Britain. If war then breaks out, it appears more than certain that the East Indies and Far Eastern squadrons of the British navy will, under the present circumstances, be no match for the Japanese Navy. And even if America comes to the rescue of the British Navy, a Japanese victory could still be hoped for. A defeat of the British Navy in the Far East, including the smashing of the Singapore base will automatically weaken British military strength and prestige in India. India is, therefore, intensely interested in the developments in the Far East.”

As no reply was received to this memorandum for three weeks, Bose sent a reminder on May 3 pointing out how unrest was gathering momentum in India, Egypt and the Arab countries. “At this psychological moment, the Axis powers could capture the imagination of the entire Orient by an open declaration of policy with regard to the Orient and, in particular, with regard to India and the Arab countries.”

Bose’s sincerity and efforts gradually dispelled German suspicions, and the Foreign Office began to lend an ear to his pleas. Adam von Trott zu Solz, a high official of the German Foreign Office, evinced special interest in Bose’s activities. He had taken a fancy for India since his student days at Oxford and counted many Indians among his friends. He used his good offices to enable Bose to set up an Indian organisation in Berlin. A
number of Indians were called, and carefully screened, by the German Foreign Office. They were then interviewed by Bose for recruitment to the Free India Centre (Azad Hind Sangh). Bose's presence in Berlin was kept a carefully guarded secret, even among Indians in Germany, until the Free India Centre was formally established later in the year. For a long time, he continued to be known as Orlando Mazzotta.

In June 1941 Bose paid a visit to Italy, and was received by Count Ciano, the Foreign Minister. The following extract from his Diary dated June 6 is revealing: "Bose would like the Axis to make a declaration on the independence of India, but in Berlin his proposals have been received with a great deal of reserve. Nor must we be compromised because the value of this upstart is not clear. Past experience has given rather modest results."^1 Nevertheless, it appears from Ciano's Diplomatic Papers^2 that by the middle of June, Bose had sufficiently influenced Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister, to feel that he should be helped in his propaganda work by putting the necessary means at his disposal. Ribbentrop, however, thought that a public declaration on the future status of India would be premature. It was for this reason—to avoid a direct commitment on the subject—that Hitler did not receive Bose for a long time.

Bose was in Rome when Hitler, by invading Russia on June 22, 1941, changed the whole complexion of the Second World War. He lost no time in communicating to the German Government his views on the reaction which the invasion would have on Indian opinion. On his return to Berlin, he further discussed this issue with Ernst Woermann, a Secretary of State at the German Foreign Office. The report of this interview submitted by the latter to the Foreign Minister shows how Bose had retained his independence of outlook in discussions with the highest German authorities, although he was enjoying their hospitality. "Bose at first spoke at length," reported Woermann, "about the reaction of the Russo-German War on public opinion in India. The Soviet Union had been popular in India, especially among the intellectuals from whom the leaders are

^1 Ciano's Diary, pp. 354-55
^2 See pp. 446-47
drawn. It is believed in India that the Soviet Union is an anti-imperialist power and would, therefore, be India’s ally against England. In the German-Russian war, the sympathies of the Indian people were very clearly with Russia because the Indian people felt definitely that Germany was the aggressor and was for India, therefore, another dangerous imperialist power.”¹

To counteract this view and to defeat British propaganda, Bose strongly urged the German Government to lose no time in issuing a declaration in favour of Free India. “Bose is so strongly influenced by the Soviet thesis on the question of the origin of the German-Russian conflict,” ruefully recorded Woermann in a minute on July 17, 1941, “that it will be one of our tasks to set him right on this point.”²

The gradual change in German attitude, from ill-concealed hostility to open support to the cause of Indian independence, was the result of Bose’s persistent efforts. He elevated the issue of Indian independence from an academic to a practical level, and convinced the German Foreign Office that it would be in Germany’s interest to support him. Naturally, the German Government was seeking every opportunity to sabotage the British war effort. India was the biggest reservoir of men and material for Britain. India was dragged into the war without its consent, and it would be no small gain for the Axis if the simmering discontent in India grew into active opposition. Bose’s propaganda would encourage this orientation, and thus be directly helpful to Germany. Widely accused of the worst form of exploitation, the Germans moreover had an added sanctimonious reason of their own to support the efforts for Indian freedom.

An understanding was arrived at to extend the necessary help to Bose. He had three immediate objectives: (1) Forming a “Free India Centre” in Berlin (2) Broadcasting to India and (3) Raising an Indian Legion in Germany. Monetary aid on the basis of a national loan was agreed upon. Bose’s personal allowance was fixed at Rs. 12,000 per month. The monthly grant to the Free India Centre, which started with Rs. 18,000

¹ The Indian Struggle, pp. 438-39
² Nazi documents published by the U.S. State Department in November 1964
in 1941, rose to Rs. 48,000 in 1944. The expenses of broadcasting and of the Legion were borne entirely by Germany. All payments were made punctually and no accounts had to be submitted to any German authority, though Bose was meticulous about the manner in which funds were spent. Accommodation for the Free India Centre was made available in the Tiergarten area, where the foreign embassies were located, and it began to function informally from October 1941. The Centre was given the status of a diplomatic mission with the usual facilities.

Bose was firm on the independence of his movement. He would not allow any strings to be attached to German aid. He would serve as nobody’s cat’s paw. He would be guided only by the interests of India as he visualised them. When later, the Germans began to take a somewhat excessive interest in his movement, he was none too pleased. A tussle, it appeared, was developing between the Foreign Office and the Propaganda Ministry for keeping a watch, if not control, on Bose’s activities. He insisted that the Free India Centre should be allowed to plan its activities without the least interference. He did not want to be branded as a pro-Nazi like the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Rashid Ali of Iraq, who were also in Berlin then.

Gradually he collected around him a band of zealous workers. Frankly, they were attracted more by the personality of Bose than his programme. Although some of them were admirers of the Fuehrer, a majority was staunchly opposed to all that Nazi Germany represented. It required no little effort on Bose’s part to get over their ideological scruples. He assured them that their efforts would be directed solely towards the freedom of India, and this involved no sympathy for the Nazis. Dr. N. G. Ganpuley was among the first to rally round Bose. A. C. N. Nambiar, an Indian journalist who was working in Central Europe for a score of years, joined him in January 1942. He stepped into the shoes of Bose when the latter left for Japan in February 1943, though he soon found them too big. The same month Girija K. Mukerji came to Berlin from Paris, and he was entrusted with the English broadcasts.

The first meeting of the Free India Centre was held on November 2, 1941, to lay down its objectives and framework of rules and regulations. In a short but impressive speech, Bose
outlined the nature of the work he had undertaken, and sought the loyal co-operation of his colleagues. "He told them of the risks involved, and the responsibilities they had to shoulder, in undertaking the work which would bring its reward only if successful; but he added if, by any chance, everything failed, they could have only the satisfaction of having played their modest part in the great struggle of their nation. He emphasized the necessity of team-work, obedience, strict discipline and secrecy, for which they had already taken a pledge."

It was later decided to adopt Jai Hind (Victory to India) as the form of mutual greeting, Netaji (revered leader) as the mode of addressing Bose, Jana Gana Mana (Tagore's song) as the national anthem, and Hindustani written in the Roman script as the national language. Jai Hind became instantly popular, but there seems to have been some opposition to the appellation of Netaji which was obviously modelled on the German "Fuehrer". The younger elements, accustomed to Nazi Germany, thought it an appropriate title, but others thought it somewhat far-fetched to compel them to call Bose Netaji even on informal occasions. Bose agreed with the latter and solved the problem by not insisting on any oath of allegiance personally to himself, except from the members of the military legion.

With the Free India Centre beginning to function smoothly, Bose devoted his attention to the organisation of radio broadcasts. This was no easy matter as there was nobody trained in broadcasting, and everything had to be arranged from scratch. The technical side had necessarily to be left to the Germans. "According to the arrangement made with the German Government, the Indian radio programme was to be sent in the name of Azad Hind Radio, transmitted on a special wave-length, and was, on no account, to be mixed with any German broadcasting programme. It was to be completely manned by Indians except for radio technicians who were to record the talks and to broadcast them at given hours through powerful stations meant for the Far East...There was to be no censorship of any kind from the German side and there was to be no dictation about the

1 N. G. Ganpuley: Netaji in Germany, p. 41
subjects to be selected for political talks. This arrangement was strictly adhered to, till the end of the war."

For a long time the location of the Azad Hind Radio was kept a closely guarded secret. Only the time and wave lengths were announced during transmission, but the place from which the broadcast was made was not revealed. The idea was to make the listeners feel that the broadcasts were being made from somewhere within India. Elaborate care was taken to collect all possible Indian news from various sources and to prepare a suitable summary to be quickly beamed to India. At first only 45 minutes were allotted to the Azad Hind Radio, during which news and a talk were sent out in English, Hindustani and Bengali. In the beginning the talks were written by Bose himself, and they were broadcast in all the three languages. There was some doubt whether these talks were heard in India at all, but Bose was confident that he would gradually attract a large number of listeners. A report received from the German legation in Kabul about the favourable reception of Azad Hind Radio’s broadcasts in India heartened all those associated with it.

The establishment of the Azad Hind Radio more or less coincided with the outbreak of war in the Far East. Exciting developments were taking place all over South-East Asia, and the Japanese Army was scoring success after success in all theatres of war. This immensely cheered Bose whose lingering doubts over the wisdom of his escape from India finally evaporated under the warmth of the Rising Sun. In his mind the success of the Axis powers was now firmly equated with India’s deliverance from British imperialism.

Singapore, the eastern bastion of British power, surrendered to the Japanese Army on February 15, 1942, and Bose thought it a fitting opportunity to make his first broadcast to the Indian people (February 19): “This is Subhas Chandra Bose speaking to you over the Azad Hind Radio,” he began dramatically. “For about a year I have waited in silence and patience for the march of events, and now that the hour has struck, I come forward to speak. The fall of Singapore means the collapse of the British Empire, the end of the iniquitous regime which it has symbolised, and the dawn of a new era in Indian history.” Bose gave a

1 ibid., p. 49
solemn assurance that he would continue to fight British imperialism till India was once again the mistress of her own destiny. “During this struggle and the reconstruction that will follow, we shall heartily co-operate with all those who will help us in overthrowing the common enemy.”

Bose’s broadcasts became more frequent and forceful as the tempo of the war in the Far East increased. The Cripps Mission to India in March 1942 presented him with a capital opportunity to expose British hypocrisy. How could a man like Cripps, with his well-known opposition to British imperialism, he asked, undertake such a cynical task? He broadcast an ‘Open Letter’, to Cripps on March 31, recalling the days he fought with the British Labour Party in vindication of his principles, and asked him how he could play his present role of a dupe of Churchill. More than one broadcast was devoted to the Cripps’ Mission until it ended in failure. On April 6 (Jallianwalla Bagh Day) Bose commended General Tojo’s declaration on “India for Indians”.

In a later broadcast (May 1), he made it clear that he was no apologist of the Axis powers, and that it was no concern of his to defend what they had done or would do. His concern was only with India: “Friends, I laugh whenever I hear British propagandists calling me an enemy agent. I need no credentials when I speak to my own people. My whole life, which has been one long, consistent and continuous record of uncompromising struggle against British imperialism, is the best guarantee of my bona fides. Perhaps I know foreign politics better than many other Indians today, and I have known Britshers from my childhood. All my life I have been a servant of India, and in the last hours of my life I shall remain so. My allegiance and loyalty has ever been, and will be, to India and India alone.”

Bose’s radio propaganda proved effective. Goebbels noted in his Diary (March 26) that it was proving extremely embarrassing to the English. “It is being heard more widely than I at first thought possible. All the better that we have not yet revealed where he is. This makes his propaganda all the more effective.” Again, on April 6, Goebbels observed: “Bose’s propaganda, conducted and guided from here, is gradually getting on the
nerves of the British. In their broadcasts they blame me, espe-
cially, for Bose's activity."

In May 1942, Bose visited Italy to plead with the Duce for
an open declaration in favour of India, a proposal which was
warmly supported by Japan. Although the initial response was
not encouraging, he seems to have won over Mussolini in a
personal meeting. Ciano reports in his Diary: "A long con-
ference without any new developments, except the fact that
Mussolini allowed himself to be persuaded by the arguments
produced by Bose, to obtain a tripartite declaration in favour
of Indian independence. He has telegraphed the Germans pro-
posing — contrary to the Salzburg decision — that they proceed
at once with the declaration. I feel Hitler will not agree to it
very willingly." Ciano's guess proved correct. Goebbels did not
like this idea very much since "we do not think the time has
yet come for such a political manoeuvre". And the Fuehrer
poured cold water on it when he received Bose on May 29, for
the first time. Taking Bose to a wall map, he pointed out the
immense distance that separated the German armies from India,
and observed that in view of this any declaration would be
premature and meaningless.

The Hitler-Bose meeting, however, proved fruitful in other
respects. The discussions at the highest level ensured the con-
nued operation of the Free India Centre, as an accredited
foreign mission in Germany, and helped to regularise its deal-
ings with the Reich Foreign Office, and other Government
departments. Apparently Bose was not impressed by the
Fuehrer. He thought of him as a sort of German version of the
Fakir of Ipi, with whom a logical discussion of any topic, even
for a few minutes, was practically impossible.1 Incidentally, this
meeting seems to have confirmed Bose's belief that he could
not accomplish much in Europe, and that he must go to Japan
for the early fulfilment of his plans.

The Quit India movement launched by Gandhi in August
1942, quickened the tempo of Bose's propaganda campaign in
Berlin. He urged the synchronisation of the internal and ex-
ternal struggles for freedom: "As at home, so also abroad, we
stand always for independence and we shall never permit vital

1 Girija K. Mekerji: This India, p. 134
encroachments on our national sovereignty by any foreign power. Do not be carried by ideological considerations; do not bother about the internal politics of other countries, which is no concern of ours. Believe me when I say that the enemies of British imperialism are our friends and allies; it is to their interest to see that the British empire is broken up and that India is once again free." Bose gave detailed instructions for conducting national activities in India and asked his Indian listeners to follow Colonel Britton's broadcasts beamed by the B.B.C. to occupied Europe for sabotaging the German war efforts, and to use his tactics for a similar purpose in India.

To cope up with the additional demands of propaganda, two more independent transmissions were begun in the name of Congress Radio and Azad Muslim Radio, both of which professed to be based in India. The broadcasting time was increased to three hours, and the languages to eight. Azad Hind Radio broadcast for two hours in English, Hindustani, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu and Persian. The third hour was divided between the Congress Radio and the Azad Muslim Radio, the latter's broadcasts in Urdu and Pushtu were meant primarily for the followers of the Muslim League. These three radios functioned smoothly in Berlin for about a year. They were shifted to Hilversum in Holland in August 1943, seven months after Bose's departure from Germany for Japan, due to the heavy Allied raids on Berlin. They had to be moved again to Helmstedt in Western Germany a year later, when the Allied armies were approaching Holland. They worked intermittently till April 9, 1945, when the three broadcasting stations were forced to close after the collapse of the German Army. Bose kept himself in intimate touch with the three radio stations, as also with the other activities he had started in Germany, till the end. Wherever he happened to be, whether in Malaya, Thailand or Burma, he sent frequent suggestions for enlivening the broadcasts, and for keeping them abreast of developments in India, and of his own progress in the Far East. His suggestions were detailed and minute, covering even such points as the diction of an announcer.
EVERYTHING IS ONLY JAI HIND HERE

THE Free India Centre and the radio broadcasts could not absorb all energies of Bose. A restless and dynamic spirit like his sought a more active expression. The Free India Centre had a limited field of activity, and the broadcasts would be soon forgotten, even if they were widely heard in India. Indian freedom could not be secured by waging only a verbal war. Something more positive and effective was needed for that purpose — something, for instance, like a national army raised abroad. It is not clear when such an idea first crossed Bose's mind. It is not mentioned in the memorandum he submitted to the German Government on April 9, 1941. But the presence of Indian prisoners of war in Berlin seems to have made him wonder whether they could not be put to better use than whiling away their time in the POW camps.

These unsophisticated young lads from the villages had joined the British Army merely as mercenary soldiers. For them a military vocation was, just like any other, meant to earn their livelihood. They were expected to serve not so much India as Britain. British imperial interests had brought them to distant battle-fields. They were no doubt brave, but they were drilled to be loyal to their foreign masters. They were rigorously insulated from all ideas of nationalism and from political influences but their experiences in the far-flung theatres of war had gradually opened their eyes. The reverses suffered by Britain in Africa, where Indian soldiers were taken prisoner and their later contacts with the Germans and Italians had created in them a new awareness of the role they had played.

There were about 10,000 Indian prisoners of war in the German camps at Annaberg and elsewhere. Some of them were

1 See Supra, pp. 218-19
brought daily to the broadcasting station in Berlin to listen to, and translate the Hindustani programmes of the BBC and All India Radio. For this forced service they were given a little better food and some paltry amenities. As Bose watched them, he thought that these young men would provide excellent material for an Indian legion. It was not in Bose's nature to let a promising field lie fallow. He knew that he would be faced with numerous difficulties in raising the proposed legion. To begin with, he had to get the agreement of the German Foreign Office to the formation of such a militia, and then he had to persuade the Reichwehr authorities to provide the necessary facilities for training and arming it. Above all, he knew that it would be no easy task to recruit prisoners of war to the proposed legion. Though illiterate peasants, they had their horse sense to guide them. Their doubts and suspicions would have to be removed first before they could be prevailed upon to change their allegiance and embark on an uncertain future.

After some hesitation and scepticism, the German Government gave its approval to Bose's proposal. To begin with, he was allowed to visit the POW camp at Annaberg. But he shrewdly decided not to undertake a campaign of recruitment straightaway. He would rather visit the camp to see for himself the conditions in which the POWs lived, and to learn their background and mental attitudes. It was essentially a mission of exploration. He wanted to gauge their likely reactions in the event of his making an appeal to them to join him.

Frankly, the reception Bose received on his first visit to the Annaberg camp was far from warm. It was in fact cold and reserved. The Non-Commissioned Officers were openly suspicious of their visitor. They and their men had never come in touch with any national leader so far, and here was an avowed enemy of Angrez Sarkar approaching them. They had their professional prospects to consider, and also the stipends that were being paid to their families in India. Any rash step would jeopardise their future. The NCOs wielded considerable influence over their men, and Bose at first found it difficult even to make them talk freely with him.

But he did not lose heart. He visited the Annaberg camp more than once, and each visit succeeded in dissolving more and
more the suspicions of the POWs. His frank and friendly approach without the least trace of coercion, gradually won them over and they received him with open arms. He was soon being welcomed with garlands and heard with rapt attention. Even then, he did not extend any open invitation to them to join him. He had necessarily to be very careful in selecting his first batch of recruits, for, upon its showing, would depend the future of the legion he had in mind. To err on the side of caution, Bose selected as his first recruits ten Indian civilians who were working with him, and were politically conscious and reliable. Only five POWs, who were already in Berlin in connection with the German radio propaganda, were allowed to join the civilians, and the first group of legionaries was thus formed. It was given a hearty farewell to Frankenberg—its first training camp—on December 26, 1941.

The understanding which Bose had arrived at with the German Government, regarding the Indian Legion, was clear and detailed. The Legion was not to be mixed with any German Army formation, and its exclusive identity was to be maintained with the emblem of the Springing Tiger, which once adorned the flag of Tippu Sultan. The German Army was to provide the necessary training, staff and facilities to the Legion. It was to be treated on equal terms, so far as food, clothing and equipment were concerned. Last but not least, it was made clear that the Legion was not to be sent on active service to any front except India. Only in the event of its being taken by surprise by the enemy at any place, where it was undergoing training, was it to fight in self-defence.

The German aim seemed to be that when their cherished dream of a thrust through the Caucasus to the Persian Gulf materialised, the Indian legionaries would be sent to start a general uprising in India. But Bose insisted that his co-operation for the liberation of India would be dependent on the world situation. He, therefore, refused to commit himself to the German proposal.

German military training and discipline were proverbially strict, and it was no easy going for the Indian Legion. The winter was on and the young recruits found it hard to adapt themselves to the rigours of weather, and the routine of the
German barracks. But gradually they got over their difficulties and proved themselves keen and willing soldiers. They formed the forerunners of the Indian National Army which Bose later formed in South-east Asia. They had to prove themselves worthy of their leader’s faith.

Apart from their own training, the first recruits were expected to win over to the Legion other prisoners of war, who were sent out in small batches from the Annaberg camp. It was a delicate and difficult task which called for all their powers of persuasion. They were asked, not only to be good soldiers of freedom themselves, but to attract others to the great cause. Their task was made all the more difficult by the condition imposed by Bose, that whoever wanted to don the uniform of the Legion, must enrol as an ordinary soldier, irrespective of his previous rank. Promotion would be strictly by merit. Whatever might have been the virtue of this policy, it acted as a disincentive to the NCOs, not to mention the officers. They not only refused to join the Legion themselves, but also tried to dissuade their men from joining it. Their influence naturally hindered recruitment.

Despite such unfavourable factors, about 300 POWs joined the Indian Legion within four months. In another six months their number was doubled. The Legion was thereafter sent to Koenigsberg near Dresden for further training. It was a permanent training camp of the German Army, with spacious barracks and extensive grounds.

About the same time that Bose was raising the Indian Legion in Germany, a similar movement was afoot in Italy. Its founder was Iqbal Shedai, an Indian who had lived in Italy for a long time and called himself a national leader. He had conferred with Bose several times in 1941 but refused to co-operate with him. He started broadcasting to India from Rome on his own and also formed a separate military unit called the Centro Militare India which had a life of less than eight months. The centre was disbanded in November 1942, as the result of a mutiny.

Actually, the number of POWs in Germany was very much less than that in Italy or in Libya, most of them being made captive by Rommel’s Afrika Korps. The POWs in Italy, had
nothing but contempt for the Italians, whose measure they had taken in the war in Africa. The treatment they received in Italian POW camps was harsh, even their rations being occasionally filched by their guards. Therefore, when they learnt about the formation of the Indian Legion in Germany, many of them were eager to join it. A delegation from Bose arranged their transfer to Germany, and they were in due course absorbed in the Legion.

By December 1942, a year after the Legion was started, it had gained the strength of four battalions (about 4,000 men.) The fact that only this modest number was recruited from POWs totalling four times that number shows the absence of coercion. Bose knew that a conscript legion would be a source of weakness rather than strength, and he rightly put his faith in quality rather than quantity. The training they received was as thorough as the Germans could impart, under the prevailing circumstances, though the legionaries were keen on being trained in all arms. Bose firmly stood by the principle that ferment and advancement within the Legion should depend only on ability and aptitude. This caused heart-burning among NCOs and officers, but its worth was soon recognised by the legionaries, as also by their German instructors. Before the end of the war, a majority of German NCO instructors attached to the Legion was replaced by Indians who also manned the administrative offices as well.

Perhaps even more important than the training was the composition of the Legion. The customary formation of the Indian Army units according to caste, religion or region was summarily done away with, and the legionaries lived together in a fraternal spirit, due provision being made for the observance of their separate religious rites and practices. Thus the distinctions and divisions implanted by the British were done away with, and the nation became the legion's common object of devotion, and the attainment of freedom, its sole ideal. "In India we have many gods and religions, but everything is only Jai Hind here," the legionaries used to quip.

Bose used to visit the camps whenever possible, and his visits were keenly looked forward to by the legionaries. Girija Mukerji and N. G. Ganpuley, who were present on some of the occa-
sions, have given eloquent testimony to the effect of Bose’s speeches on the legionnaires: “I saw how the whole audience was coming under his spell. When he had finished they had acquired new life, new animation, new excitement,” Mukerji noted. To Ganpuley, Bose “in his long dark robe, looked more like a priest preaching his sermon than a military leader addressing soldiers”.1 Bose never gave them false promises or glib assurances. He rather impressed on them how arduous and long their journey was likely to be, and told them the history of the freedom struggle dating back to the war of independence in 1857. Veer Savarkar’s history of that war seems to have greatly impressed Bose. The legionaries, on their part, were quick to take the message and spontaneously sang:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Hamey sukho ko ab booh jana padega} \\
\text{Watanke liye dookh uthana padega} \\
\text{Aiy! Azad Hindiyon utho kamar bandho} \\
\text{Watan lut rahe hai bachana padega.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Now we shall have to forget all pleasures and face sorrows for the sake of our country. Oh free Indians, arise and gird up your loins. We shall have to save our land which is being looted by foreigners.)

This is not to suggest that the Indian Legion became one happy family. Doubt and dissatisfaction did occasionally assail soldiers, who were cut off from their homes 5000 miles away. Even petty grievances at times assumed serious proportions. On the whole, however, the Legion settled down to its task in a disciplined and contented manner, so long as Bose was in Germany. After his departure, something like a minor mutiny occurred when it was asked to leave the Koenigsberg camp, and to go to Holland for coastal defence duty. But troubles like this were few and far between and were generally nipped in the bud by the watchful officials of the Free India Centre.

While Bose was thus busy raising the Indian Legion, and broadcasting over the Azad Hind Radio, his mind was getting more and more engrossed with future plans. Germany was too far away from India, and whatever hopes he had entertained

\footnote{Netaji in Germany, p. 89}
about Hitler's quick victory in Europe, and subsequent drive to the East, were dissipated by the heroic Russian defence of Stalingrad. Indeed, it had become clear by the end of 1942 that, like Napoleon, Hitler too would have to stage an ignominious retreat from Russia, sooner or later.

On the other hand, Japan's Rising Sun was still on the ascendant, and having occupied the whole of South-east Asia, it was knocking on the north-eastern gates of India. This was the time to be as near his motherland as possible, so that he could synchronise his own armed struggle with the Quit India movement launched by the Congress in August 1942. In Bose's mind these were the two sides of the same coin, howsoever Gandhi and Nehru might inveigh against Japan, or profess to be opposed to his methods.

Bose had already got in touch with General Oshima, the Japanese Ambassador in Germany. Oshima was very well posted on Bose's activities through his Military Attache, Colonel Yamamoto, who was soon to come in close contact with Bose in South-east Asia. General Oshima was in complete agreement with Bose that he would be able to do more positive work by being nearer his homeland than by remaining in Germany. He promised to do everything in his power to facilitate Bose's voyage to the Far East, and to persuade the Japanese Government to extend all possible help to him. Bose had already received an invitation from Rash Behari Bose, President of the newly formed Indian Independence League, to go to the Far East and to relieve him of the responsibility of conducting the activities of the League, which was proving too heavy for his old shoulders.

A voyage to Japan, however, was no easy matter in the midst of a world war. Flying was definitely risky, although an Italian plane had succeeded in making a non-stop flight to Singapore. A sea voyage was possible only by a submarine. Japanese submarines paid occasional visits to Germany to deliver strategic material. The German Government was agreeable to Bose's departure, and promised to make a submarine available to him, provided the Japanese Navy was prepared to receive him halfway, somewhere near the Cape of Good Hope.

While negotiations and arrangements for his voyage dragged
on—they took eight months to be finalised—Bose became restless and, at times, even lost his temper. He was anxious to utilise the flood-tide of Japanese victory for his own ends. Every day that he had to prolong his stay in Germany postponed the fruition of his long-term plan. His mind was further in suspense as his wife, the former Emilie Schnekl, whom he had known since 1934, and married earlier in the year, was expecting a baby. He spent the Christmas of 1942 with her and his newborn daughter in Vienna. The parting from his wife and infant daughter after so brief a wedded life was poignant. Bose was never to see his family again.

Bose left Berlin by train for Kiel on February 8, 1943, to board the German submarine U-190, accompanied by Abid Hassan, a former engineering student, who was among the first civilians to join the Indian Legion. There were only two men from the Free India Centre and two officers of the German Foreign Office to bid him good-bye as his departure was to be kept a close secret. The voyage took nearly three and a half months, Bose and his companion being transhipped to the Japanese submarine I-29 at a pre-arranged rendezvous, 400 miles SSW of Madagascar. Little is known of this perilous undertaking, though there are a couple of pictures of Bose (with a beard) taken during the voyage.

During the long period of his submarine voyage, the pretence was kept by the Free India Centre that Bose was visiting various places in Europe, including the Russian front. Verisimilitude was lent to this pretence by putting on the Radio Bose’s tape-recorded speeches, kept ready specially for the purpose. After an uneventful but hazardous voyage, Bose landed somewhere on the west coast of Sumatra, where Colonel Yamamoto, who had arrived in Japan earlier by the overland route and become the head of the Hikari Kikan (Liaison Bureau), was waiting to receive him. From Sumatra Bose flew to Singapore for talks with Rash Behari Bose. Few people knew about his presence in the Far East until he flew to Tokyo, to consult the Japanese Government and finalise his plans.
ALTHOUGH the actual date of Bose's arrival in South-east Asia was a strictly guarded secret until his public appearance in Singapore, on July 2, 1943, he was widely expected for a long time. Repeated invitations were sent to him to come over to East Asia and take over the leadership of the Indian independence movement. None was more eager for this than its leader, Rash Behari Bose. Rash Behari Bose—who will be now referred to in the narrative only by his Christian name, to distinguish him from his far more renowned namesake—was a well-known revolutionary of the old school. He had settled down in Japan for several years, married a Japanese woman and become a Japanese national.

Rash Behari's name first hit the headlines for throwing a bomb at Lord Hardinge, then Viceroy and Governor-General of India, while the viceregal procession was passing through Chandni Chowk, Old Delhi, in 1912. The daring outrage caused a tremendous sensation but the alleged culprit managed to elude the police. Subsequently, in the First World War Rash Behari was involved in a plot to organise a rebellion of Indian soldiers in the Army—something like the revolt of 1857. He had actually made arrangements to smuggle arms and ammunition from Germany, but the plot was detected, and the ship carrying arms was captured by the British. Realising that all his plans had failed, and that the police were hot on his trail, Rash Behari escaped to Japan under the assumed name of Tagore.

It did not take long for the British Embassy in Tokyo to know of his presence there, and it pressed for his extradition under the treaty of alliance, then existing between the two countries. Rash Behari would have been almost certainly arrest-
ed and shipped back to India, to stand trial had he not put himself under the protection of Professor Toyama, the moving spirit behind the Black Dragon Society of Japan. Wielding great influence over the Japanese Foreign Office, the society saved him from extradition. Even so, Rash Behari had to remain underground in Japan for several years, and when he emerged from hiding, it was as a Japanese citizen. Meanwhile he had also married the daughter of the Japanese gentleman who had given him shelter.

Although he was no longer a British-Indian national, and was an exile from his motherland for nearly a quarter of a century, Rash Behari lost no time after the outbreak of war in the Far East in December 1941, in raising the flag of revolt against the British once more. He got in touch with the Japanese War Office and impressed on it the need of carrying its offensive to India since, as long as India remained under British domination, its immense resources, man-power and strategic situation would be a source of great strength to the Allies. Both Field Marshal Terauchi, Commander-in-Chief in South-east Asia, and General Sugiyama, Army Chief of Staff, were rather lukewarm at first towards Rash Behari's approaches. But he managed to gain the sympathy of General Tojo, the Japanese Prime Minister.

Rash Behari's hands were strengthened by the spontaneous inauguration of an independence movement by Indian leaders in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok. The first steps to put the movement on an organised basis were taken with a dramatic swiftness at Bangkok on December 9, 1941, when the Indian Independence League was formed under the leadership of Baba Amar Singh and Giani Pritam Singh. They were in touch with the Japanese Embassy in Bangkok since much earlier and had offered assistance and co-operation in the event of a Japanese invasion of Malaya. The inauguration of the League almost coincided with the opening of the Japanese offensive in Malaya.

The main objective of the League was to achieve the freedom of India, but there were also other more proximate and pressing considerations that prompted its birth. One was to safeguard the lives and properties of Indians in Malaya, Thailand and
other countries in South-east Asia. In the event of their remaining aloof or even neutral, Indian citizens would have been treated as "enemy nationals" and put to incalculable hardship though apparently they were siding with Japan. The penchant of Nipponese soldiers for violence and molestation of women was not unknown to Indians. The League would at least serve as an insurance against the atrocities of an occupying army. That the League succeeded in this limited objective was soon evident. Japanese soldiers generally left Indians alone, and it was not unusual to see Malayan and Chinese women wearing the sari to escape their attentions.

The League issued an appeal to Indians to refrain from helping the British war effort, and also sent its representative to accompany the Japanese forces as they advanced into Malaya. They infiltrated into the British defence lines to prevail upon Indian soldiers not to fight the Japanese. Giani Pritam Singh was most active in this field, and it was he who contacted Captain Mohan Singh of the 1/14 Punjab Regiment, which had been isolated and overtaken by the advancing Japanese forces and was awaiting capture in the jungles near the Jitra cantonment on the Siamese border. The British colonel of the regiment sent a message of surrender to the Japanese commander at Alor Star. Instead of a Japanese guard coming to take them into custody, however, Captain Mohan Singh and his fellow Indian officers were surprised to see Pritam Singh approaching them in a car, flying the flag of the Indian National Congress. True, he was accompanied by a Japanese officer, Major Fujiwara, but the latter affably assured them that he had instructions to treat them not as prisoners of war, but as honoured friends of Japan. Would they not join hands with the Japanese in the liberation of their motherland? Meanwhile, the British colonel was quietly taken away alone.

Mohan Singh was among the very few politically conscious Indian officers in the Indian Army. Even so, this sudden and unexpected development took him aback. He was patriotic in his heart of hearts, but how could a soldier change his sworn allegiance so abruptly? And would not association with the Japanese merely amount to a change of masters, even if they eventually succeeded in overthrowing the British? There follow-
ed endless discussions with the perfervid Pritam Singh and the persuasive Fujiwara. Captain Mohan Singh's mind was half made up when the Japanese commander in Malaya placed the Indian prisoners of war under his control on December 17. Now he could at least be of some service to fellow-soldiers and take counsel with them regarding the course to be followed. By the end of December 1941, a decision was taken to join the Indian Independence League, and to form the Azad Hind Fouj with Captain Mohan Singh as the General Officer Commanding. This was the modest beginning of the Indian National Army in South-east Asia, which was later to march into India under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose.

Giani Pritam Singh had reason to be proud of such dramatic achievements in so short a time. But he could not rest on his oars until the League was put on a firm footing, and a network of branches established all over Malaya, Siam, Burma, and wherever else Indians had settled in South-east Asia. The swift tide of Japanese victories only added to his responsibilities. On the one hand, he had to maintain good relations with the Japanese army commanders who were becoming 'cocky' with success, and on the other, to ensure that the interests of Indians did not suffer under the Japanese occupation. Above all, he had to get a pledge and commitment from the Japanese Government for the liberation of India. This was, indeed, the main object of the Indian Independence League.

By the end of January 1941, a network of branches of the League was established all over Malaya. On February 15, Singapore surrendered, and orders were issued to the prisoners of war to assemble at the Ferrer Park the following noon. At the formal surrender ceremony Lt. Colonel Hunt, a staff officer of the British Military Headquarters in Malaya, made a surprising speech in which he told the Indian POW: "Today, I, on behalf of the British Government, hand you over to the Japanese Government whose orders you will obey, as you have so long done ours." The discrimination between British and Indian troops was thus maintained to the bitter end. After this, the Japanese representative, Major Fujiwara, came before the microphone and said: "I, on behalf of the Japanese Government take you over under our command and hand you over to G.O.C.
Captain Mohan Singh." He continued: "As the British Empire is coming to an end the Indians have a unique opportunity to attain freedom. It is an ideal time for you to rise and to strike for your country's cause. Japan is prepared to help Indians in every way, even though Indians are British subjects, and thus technically British nationals. We know that Indians are not British subjects by choice. The Japanese Army would not treat you as enemies but as friends if you repudiate British nationality."

After this, Captain Mohan Singh made an appeal in Hindustani to his fellow-soldiers to join the Azad Hind Fouj, and help the liberation of their motherland. A considerable number of soldiers spontaneously agreed to do so, although the reaction of the officers was understandably cool, if not hostile.

Captain Mohan Singh set up his headquarters at Mount Pleasant in Singapore. A POW headquarters was formed under Colonel N. S. Gill with Colonel J. K. Bhonsle as Adjutant and Quarter Master, and Colonel A. C. Chatterji as Director of Medical Services. Propaganda was vigorously started to win over recruits to the I.N.A. It was no easy job to look after the large number of Prisoners of War, as the Japanese were stingy with the supply of rations, clothing and medicines. The senior Indian officers, on their part, were chary of extending their co-operation to Captain Mohan Singh, who was comparatively junior. Loyalists and fifth columnists sought every opportunity to foment indiscipline, insubordination and even communal differences in the ranks, and Mohan Singh and his colleagues encountered numerous difficulties in running the POW Camps.

Giani Pritam Singh also had his hands full in working among civilians to popularise the League. He organised meetings, conducted a paper called Azad Hind in Singapore and arranged broadcasts from Singapore, Saigon and Bangkok radio stations. Rash Behari was in close and constant touch with all these developments and activities. At the end of February, he called upon the various branches of the League in South-east Asia to send representatives to a conference in Tokyo, to decide upon the future course of action. The Indian National Army and the Prisoners of War were also asked to send delegates. Pritam Singh convened a preliminary meeting in Singapore on March
9, to elect delegates. It was at this meeting that a formal decision was taken to invite Subhas Chandra Bose to South-east Asia to assume the leadership of the League. Actually, his informal consent had already been secured by Swami Satyanand Puri, an office-bearer of the League. Great enthusiasm was evinced at the meeting when news of the fall of Rangoon was announced. Although the programme of the League was generally approved, the chairman of the meeting, N. Raghavan, expressed his personal opinion that no method which would not receive the approval of the Indian National Congress would succeed. (The Quit India resolution was yet to be passed.)

The Indian Independence Conference, held in Tokyo for three days beginning March 28, 1942, opened in tragic circumstances. Pritam Singh and three other delegates from Malaya, along with seven other Japanese officers, lost their lives in an air crash while on the way to Tokyo. The death of Pritam Singh was an irretrievable loss to the League. He was a devoted and dedicated worker, and the Indian independence movement in South-east Asia, which was still in a fledgeling stage, was truly his creation. It was he who found a working basis for co-operation between the movement and the Japanese authorities. It was he who won over Captain Mohan Singh for the movement, and thus fathered, not only the League but also the Azad Hind Fouj. No better tribute can be paid to him than by recording that it was on the foundations laid truly and well by Sardar Pritam Singh that Subhas Chandra Bose subsequently raised the structure of the Provisional Government of India.

The conference began with the reading of a message from General Tojo, the Prime Minister, conveying sympathy to the independence movement, and promising help. However, the delegates were not taken in merely by such vague promises, and their main resolution called upon the Japanese Government to make a formal declaration to the effect:

1. That Japan is ready and willing to give all possible help to India to sever its connection with the British Empire, and to attain complete independence;
2. That on such severance of India from the British Empire, Japan would recognise the full sovereignty of India, on attaining independence;
(3) That absolute independence of India would be guaranteed by the Imperial Government of Japan;
(4) That the Imperial Government of Japan would exercise its influence with other powers, and induce them to recognise the independence and sovereignty of India; and
(5) That the framing of the future constitution of India would be left entirely to the representatives of the people of India.

To demand such an explicit commitment (which, needless to say, was long in coming) from the Japanese Government, which was then on the crest of victory, called for courage and a hard sense of realism on the part of the organisers of the League. After all, except for Rash Behari they were no more than parish leaders till then. By another resolution, a council of action was appointed under the interim presidency of Rash Behari to prosecute the aims and objects of the movement. It was also decided to convene a fuller conference of representatives from all parts of Greater East Asia. The number of delegates to be sent by each area to the conference was also laid down. Malaya and Burma, which had the largest concentration of Indian nationals, were allocated 20 delegates each.

The plan was to make the conference truly representative of the entire Indian community in Greater East Asia, and endow its resolutions with an authoritative character. It was decided to hold the conference in Bangkok in June. The next three months were devoted to its preparation. The work of enrolling members for the Indian Independence League and recruits for the Indian National Army, was undertaken with enthusiasm. The latter was not an easy task, in view of the Japanese attitude. It was co-operative more in words than in action, and the language difficulties often led to queer complications. After his return from Tokyo, Captain Mohan Singh called a conference of officers at Bidadari Camp, and laid before them his proposals for making the Indian National Army a part and parcel of the Indian Independence League, and, in fact, its fighting arm. It would not be amiss to consider here why so many officers and men of the Indian Army broke their oath of loyalty to the King and exposed themselves to the charge of treason. “To be true to his salt” is the first article of faith of the simple Indian jawan,
and it was not without anguish that large numbers of them in
the POW camps decided to throw in their lot with the I.N.A.

Bhulabhai Desai gave a brilliant defence of their action dur-
ing their trials in the Red Fort four years later, but it would be
worthwhile to put oneself in the shoes of the officers and men
who had suddenly found themselves in the POW Camps in
1941. They were rigorously insulated from politics and taught
to put their faith in the fairness and invincible might of their
British masters. The rank discrimination practised against them
in pay, privileges, and general treatment, made a mockery of
fairness, and even if the sepoys submitted to it with patience,
it created acute and increasing resentment in the heart of the
younger officers. Even while they were on active service outside
India, they were neither admitted to British clubs, nor even
allowed to travel in compartments reserved for Europeans.
Their promotions were most tardy, and till 1942 — more than
two years after the outbreak of hostilities, few Indian Officers
were able to secure a rank above that of a lieutenant-colonel.
The differential treatment accorded to Indian officers was cited
by Shah Nawaz Khan as a specific reason why he joined the
I.N.A.: "Not a single Indian officer was given the command of
a Division, and only one Indian was given the command of a
Brigade."

In October 1939, there were only 393 Indian officers in the
combatant section of the Army, and the proportion of British
to Indian officers was 10 to 1. By January next year, the number
of Indian officers reached 596, but their ratio came down 12 to 1.
It was only by the end of the war that over 8,000 Indians served
as officers, but even then they formed only one-fourth of the
commissioned ranks in the Indian Army.

Field Marshal Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian
Army confessed later: "The early stages of 'Indianization', from
its inception to the beginning of the late war, were badly mis-
managed by the British Government of India, and this prepared
the ground for disloyalty when the opportunity came. There
is little doubt that Indianization, at its inception, was looked
on as a political expedient which was bound to fail militarily.
There is no doubt also that many senior British officers believed,
and even hoped, that it would fail.
"The policy of segregation of Indian officers into separate units, the differential treatment in respect of pay and terms of service as compared with the British officer, and the prejudice and lack of manners of some — by no means all — British officers and their wives, all went to produce a very deep and bitter feeling of racial discrimination in the minds of the most intelligent and progressive of the Indian officers, who were naturally nationalists, keen to see India standing on her own legs, and not to be ruled from Whitehall for ever."\(^1\)

Apart from the Indian officers forming a separate cadre in the Army, there existed subtle distinctions in their own ranks. There were, for instance, the King’s Commissioned Officers, the Indian Commissioned Officers, the Emergency Commissioned Officers — all of them being on a vastly lower level than the British or the Australian or the Canadian or the South African officers. It was sheer colour bar under the King’s uniform. Little wonder then that all this rankled in the minds of Indian officers, who were expected to shed their blood along with their white colleagues. Moreover, not a few of them had become conscious of the struggle for freedom that was being waged in India, and had developed a nagging feeling that they were merely mercenary soldiers. Mohan Singh later gave poignant expression to his feelings when he made the fateful choice in December 1941:

"I could not convince my conscience that it was right for Indians to shed their blood for an end which was not applicable to them. Britain, faced with the imminent danger of invasion, had declared that she was fighting for freedom, democracy and other high-sounding principles. She besought others to come to her help. Even at the most critical period of her national history, and when she was using India to fight for her own freedom, she refused to consider the question of India’s freedom. Instead, she ordered the arrest of Indian leaders because they were considered guilty of asking freedom for India. Why should we Indians fight for the freedom of others who consider the mere mention of the word freedom a sufficient crime for the greatest of us to be put behind bars?"

"Then why were Indians fighting? The only answer I could find was that we were fighting merely as deluded, befooled,

\(^1\) J. Connell: _Auchinleck_, pp. 948-49
mercenary heroes, at the expense of poor India, for the sole benefit of Britain, thus helping Britain to keep India in subjection with Indian men, money and materials.”¹

May be such tempestuous thoughts could not have been translated into action had it not been for the knock-out delivered by the Japanese Army to the British forces. Here was the vaunted might of the British reduced to dust. Here was the myth of racial supremacy exposed. Here was a heaven-sent opportunity to discard the mercenary label and to prove one's patriotism. And if further proof were needed of the ingrained discrimination in the British character, it was provided by the shameful manner in which the Indian soldiers were delivered to the Japanese conquerers like so many sheep. That incident itself absolved them from their oath of loyalty to the King.

Did not the Japanese constructively order them to join the Indian National Army at that very moment when Major Fujiwara told them—"On behalf of the Japanese Government I take you over under my charge, and, on behalf of the Japanese Government I now hand you over to G.O.C. Captain Mohan Singh, who shall have the power of life and death over you."

This directive was further underlined by the harsh treatment meted out to the POWs who refused to join the I.N.A. No wonder that even those who were least touched by patriotic motives made virtue of necessity and joined the I.N.A. Thereby they gained relatively more freedom and better creature comforts. In the bargain they also could now pass as patriotic soldiers.

The conference which was held in the spacious Silapkorn theatre at Bangkok for nine days from June 15, 1942, was a landmark in the history of the independence movement in Greater East Asia. It was presided over by Rash Behari, and delegates came from every country in South-east Asia, where there was an Indian settlement. It was opened by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, with a message from Field Marshal Pibulsonggram, the Thai Prime Minister. General Tojo also sent a special message, and the Japanese, German and Italian ambassadors in Bangkok personally attended the conference.

¹ Mohan Singh's Diary, p.
Thirty-five resolutions were adopted at the conference, the two most important being, first, framing a constitution for the Indian Independence League, and second, extending an invitation to Bose to come to East Asia. The League would henceforth consist of (1) a Council of Action, (2) a Committee of Representatives (3) Territorial Committees and (4) Local Branches. The Council of Action was to be the chief executive body with extensive powers for carrying out the policy of the League. The Council of Action was to consist of the President (Rash Behari), two members from the I.N.A. (Mohan Singh, who was elevated to the rank of a General, and Colonel G. Q. Gilani), and two civilian members, N. Raghavan and K. P. K. Menon (who was later to incur the displeasure of Bose).

The participation of high-ranking Japanese dignitaries in the Bangkok Conference was taken to imply the tacit recognition of the League and the I.N.A. by the Japanese Government. But, much to the surprise and annoyance of the leaders of the League, Tokyo procrastinated and prevaricated in formally recognising these two bodies. The cue was taken by the Japanese officers on the spot, who, far from sincerely co-operating with the League as expected, began to find fault with it and even tried to put spokes in its wheels. They adopted an even more abrasive attitude towards General Mohan Singh, who was hardly a man to be trifled with. The misgivings about the Japanese intentions towards the Indian Independence League came to a head in Burma over the properties left behind by Indian owners when they fled the country. The League wanted to administer these properties pending the return of their owners, according to the resolution passed at the Bangkok conference, while the Japanese blithely continued to treat them as properties of enemy aliens. Two office-bearers of the League had a stormy interview with representatives of the Japanese command. They were bluntly informed that the Bangkok resolutions were never accepted by Tokyo, and that, therefore, the Council of Action had no official status. All was left to the discretion of the local Japanese commanders. When one of the League members protested that they could not be mere puppets, the Japanese officer bluntly replied: “Puppets? What is the harm in being puppets? You should be proud to be the puppets of the Japanese!”
An explosive situation arose over the recruitment to the I.N.A. and its exact status *vis a vis* the Japanese Army. Some twenty-five thousand men had volunteered to join it at the time of the Bangkok Conference. By the end of August 1942, 40,000 men had signed a pledge to serve the Indian National Army under General Mohan Singh. A combat Division of over sixteen thousand officers and men was ready by the middle of September, and Mohan Singh was anxious to raise another Division, his objective being an army of 250,000 raised from POW and civilians.

Far from relishing such a rapid expansion of the I.N.A., Colonel Iwakuro, head of the Japanese liaison organisation, was alarmed by the proposal. In the first place, the Japanese did not consider it militarily or practically wise to raise such a large Indian army. Secondly, they simply could not provide facilities for its training and equipment. Thirdly, recruitment to the I.N.A. began to affect the collection of labour gangs which were essential for the Japanese war preparations.

General Mohan Singh summarily turned down the Japanese demand to send 900 men of the I.N.A. to Burma, and stated that no movement of Indian troops could take place before a clarification of Japan's intention towards India was made. The demand for this was buttressed by a memorandum sent by the Council of Action to Col. Iwakuro on November 29, 1942. The memorandum was followed by a delegation whose interview proved fruitless.

The following week, General Mohan Singh had a series of discussions with Lt. Kunizuka, Major Ogawa, Col. Iwakuro and Major Fujiwara, but the talks failed to secure a satisfactory agreement. Simultaneously, the Council of Action held daily meetings to chalk out its future line of action. A majority was inclined towards dissolution of the Council if the Japanese Government rejected its demands. Instead of satisfying the Council, it precipitated the crisis by arresting Colonel N. S. Gill, who was commanding the I.N.A. in Burma, on a charge of being a British spy. General Mohan Singh personally lodged a strong protest with Major Fujiwara. The arrest of a senior and trusted officer of the I.N.A. on a trumped-up charge without a reference
to its G.O.C., was a personal reflection on the latter. General Mohan Singh could not submit to such arbitrary and high-handed action. The least he could do to register his indignation was to resign from the Council of Action, two other members joining him in this course. Raghavan and the President declined to follow suit, partly due to prudence and partly with the lingering hope that they might still be able to prevail upon Tokyo to be more co-operative. In his capacity as president, Rash Behari took charge of the movement in his own hands and thus virtually became its dictator.

Mohan Singh had resigned only from the Council of Action. But he had not given up his control of the I.N.A., whose pledge was given to him personally. This matter became a bone of contention between Rash Behari and Mohan Singh, the former being keen to assume the reigns of the I.N.A. himself. This led to an acrimonious correspondence between the two. Mohan Singh had not the least doubt that the movement would founder in the weak and doddering hands of Rash Behari. As no compromise could be arrived at, General Mohan Singh issued on December 21, 1942, a special Order of the Day warning all its members that the Indian National Army would be dissolved soon. The Order said, inter alia: "A confirmatory order will be sent out as soon as arrangements with the Nipponese are complete. In the event of my being separated from you before such an order is issued, the dissolution will take place automatically and immediately. Also, at the same time, the resignation of all members of the I.N.A. and their release from all obligations and undertakings to me and the I.N.A., will be taken for granted."

This was a shrewd move, Mohan Singh probably having a premonition of the fate that was soon to overtake him. On the 29th December, he was called to the office of Col. Iwakuro and asked to accept certain conditions for the functioning of the I.N.A. Without the least hesitation, he turned them down whereupon, Rash Behari who was present there, dismissed him on the spot from the post of G.O.C. of the I.N.A. He was promptly put under arrest by the Japanese and kept in detention, first on an island near Singapore and later in Sumatra. On
the surrender of Japan in August 1945, he was taken to Singapore and treated with much harshness. In due course he was brought back to India and released unconditionally on May 4, 1946, without being put on trial.

Thus faded away from the scene, Mohan Singh, whose name is known to few in India. Brave, patriotic, independent and undaunted even in adversity, he proved to the Japanese the mettle of the I.N.A. soldiers. He never bowed to them as masters, but behaved with them on terms of equality. "I do not wish to gain the confidence of the Japanese at the cost of losing the confidence of the Indians," he told a Japanese interlocutor. When the latter patronisingly observed that Indians would be "more independent" under the Japanese, prompt came Mohan Singh's retort: "What do you mean by 'more'? India will be absolutely independent. No one can stop it."

It is a melancholy reflection that Bose, who, within a few months, assumed the command of the I.N.A. and won glory for it, could find no use for Mohan Singh. One can only guess the reasons which were behind such unsympathetic and uncharitable attitude. Maybe, Bose thought it would be difficult to fit Mohan Singh in his entourage despite the latter's readiness. The utmost that Bose did was to improve the conditions of his detention after a personal visit to Sumatra. Perhaps he was told that Mohan Singh was a difficult man to pull on with. His fellow-officers, many of whom were his seniors, had found him ambitious and over-bearing. Shah Nawaz, who had refused to join hands with Mohan Singh, deposed at his trial in the Red Fort that he was "efficient but very ordinary", and that he was convinced that politically at any rate Mohan Singh would not be able to cope with the Japanese political intrigues. His courageous conduct disprove this particular charge, but it may be conceded that Mohan Singh lacked the discretion and duplicity necessary for a politician. That was probably his undoing. Nevertheless, his name deserves to be remembered with honour and gratitude in the history of the Indian National Army.

The abrupt dissolution of the I.N.A. naturally created consternation in its ranks. Not a few questioned the legality of Mohan Singh's order, though a large number decided to remain
true to their pledge to him. But what was to be their status thereafter? Did they still belong to the I.N.A. or did they revert to their POW status? The Japanese started issuing orders to them directly, and those who refused to obey, were conscripted into labour gangs for the notorious Siam-Burma 'death-railway' and such other projects. They perished in large numbers while working on these projects.
CHAPTER 24

A NEW VOICE IN ASIA

THE end of 1942 found the Indian independence movement in Greater East Asia almost at its nadir. The I.N.A. was dissolved. The League was fast disintegrating in the feeble hands of Rash Behari. He tried to reorganise the I.N.A. with Lt. Col. J. K. Bhonsle as Director of Military Bureau, and Lt. Col. M. Z. Kiani as Commander of the Army. The office-bearers of the Territorial Committees of the League got together in Penang in the third week of February, 1943, and presented a memorandum to Rash Behari in which they called for (1) reactivisation of the Council of Action, (2) co-operation and co-ordination between the civilian and the military wings of the movement, and (3) the securing of a solemn declaration from the Japanese Government of its policy towards India at the earliest. Rash Behari did not relish these demands, and, to counter the move of the Territorial Committee, he called a conference in Singapore at the end of April 1943. It decided to put the I.N.A. and the League on "a war footing". The I.N.A. was to owe allegiance to the League. This cut little ice with Rash Behari's colleagues, and some of them started their own organisation with the connivance of the Japanese. The entire independence movement would have finally collapsed had it not been for the providential arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose in South-east Asia in June 1943.

Long before Bose arrived in South-east Asia, his name had become a household word among the Indians there. They were aware of his stature as a leader in India. His dramatic escape from Calcutta in January 1941 had caught their imagination. They had hoped for a long time that he would come to the Far East to head the Indians since they had no other leader of his calibre. It was the raising of the Indian Legion in Germany
which had probably served as the inspiration and model for Mohan Singh, who had looked forward to Bose's eventual leadership of the I.N.A. Bose's broadcasts from Germany were listened to with rapt attention, and a Malayan edition of his *Indian Struggle* was brought out in 1942. The Indian Independence League had passed resolutions inviting him to East Asia, and Rash Behari was very anxious to transfer the burden of leadership to Bose's younger and stronger shoulders. The Japanese, on their part, considered that a person of Bose's eminence and dash would be a great asset in furthering their own co-prosperity plans as also for gaining the support of Indians. They became more than ever anxious to bring him over, when the League and the I.N.A. movement began to crumble in the latter part of 1942.

So Bose was hailed as a man of destiny when he landed at Syonan (as Singapore was renamed) on July 2. He had put his eighteen days' stay in Japan to good purpose. He met General Tojo the day after his arrival and established an accord with him. He was present in the Diet (Japanese Parliament) when Tojo declared that "Japan is firmly resolved to extend all means in order to help to expel and eliminate from India the Anglo-Saxon influences which are the enemy of Indian people, and to enable India to achieve full independence, in the true sense of the term." Bose studied with great care Japan's relations with its allies and satellites, and its plans to grant independence to Burma and the Philippines. He was charmed with Japanese courtesy, which was in sharp contrast with the brusque manner in which he was treated in Germany. He was impressed with the vigour and industry with which the Japanese were prosecuting their war efforts. He had prolonged discussions with Rash Behari about the independence movement in East Asia, and he got thoroughly briefed on the problems that would face him. He gave a number of interviews to the Press and addressed a series of broadcasts to his compatriots in Greater East Asia as well as India. He asked his countrymen to put their trust in him. He declared: "The powerful British Government that has persecuted me all my life, and has imprisoned me eleven times, has not been able to demoralise me. No power on earth can hope to do so. And if the wily, cunning and resourceful British
politicians have failed to cajole and corrupt me, nobody else can do so." Here was a new voice in Asia.

In all his statements and broadcasts from Tokyo, Bose stressed the following four points: First, that India's freedom must be won fighting, that the civil disobedience movement must develop into an armed struggle and that the Anglo-Americans having drawn the sword must be met with the sword.

Second, that the British Government would never, never grant freedom to India; and India must not fall in the traps that may be set by the crafty British to side-track the independence movement. Third, that the victory of Japan and the Axis powers in Europe was assured, that Anglo-American propaganda was meant solely to bolster up their morale and to deceive India. Fourth, that Japan and the Axis powers in Europe were India's friends and allies, that India must respond to the sincere offer of an all-out aid pledged by Japan for India's battle for independence, that Japan will fulfil her pledge of "full independence to India in the true sense of the term".

Thousands of people vociferously greeted Bose in Singapore on July 2, as he alighted from the plane that brought him from Tokyo and inspected a guard of honour presented by the I.N.A. Leaders of the Indian community and officers of the I.N.A. who were present at the airport, were conscious that they were witnessing a memorable event in India's struggle. Bose who was overcome with emotion, observed in his brief address that it was a historic day in his life. Two days later he formally assumed leadership of the freedom movement, and became President of the Indian Independence League, at a glittering ceremony at the Cathay Cinema. The meeting began with the reading of a message from General Tojo. After giving a resume of the movement during the previous eighteen months, Rash Behari solemnly announced:

"In your presence today, I resign my office and appoint Deshsevak Subhas Chandra Bose as President of the Indian Independence League in East Asia. From now on, Subhas Chandra Bose is your President, your leader in the fight of India's independence, and I am confident that, under his leadership you will march on to victory." Amidst loud acclamation, Bose assumed charge as President and, in turn, appointed Rash. Behari as his
Supreme Adviser. He made a scathing indictment of the British attitude towards India. Referring to his association with Japan, he declared that "my loyalty is to India and India alone: not even our enemies will have the audacity to urge that I am capable of betraying my country".

Next day (July 5) Bose took the salute at a parade of the Indian National Army where, for the first time, he appeared in a military uniform, which he invariably donned thereafter. Addressing the parade he said: "Soldiers of India's Army of Liberation and my comrades, today is the proudest day of my life. Today it has pleased providence to give me the unique honour of announcing to the world that India's army of liberation has come into being. The army has now been drawn up in military formation on the battle-field of Singapore, which was once the bulwark of the British Empire. This is not only the army that will emancipate India from British yoke; it is also the army that will hereafter create the future national army of Free India. Every Indian must feel proud that this army—his own army—has been organised entirely under Indian leadership, and that when the historic moment arrives, under Indian leadership it will go into battle."

Bose then gave the I.N.A. its battle-cry: "Comrades! My soldiers! Let your battle-cry be: 'To Delhi! To Delhi!' How many of us will individually survive this war of freedom, I don't know. But I do know that we shall ultimately win, and our task will not end until our surviving heroes hold the victory parade on another grave-yard of the British Empire—the Lal Kila or Red Fort of ancient Delhi."

Bose added: "Throughout my public career, I have always felt that though India is otherwise ripe for independence in every way, she has lacked one thing, namely, an army of liberation. George Washington of America could fight and win freedom because he had his army. Garibaldi could liberate Italy because he had his armed volunteers behind him. It is your privilege and honour to be the first to come forward and organise India's national army. By doing so, you have removed the last obstacle in our path to freedom. Be happy and proud that you are the pioneers—the vanguard—in such a noble cause."

Thereafter Bose spoke a few words specially to the I.N.A.
officers. "Realise your responsibility," he told them "and remem-
ber always that officers can make or unmake an army.
Remember also that out of your ranks will be born the future
General Staff of the Army of Free India." Once the formal
ceremonies ended, Bose quickly proceeded to reorganise the
I.N.A. and the League. He issued a communique on July 8
dealing with the aims, composition, and training of the I.N.A.,
which was "entirely of the Indians, and for the Indians, and
must conform to the Indian spirit, Indian genius and Indian
environment".

At a mass meeting on July 9, Bose gave a slogan to civilians:
"Let the slogan of the three million Indians in East Asia be
'Total Mobilisation for a Total War'. Out of this total mobili-
sation I expect at least three hundred thousand soldiers and
three crores of dollars." Women were not to be excluded from
this mobilisation, and it was at this meeting that Bose first
envisaged the establishment of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment.
Bose made a similar appeal at a special meeting of women on
July 12.

The next day Bose issued a statement dealing with the
reorganisation of the Indian Independence League. It was to
consist of twelve Departments as follows: (1) Military Bureau;
(2) Recruitment; (3) Training; (4) Supplies; (5) Finance;
(6) Publicity, Press and Propaganda; (7) Health and Social
Welfare; (8) Overseas; (9) Women; (10) Re-construction;
(11) Education and Culture; and (12) General Secretariat.
Each of these departments was to be under a separate officer,
who was given detailed instructions for carrying out his work.
The Departments soon started functioning under the overall
supervision of Bose.

A new momentum was evident in the working of the
League and the I.N.A. when, on July 25, Bose issued a special
Order of the Day taking over the Supreme Command of the
I.N.A. Henceforth he was its Sipah-Salar (Supreme Comman-
der). The same day he left Singapore on an extensive tour of
East Asia. His first halt was at Bangkok as a state guest. He
found much in common between himself and Marshal Pibul-
songgram, the Thai Premier. He called on the German and
Italian Ambassadors and met leading Indians at a garden party.
Next he visited Rangoon, where Burma’s independence was to be proclaimed on August 1. His presence on the historic occasion helped to cement the ties of friendship between the two neighbours, and to win the sympathy of Dr. Ba Maw, Burma’s new Head of State, for the League and the I.N.A. Bose broadcast a speech from the Rangoon Radio, and also addressed a rally attended by over 10,000 Indians. After a brief visit to Saigon, he returned to Singapore on August 11. The whirlwind tour created tremendous excitement, not only among the Indians but also among the Thais, Burmese and Indo-Chinese. Indians everywhere promised to sacrifice their all for the cause of freedom.

Bose was again in Burma during the last week of September, for making arrangements for the reception of a Division, which was to proceed to the Indian front. He visited the mausoleum of Bahadur Shah, the last Moghul Emperor of India. Bose had a special liking for a couplet of Bahadur Shah, which formed the signature tune of Free India Radio in Germany:

Gaaziomain boo rahegi jab talak imanki
Tabto Londontak chalegi tegh Hindustanki!

(As long as the last particle of faith exists in the soul of India’s freedom fighters, the sword of Hindustan will continue to penetrate the heart of London.)

It was an ironic coincidence, Bose pointed out, that while the remains of India’s last emperor rest on the soil of Burma, those of the last king of free Burma rest on that of India. Bose handed over a generous donation to Dr. Ba Maw for charity and the latter, on his part, promised full support to the struggle for India’s freedom.

While Bose was displaying tremendous energy in infusing a new life into the Indian Independence League, he did not lose sight of the developments in India, which had taken a turn to his liking, with the launching of the Quit India movement. He was greatly distressed by the famine in Bengal, which was taking a heavy toll of life. He made an offer of 100,000 tons of rice to be shipped to India as a gift of the League, if safe conduct was guaranteed to the ships carrying the grain. It was in-
conceivable that the British would give such a guarantee during the war. Even if Bose could not save lives, his proffered gift served as a timely handle to expose the heartlessness of the Indian Government.

The idea of forming a Provisional Government of Free India on the lines of the numerous emigre European Governments, then functioning from London was long in Bose's mind. There is reason to believe that he had mentioned this plan in his very first meeting with General Tojo, who expressed vague agreement with it. But the Japanese Liaison Department (Hikari Kikan) in Singapore was hostile to the plan, which was likely to affect its own power and importance. Bose, nevertheless, decided to go ahead since a Provisional Government would carry an unmistakable significance, and have strength of its own. Bose announced his plan at a conference of the Indian Independence League in Singapore on October 21. He said: "It would naturally have been the best thing if such a government had been constituted inside India, and if that government had launched the last struggle for liberty. But things being what they are in India, and all the known and recognised leaders being in prison, it is hopeless to expect the formation of a provisional government within the frontiers of India. It is consequently for the Indians in East Asia to undertake the solemn task. Since the Indian Independence League is the only representative organisation of Indians in East Asia, and as such enjoys the full confidence of the entire Indian community, it is competent to form such a government."

After stressing the need for and the competence of the Provisional Government of Free India (Arzi Hukamat-e-Azad Hind), Bose added: "Friends, what we are doing here at present is but a preparation for the final struggle. The struggle will begin only when we cross the Indian frontier. Then will commence the historic march to Delhi—the march that will end only when the last Englishman is either expelled from India, or is thrown into prison—and when India's national flag flies over the Viceroy's House and the Azad Hind Fouj holds its victory parade inside the ancient Red Fort of India's metropolis."

After thanking the Government and people of Japan for the
sympathy, help and co-operation they were extending to the
cause of Indian freedom, Bose announced a gift of five aero-
planes each to the Imperial Nipponese Army and Navy as a
token of appreciation on behalf of the Provisional Government.
The composition of the Provisional Government was
announced in the afternoon session. The Cathay Cinema was
packed to capacity, and the audience was pitched to a high level
of excitement and expectancy. Colonel Yamamoto, head of the
Hikari Kikan, was present along with a number of Japanese
officers and representatives of East Asian nations. After citing
a parallel, the formation of the Irish Provisional Government
in 1916, Bose observed: “In our case, the Provisional Govern-
ment of Free India will not be like a normal peace-time govern-
ment. Its functions and its composition will be of a unique kind.
It will be a fighting organisation, the main object of which will
be to launch and to conduct the last war against the British and
their allies in India. Consequently, only such departments will
be run by the Government as will be necessary for the launch-
ing and the prosecution of the struggle for liberty.”

Bose became Head of State, Prime Minister and Minister for
War, as well as Foreign Affairs while continuing as the Supreme
Commander of the Indian National Army. Finance, Publicity
and Women’s Organisation were entrusted respectively to A. C.
Chatterji, S. A. Ayer and Mrs. Lakshmi Swaminathan. A. M.
Sahay became secretary with Ministerial rank, Rash Behari re-
main ing as the Supreme Adviser. Eight representatives of the
Armed Forces were taken into the cabinet, besides a team of
eight civilian Advisers.

Bose then slowly read the Proclamation of the Provisional
Government of Free India, which he had drafted at a night’s
sitting a couple of days earlier. He noted how Indians had
waged the struggle of freedom right from 1757, when the British
first gained ascendancy in Bengal. It reached a climax in the
War of Independence of 1857. Subjected to terror and brutality
thereafter, the Indian people lay prostrate for a while. But a
new awakening began with the birth of the Indian National
Congress in 1885, after which, the struggle had never flagged.
The freedom fight was intensified with the beginning of the
Second World War. It had entered a new phase with the estab-
lishment of the Provisional Government of Free India. "It will be its task to launch and to conduct the struggle that will bring about the expulsion of the British and their allies from the soil of India. It will then be the task of the Provisional Government to bring about the establishment of a permanent national government of Azad Hind, constituted in accordance with the will of the Indian people and enjoying their confidence."

Bose then made a bold claim: "The Provisional Government is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Indian. It guarantees religious liberty, as well as equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens. It declares its firm resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and transcending all the differences cunningly fostered by an alien government in the past."

The Proclamation ended with a rousing peroration: "In the name of God, in the name of bygone generations who have welded the Indian people into one nation, and in the name of its dead heroes who have bequeathed to us a tradition of heroism and self-sacrifice, we call upon the Indian people to rally round our banner and to strike for India's freedom. We call upon them to launch the final struggle against the British and all their allies in India, and to prosecute that struggle with valour and perseverance with full faith in final victory—until the enemy is expelled from the Indian soil and the Indian people are once again a free nation."

The Ministers and Advisers thereupon ascended the dais and took their seats behind the Head of the State. There followed the solemn ceremony of oath-taking, Bose being the first to do so: "In the name of God, I take this sacred oath that to liberate India and 38 crores of my countrymen, I, Subhas Chandra Bose, will continue this sacred war of freedom till the last breath of my life..." At this point he was visibly moved. His eyes glistened with tears. His voice failed. He remained silent for a minute or two. There was complete silence. With bated breath, the vast audience awaited the completion of the oath. Having overcome his emotions he continued: "I shall always remain a servant of India and look after the welfare of 38 crores of Indian brothers and sisters. This shall be for me my highest duty.
Even after winning freedom, I will always be prepared to shed the last drop of my blood for the preservation of India's freedom."

Bose was followed by the members of the Government, each pledging in the name of God his loyalty to his leader, and consecrating himself to the service of India. Each individual member stood at attention before Bose and took the following oath:

"In the name of God, I take this holy oath that to liberate India and the thirty-eight crores of my countrymen I........ will be absolutely faithful to my leader, Subhas Chandra Bose, and shall be always prepared to sacrifice my life and all I have for fulfilling this pledge."

When the national anthem ended, the entire audience which had participated in the making of history, rose to its feet and rent the air with slogans, cheers and acclamations. It almost seemed as if the day of freedom had already dawned. At their very second meeting, the Ministers of the Provisional Government resolved forthwith to declare war on Britain and America. There was a difference of opinion over the advisability of declaring war on the U.S., but Bose was firm about it. He had always considered Britain's allies as much the enemies of India as Britain. The announcement of war evoked frenzied demonstrations at a mass rally on October 24.

Within a few weeks, the Provisional Government of Free India received recognition from the Governments of Japan, Germany, Italy, Burma, the Philippines, Nanking, Croatia, Manchukuo and Siam, thereby establishing its international legitimacy. General Tojo gave a categorical assurance in the Diet on October 26 that "Japan was determined to support the Provisional Government of Free India consistently in the future, and to put forth her utmost efforts for the independence and emancipation of India".

On October 22, 1943, Bose inaugurated the training camp of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. This aptly named regiment had been formed the previous month, with a nucleus of 100 volunteers. It had two sections: the fighting and the nursing. A women's organisation was included in the "Total Mobilisation" scheme of Bose. The Regiment had the only combatant unit of
women outside Russia then, and Indians in East Asia were astonished by the zeal and alacrity with which their daughters, sisters and wives flocked to it to undergo training in arms. Their first turn-out at a Guard of Honour immensely pleased Bose. He referred to the martial traditions of Indian women and listed the mythological Pramila, wife of Meghanada, who was keen on fighting with Rama, Chand Bibi of Ahmednagar, Rani Durgavati of Garhmandal, Padmini, who rescued her husband from Alauddin Khilji’s camp, and Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi—all honoured names in India. Women in their hundreds had braved lathis during the non-cooperation campaigns. Captain Lakshmi Swaminathan, commander of the Regiment and her colleagues were thus acting in conformity with their heritage. The courage and endurance they displayed during the next two years won the unstinted admiration, not only of Indians but also of the Malayans, Thais and Burmese, to whom a woman in military uniform was a new phenomenon.

Soon after the establishment of the Provisional Government of Free India and its declaration of war on the Allies, Bose left for Tokyo to attend the Greater East Asia Conference. He had planned to take up several other issues with General Tojo, with whom he could now talk on a basis of equality. First on the list was the issue of his relations with the Hikari Kikan in Malaya which, instead of facilitating liaison between Bose and the Japanese Government, was actually hindering it. Especially since Bose gave the call for “total mobilisation”, the Hikari Kikan’s attitude had become positively unhelpful. Somehow it had taken into its head that the interests of the Japanese Army and the I.N.A. conflicted, and even Colonel Yamamoto, whom Bose had known since his Berlin days, had become suspicious and un-co-operative.

Second on the list was the I.N.A.’s exact role in the proposed Imphal campaign. Bose and his officers were naturally anxious that the I.N.A. should play an active part in the campaign shoulder to shoulder with its Japanese allies. But Field Marshal Terauchi, Japanese Commander-in-Chief in South-east Asia, envisaged no more than a secondary role for it. He suggested that the main body of the I.N.A. should be left in Singapore, and only its espionage and propaganda branches employed in
the field. His reason for according such an inferior status to the I.N.A. were still more insulting. I.N.A. soldiers, he said, had been demoralised by defeat. Far from being a help and support to the Japanese offensive, they would take the first opportunity to cross over to their former comrades. Therefore, the task of liberating India must devolve on the Japanese Army alone.

This facile argument made Bose indignant. "Any liberation of India secured through Japanese sacrifices," he retorted, "would be worse than slavery." The I.N.A. could not remain mere onlookers of the fighting. "It must send as many men into battle as possible. In fact, it must be made the spear-head of the offensive. It was a question of national honour," Bose declared. After prolonged discussions, Terauchi was at last persuaded to accept one I.N.A. regiment for active service on a trial basis.

Bose was not satisfied with this and pleaded with Tojo that the First I.N.A. Division should be employed as a whole in the Imphal campaign. As a matter of fact, he wanted to raise two more Divisions if arms and equipment could be made available. The issue was referred to General Sugiyama, Chief of Staff of the Japanese Army, who agreed that the I.N.A. should rank as an Allied Army under the Japanese Operational Command. Sugiyama also consented to the raising of a second Division.

The third matter which Bose took up with Tojo concerned the handing over of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands—the only Indian territory held by the Japanese—to the Provisional Government of Free India. Though there was no political difficulty in this transfer, the Imperial Japanese Navy pointed out that it could not entirely relinquish its control over these islands, which were its farthest outposts in the Bay of Bengal, during the war. However, it had no objection to a formal transfer, and to the appointment of an Indian Chief Commissioner whose authority would be strictly limited. Bose was not satisfied, but he agreed to the arrangement in view of the propaganda value of even a ceremonial occupation of Indian territory. He renamed Andaman and Nicobar as "Shahid" (Martyr) and "Swaraj" islands respectively. "Like the Bastille in Paris," he said on the occasion, "which was liberated first during the French Revolu-
tion, the Andamans, where our patriots suffered much, is the first to be liberated in India's fight for independence”.

The Greater East Asia Conference was held on November 5 and 6 in the Diet building, and was timed to meet before the Cairo Conference of the Allies. Six Asiatic nations (including the host country) had come together to discuss various problems of mutual interest. Although Bose was now a full-fledged Head of a State, he attended the conference as an observer and not as a delegate because he could not commit India to the Co-Prosperity-Sphere. The Conference adopted a Joint Declaration on the second day which, in substance, read:

(1) Anglo-American domination of East Asia must cease for ever. Greater East Asia must be left to East Asians.

(2) The nations of Greater East Asia will jointly defend their homelands, and collaborate on a basis of mutual respect of their sovereignty and cultural traditions, to inaugurate an era of economic prosperity and cultural advancement in their region.

(3) They will extend this spirit of fraternal collaboration to the world at large, and contribute to the progress of mankind by working together for the abolition of racial discrimination, the promotion of cultural inter-communication, and the opening of natural resources throughout the world.¹ Dr. Ba Maw, Adipadi of Burma, thereafter introduced Bose to the conference in glowing terms, and requested him to address the delegates.

Endorsing the observation of Dr. Ba Maw that Asia could not be said to be free until India was free, Bose observed: “If our allies were to go down, there will be no hope for India to be free for a hundred years. For India there is no other path but uncompromising struggle against British imperialism. Compromising with Britain means to compromise with slavery, and we are determined not to compromise with slavery any more.”

The speech was a personal triumph for Bose but the essential humility of the man came out in a revealing incident. When during the conference Premier Tojo said that Bose would be all-in-all in free India, the latter rose to his feet at once and observed that it was not for General Tojo to decide. In free India, the people alone would choose their leader. He considered himself only an humble servant of the Indian nation.

¹ Toshikazu Kase: *The Eclipse of The Rising Sun*, p. 72
On November 10, Bose was granted an audience by the Emperor of Japan. The following week he was fully occupied with visits to war factories and military academies, where he met the Indian cadets whom he had sent there (he called them his "Tokyo Boys"). He gave Press interviews and addressed private and public meetings.

Leaving Tokyo on November 18, he returned to Singapore via Nanking, Shanghai, Manila and Saigon. Everywhere he was treated with affection and deference. Immediately on his return, Bose started planning the movement of the I.N.A. units to Burma preparatory to the launching of an offensive against Imphal. Already he had realised the rashness of his repeated promises to set foot in India before the end of the year, and he could not afford to waste any more time. It was decided to move the headquarters of the Provisional Government also to Rangoon, but before his departure, he had to ensure the success of "total mobilisation". The expenses of the Army were mounting, and contributions of "silver bullets" were most urgently needed. While the poor people cheerfully gave their all to the movement, it was found that the richer sections showed habitual reluctance to give even their promised quota. On October 25, Bose severely warned the merchant community in Malaya: "Legally speaking, there is no private property when a country is in a state of war. If you think that your wealth and your possessions are your own, you are living in delusion. Your lives and properties do not now belong to you; they belong to India and India alone."

He added: "I stand here today representing the Provisional Government of Azad Hind which has absolute rights over your lives and properties...We have to get Indian independence by all means and at any cost, and for that, we have to carry out Total Mobilisation voluntarily if possible, by compulsion if necessary...Everyone who refuses to help our cause is our enemy."

Putting on a velvet glove on his iron fist, Bose awarded titles like "Sewak-e-Hind" to the more munificent donors. A few rich people offered their entire properties, while there was a keen competition among the less affluent to donate to the cause. Eye-
witnesses have mentioned several such instances. *Karo sab nichhaawar, bano sab fakir* (sacrifice your all and become ascetics) became a favourite saying of Bose. His demand on Malayan Indians was for ten crores of rupees, which was approximately ten per cent of the value of their possessions. Barely three-fourths of this amount could be collected by the end of 1943, despite intensive persuasion and occasional pressure, which sometimes included the detention of the more recalcitrant plutocrats.

A vigorous recruitment drive was also started. It embraced both the prisoners of war and civilians. There was a most heartening response especially from the latter and it was difficult to make arrangements for their immediate training. A number of military schools were started. The initial training extended over six months, and no distinction was made during it between officers and men, let alone between the different castes and communities. A college for civil administration was also opened under A. N. Sarkar. A large number of pamphlets and posters in different languages were prepared for use in the impending campaign. Discipline in all ranks was tightened and an I.N.A. Order warned that desertion and mutiny would be punishable by death, as in other armies. A "Bal Sena" was set up for canalising the enthusiasm of children and infusing the spirit of service in them. Whatever immediate service it did or did not do, the pint-size "Sena" proved a source of embarrassment when the British reoccupied Burma and Malaya. They had put a ban on the shouting of *Jai Hind*. But the "Bal Sena" consistently defied it, and, ultimately, the order had to be withdrawn.

A sub-committee of the Cabinet was appointed to draw a plan of national reunification. According to its recommendations, it was decided that Hindustani written in the Roman script was to be the national language; *Jai Hind* the common salutation, the tricolour (without the charkha) the national flag; the song beginning with *Subh sukh chain ki barkha barse*, the national song; the Springing Tiger the national emblem; *Chalo Delhi* the national war-cry; and *Azad Hind Zindabad, Inquilab Zindabad and Netaji ki jai* the national slogans.
Bose paid a long deferred visit to the Andaman Island in the last week of December, and after the formal ceremony of renaming them, appointed Lt. Col. Loganadhan as Chief Commissioner. No basis of co-operation, however, could be established between the Indian Commissioner and the Japanese Admiral in charge of the islands and soon after, Loganadhan resigned his office.
CHAPTER 25

ON TO DELHI

AFTER spending a week as a state guest in Thailand, Bose arrived in Rangoon on January 7, 1944, with the key members of his Cabinet. The Japanese had decided to launch their long deferred offensive against Arakan and Imphal early in the new year. At the very least, this was necessary to forestall the expected British counter-offensive following the success of General Wingate’s Chindit expedition. The objective of the offensive was to attack the British forces in Arakan and to compel them to engage their entire resources in a battle for Chittagong and the gateway to Eastern Bengal. Then it would be relatively easy to take Imphal and Kohima.

Bose insisted on the full participation of the I.N.A. in the offensive, in keeping with the understanding arrived at with the Chief of Staff of the Japanese Army in Tokyo. But General Kawabe, Commander-in-Chief on the spot, raised the same objections which Field Marshal Terauchi had done earlier. He referred to the disparity in the respective strengths of the I.N.A. and the Japanese Army, and pointed out that the former was hardly in a position to play an independent, let alone a decisive role in the offensive. General Kawabe, therefore, thought it best to attach companies of the I.N.A. to the Japanese Divisions taking part in the offensive. Bose could not agree to such a minor role for the I.N.A. He urged that it should be made the spear-head of the advance into India. The first drop of blood to be shed on Indian soil must be that of a member of the I.N.A., Bose declared. The I.N.A., in any case, must retain its identity which would not be possible if it were used in units smaller than a battalion. An understanding was eventually arrived at between General Kawabe and Bose on the following lines: (1) The Japanese Army and the I.N.A. would have an
equal status. (2) The two armies would work on a common strategy and under a common (Japanese) command. (3) Officers and men of the I.N.A. would function under their own military law. (4) An independent sector would be put in charge of the I.N.A. (5) Liberated Indian territories would be handed over to the I.N.A., and the Indian tricolour alone would fly over them.

It was decided that the first Battalion of the Subhas Brigade should form part of the force opposing the British West African Division in the Kaladan Valley, while the other two were to relieve Japanese forces guarding the lines of communications over the Chin Hills.

Bose spent as much time as he could with the Subhas Brigade, which was soon to move to the front. He talked to its men and officers individually and in groups, watched them at exercises and did his best to enthuse them with his own patriotic ardour. He even offered those, who were diffident or unsure of themselves, the option to remain behind. But those who marched forth, he said, must uphold the honour of the I.N.A. and India under all circumstances. The future depended on their devotion and valour.

On February 3 he bade them farewell in the following words: “Blood is calling to blood. Arise! We have no time to lose. Take up your arms. There in front of you is the road our pioneers have built. We shall march along that road. We shall carve our way through the enemy’s ranks or, if God wills, we shall die a martyr’s death. And in our last sleep we shall kiss the road which will bring our Army to Delhi. The road to Delhi is the road to freedom. On to Delhi!”

The jawans’ enthusiasm was unbounded. But enthusiasm alone does not win modern wars. The military handicaps of the I.N.A. were all too apparent even then. It had no air force and artillery of its own. It did not possess even mortars. Its machine-guns were only of medium size and without spares. Telephone and wireless equipment was in short supply, and messages even on vital sectors had to be relayed through the Japanese lines. Transport, whether mechanical or animal, was hardly available, and the Jawans had to carry their own arms and equipment, as also supplies of food and ammunition. Medical facilities were
woefully deficient, and there was a shortage of warm clothing and boots, not to mention mosquito nets, which were a prime necessity in an area where malaria was rife.

All these shortcomings were to affect the fighting capacity of the I.N.A., and even to sap its morale before long. But, for the time being, they were in fine fettle and played a notable part in the Japanese attack in Arakan, which cut off the 7th Division of the British Army in the Mayu Valley and, in a few days, annihilated it. Some Indian troops, including the Gwalior Lancers, deserted the British Army and came over to the I.N.A. Major L. S. Misra, the I.N.A. commander in Arakan, was complimented by Bose on this exploit.

On the Kaladan front, Major Rathor was ordered to intercept a West African Division which was trying to cross the Kaladan river. This was successfully done and the I.N.A. occupied Paletwa and Daletme, from where the Indian frontier was approximately forty miles to the West. The nearest British post on the Indian side was at Mowdok, which was soon occupied and held until September. The other two battalions of Subhas Brigade, under the command of Colonel Shah Nawaz Khan, proceeded via Mandalay and Kalewa to the Chin hill area of Haka and Falam. The Japanese considered it highly important to hold these two strategic points to protect their lines of communication. The Subhas Brigade, therefore, could not take an active part in the Imphal campaign as originally planned, much to the disappointment of its officers and men. On the other hand, keeping open the lines of communication for the main offensive was by no means an easy job in view of the mountainous terrain and lack of transport.

On March 18, an I.N.A. detachment captured Tidum, crossed the Burmese frontier, and set foot on Indian soil amidst scenes of jubilation. Bose broadcast the thrilling news in a proclamation, which solemnly declared his Government’s determination to go on fighting, in close brotherhood with Nippon, until India was completely liberated. He called on the Indian people to render all help, direct and indirect, to the armies of liberation. "We advise the Indian people, our kith and kin, to keep away from the Anglo-American armies, their aerodromes, barracks, ammunition factories, harbours, military installations
and their war industries, which may have to be destroyed by us before the enemy can be defeated." On March 21, General Tojo stated in the Diet that the administration of occupied Indian territories would be in the hands of the Provisional Government. The Hikari Kikan, now under General Isoda, however, was loath to relinquish its authority, which led to a serious row between Bose and Isoda.

The battle for Kohima and Imphal was one of the most prolonged and hard-fought battles of the Second World War, and it ultimately proved catastrophic for the Japanese Army in Southeast Asia. The battle "swayed back and forth through great stretches of wild country; one day its focal point was a hill named on no map, the next a miserable unpronounceable village a hundred miles away. Columns, brigades, divisions marched and counter-marched, met in bloody clashes and reeled apart, weaving a confused pattern hard to unravel".1

The Japanese offensive began in the first week of March. The Imphal-Kohima road was cut on March 14, and by the end of the month, the Japanese encirclement of Imphal was complete. There was a difference of opinion about cutting the road since a strong British force was concentrated at Imphal. Bose shared the view that the road should be left open to enable the British to withdraw as they had done elsewhere till then. But General Mutaguchi, commanding the Japanese Fifteenth Army, wanted to isolate the British at Imphal and compel them to surrender Imphal, he said, was a lake with a big fish, which could be netted at leisure. This strategy was soon to recoil on the Japanese. The "big fish" proved to be a crocodile, which dragged them to their doom!

Fighting on the Imphal-Kohima sector was mainly done by the Japanese forces, with the I.N.A. playing an auxiliary role. But when the Japanese were pressed hard, they asked for the services of the Subhas Brigade, which was detailed for keeping the lines of communication open. It was the last week of May when the Brigade reached the front after suffering untold privations en route. Meanwhile, strong mechanised British forces had pushed back the Japanese forces from the Kohima-Dimapur road and, later, from Kohima itself. The Subhas Bri-

1 Field Marshal Sir William Slim: *Defeat Into Victory*, p. 296
gade, therefore, could do little but participate in the retreat in harrowing conditions. Similar was the fate of the Gandhi Brigade under Col. M. Z. Kiani, and of the Azad Brigade under Col. Gulzara Singh, which were also rushed to the Imphal front. The former, however, distinguished itself in a number of actions, the most notable being a night attack on Pael aerodrome. The liaison between the I.N.A. forces and the Japanese command soon broke down completely. The Japanese themselves were short of ammunition, rations, transport and medical facilities, and were in no position or mood to discharge their obligations to supply these to the I.N.A., which, at times, had to subsist on grass and roots boiled with paddy.

On April 8, the Japanese occupied Kohima Fort, but the British grimly clung to other strategic points in the area. Weeks of seesaw fighting gradually developed into a war of attrition, which the British were in a far better position to wage than the Japanese. In the first place, their resources were more plentiful and their lines of communication shorter. Another and more decisive factor was their complete control of the air, while most of the Japanese air squadrons were withdrawn from Burma and sent to the more critical Pacific front. The British could lift entire divisions by air to relieve the Imphal garrison. On the other hand, even the Japanese land supply lines had virtually become inoperative due to the enemy’s air strikes and the torrential rains, which turned mountain tracks into rivers of mud.

The unimaginative strategy of General Sato, comander of the Japanese 31st Division who was in charge of the Kohima-Imphal sector, also proved of great benefit to the British. He was ordered to take Kohima and dig in, and that single idea obsessed his mind. It never occurred to him that a far richer prize lay within his grasp, and that he could inflict a crippling blow on the enemy by making a major thrust at Dimapur—the railhead for that area. He could then have left only a detachment to mask Kohima, his initial objective. Field Marshal Slim, commanding the Fourteenth British Army, gleefully utilised the opportunity to replenish his forces to the maximum advantage, while Japan had to pay dearly for the lack of initiative of its field commander. Indeed, it soon found itself precisely in the same position in which it had caught Britain in December 1941
in the Malayan campaign. The desperate straits which the Japanese Army was reduced to was evident in the order issued by Major-General Tanaka to the 33rd Division: "Now is the time to capture Imphal. The coming battle is the turning point. It will denote the success or failure of the Greater East Asia war. Your men have got to be fully in the picture. They must regard death as something lighter than a feather. They must capture Imphal. For that reason, it must be expected that the Division will be almost annihilated. I have confidence in your firm courage and devotion, and believe that you will do your duty, but should any delinquencies occur, you have got to understand that I shall take the necessary action. In order to keep the honour of his unit bright, a commander may have to use (even) his sword as a weapon of punishment, exceedingly shameful though it is to have to shed the blood of one's own soldiers on the battlefield. On this one battle rests the fate of the Empire."

All this was of no avail. The Japanese soldiers fought with their customary bravery and reckless courage. But they were out-generalled, out-gunned and out-fought. The savage struggle surged back and forth, the Japanese air force making one of its rare appearances in the first half of May. Kohima town resembled the battle-field of the Somme in 1916. In June, the battered and exhausted Japanese army started its disastrous retreat. Five of its Divisions had been destroyed, and two other Divisions, an independent brigade, and many lines of communication units were badly mauled. Fifty thousand Japanese had been killed; allowing only half that number for the wounded, Japan had lost some seventy-five thousand soldiers in its greatest defeat in history. A Japanese writer, Toshikazu Kase, has described it in graphic terms:

"Our expeditionary force of 270,000 men which had marched to the gates of Imphal in India, met defeat. Most of this force perished in battle, or later died of starvation. The disaster of Imphal was perhaps the worst of its kind yet chronicled in the annals of war. One of the regimental commanders, who survived the retreat, called upon me in Tokyo in his tattered uniform. I could hardly recognise him. He told me how the ranks had thinned daily, as thirst and hunger overtook the retreating columns and how the sick and the wounded had to be aban-
doned by the hundreds. In order to avoid capture, these men were usually forced to seek death at their own hands. Only 70,000 of the original force survived.”

Bose, who had stationed his headquarters at the advance base of Maymyo, to be nearer the front, seems to have taken long to realize the magnitude, or even the nature of the disaster, which had overtaken the joint forces. His communications with the I.N.A. detachments and the Japanese command had broken down and the Hikari Kikan was no help at all. All it did was to offer lame excuses for its failures. Frantic efforts were made by Bose through his aides to rush food, supplies and medical help to the I.N.A. units which were distributed in several sectors.

An air of optimism, however, still reigned supreme in Rangoon and elsewhere. ‘Netaji Week’ — 4th to 11th July — was observed to commemorate Bose’s assumption of leadership of the independence movement in East Asia. Bose utilised the occasion to deliver a series of speeches to sustain morale, and to collect funds. In a speech, he recounted the achievements of the movement during the previous twelve months:

“(1) We have been able to mobilise men, money and materials in accordance with our plan for Total Mobilisation. (2) We have trained our Army for a total war and expanded it considerably. (3) We have organised a women’s section in our Army called the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. (4) We have set up our Government, Arzi Hukumat-e-Hind, and have obtained recognition from nine friendly Powers. (5) We have acquired our first territory in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. (6) We pushed forward our headquarters to Burma and, in February 1944, launched our war of independence. On March 2, we were able to proclaim to the world that our troops were already in India. (7) We have considerably expanded the work of our Press, Publicity and Propaganda Departments. (8) We have set up an organisation called the Azad Hind Dal to take over the administration and reconstruction in Free India. (9) We have set up a bank of our own in Burma—the National Bank of Azad Hind Ltd. We have placed orders for our own currency to circulate in Free India. (10) We have been able to give a good

1 Eclipse of the Rising Sun, p. 92
account of ourselves in every sector of the fighting front, and our troops have been pushing on inside India slowly but steadily, in spite of all difficulties and hardships.”

Impressive as all these achievements appeared, Bose could scarcely have imagined then that they would be entirely nullified within a few months. On the other hand, the “difficulties and hardships” which he casually mentioned, began to multiply.

Parades (one of them at the tomb of Bahadur Shah), investitures (when awards were given for conspicuous gallantry), receptions and such other functions were held during the Netaji Week. One of them related to the formal take-over of the Ziawadi Estate, near Toungoo, of about 50 square miles consisting of a sugar mill, a jute mill and a cotton mill, which were held by the Japanese as enemy property. The Provisional Government set up training centres there and the estate’s income came as a windfall at a time when the expenses of the Provisional Government were rising. Those of the I.N.A. alone amounted to two million rupees a month.

There was not the least tinge of doubt in Bose’s speeches during the Week, though he must have heard about the Allied invasion of Europe a month earlier, and the American successes in the Pacific. In one he declared: “The British who spilt the blood of innocent, freedom-loving Indians and tortured them inhumanly must pay for their crimes. We Indians do not hate the enemy enough. If you want your countrymen to rise to heights of superhuman courage and heroism, you must teach them not only to love their country but also to hate their enemy.” In another speech he made a sporting offer to the British: “Let them accept the Quit India resolution and give immediate effect to it and I guarantee that not a single Japanese soldier will set foot on Indian soil.” He assured those Indians, who were in the service of the British Government and efficient in their work, that they would be engaged by the new Government “provided they were not pro-British at heart, and had not gone out of their way to harm the independence movement”. Similar assurances were given to the soldiers of the Indian Army. He gave a public welcome to a number of them who had surrendered to the I.N.A. in Arakan.

During this Week, he also addressed a long broadcast per-
sonally to Mahatma Gandhi in which he vindicated his actions with passionate sincerity, and dwelt on the historic significance of the war of independence he had launched.

Despite the air of cheerfulness and confidence he publicly affected, the gravity of the situation must have dawned on Bose at least on July 26, when the final decision to suspend the Imphal campaign was officially announced. Tojo resigned his premiership the same day. Bose busied himself with the dispatch of supplies and medical help to the retreating I.N.A. soldiers, whose plight was pathetic. Four thousand had lost their lives in the Imphal offensive and the remaining—most of them sick or wounded—were trudging back with difficulty. Not a few breathed their last on the road. Food, clothing, boots, vehicles—whatever Bose could lay his hands on in Rangoon—was rushed to the soldiers, many of whom were marooned by the flooding of the Chindwin River. Many suffered from malaria, some were reduced to the last stages of starvation. He left for the front to see things for himself. He visited I.N.A. camps and hospitals, and his presence proved a source of cheer, comfort and courage. Even the ailing and the wounded men declared their readiness to return to the front as soon as they were well enough. Bose issued a Special Order of the Day on August 14, 1944, in which he put the best face on recent happenings:

“Our units, with their better training and discipline and unshakable determination to do or die on the path of India’s freedom, soon established their superiority over the enemy whose morale deteriorated with each defeat. Fighting under the most trying conditions, our officers and men displayed such courage and heroism that they have earned the praise of everybody. With their blood and sacrifice, these heroes have established traditions which the future soldiers of India will have to uphold.

“All preparations had been completed and the stage had been set for the final assault on Imphal when torrential rains overtook us and to carry Imphal by an assault was rendered a practical impossibility. Handicapped by these elements, we were forced to postpone our offensive. After the postponement, it was found disadvantageous to hold the lines that we then had. For securing a more favourable defensive position, it was considered advisable to withdraw our troops. In accordance with
this decision, our troops have withdrawn to a more favourable position. We shall now utilise the period in completing our preparations so that, with the advent of better weather, we may be in a position to resume our offensive. As we have been successful in defeating our enemy once, our faith in our final victory and complete annihilation of Anglo-American forces has grown ten-fold.

"May the souls of those heroes who have fallen in this campaign inspire us to still nobler deeds of heroism and bravery in the next phase of India's 'war of liberation'! Jai Hind!"

Whatever excuses Bose gave for the withdrawal, and after making full allowance for the fact that the I.N.A.'s role was essentially subsidiary, he could not disguise from himself the hard realities of indiscipline and lack of leadership at its lower levels. Almost one-fourth of the men on the Imphal front had deserted or were captured. As against this, comparatively few Indian Army soldiers were taken prisoner or were persuaded to come over to the I.N.A. (Not a few of those who did had to be sent back as they could not be fed.) He summoned the I.N.A. officers in Rangoon and severely upbraided them for their failure to serve as model leaders to their men. They had become too fond of comfort and soft living, he told them. Whatever Bose could tolerate, he could never condone traitors who (he felt) deserved to be shot out of hand. He even thought of issuing an order allowing soldiers to shoot any man or officer who was suspected of planning desertion, but was dissuaded from taking such a drastic step for the time being. He did not spare even himself, and considered that events might have taken a different turn if only he had gone to the front in time.

Bose spent the next few weeks in putting new heart in the League workers, regrouping the I.N.A. forces and visiting hospitals where a large number of troops lay recovering from wounds, fatigue and illness. The hospital at Mandalay was rapidly expanded, and a special hospital for convalescents was opened at Kalaw, in the Southern Shan States, as the base hospitals at Monywa and Maymyo were crowded with patients. Burma was now exposed to a new hazard—aerial bombing—and the hospitals, too, had occasionally been exposed to air attacks. The British Fourteenth Army, moreover, was advancing
towards the east bank of the Chindwin river. It was decided to shift the Maymyo base to the Ziawadi Estate.

At a special meeting of the Ministers of the Provisional Government, it was unanimously decided to continue the war until complete independence was won. They also decided not to depend any longer on the Japanese for supplies, but to mobilise the necessary resources independently for the next phase of the campaign. A special department of production was started, and a War Council of twelve members was appointed for the more efficient conduct of hostilities.

"A Provisional Government and Azad Hind Week" was observed in the third week of October; such periodical celebrations being useful in boosting popular morale. Bose visited Tokyo once again to confer with the new Prime Minister, General Koiso. Their talks were meant to regularise the relations between the I.N.A. and the Japanese commanders in Burma, and to take up the issue of the Hikari Kikan, which could not render any help to the I.N.A. or the Provisional Government. Bose, who was warmly received by Koiso, suggested that direct diplomatic relations should be established between the Japanese Government and his own Government with the exchange of ambassadors, thus eliminating the Hikari Kikan. Koiso's reaction to this proposal was favourable and an ambassador, Hachiya, was appointed soon after. (Before he could formally take up his duties, however, Japanese rule over Burma and Malaya had ended).

Koiso reiterated his predecessor's assurance that Japan had no territorial or economic ambitions in India, and that it did not expect any special privileges in return for its help. The Japanese Premier also promised to augment and expedite war supplies to the I.N.A. and, as an earnest, issued orders for the immediate dispatch of medicines, wireless sets and arms. Bose broadcast a message to America:

"I want to tell my American friends that Asia is now surging with revolutionary fervour, from one end to another...We want our freedom and we shall have it by any means. You had an opportunity of helping us, but you did not. Now Japan is offering us help and we have reason to trust her sincerity. This is why we have plunged into the struggle alongside of her. It is
not Japan that we are helping by waging war on you and on our mortal enemy—England. We are helping ourselves—we are helping Asia."

One wonders if this message was prompted by the realisation that the tide of war had turned. Bose was a witness to the devastating air raids which America had mounted on the Japanese mainland.

Significantly again, Bose wanted Koiso to help him to make an approach to Soviet Russia, which was still on terms of (an uneasy) peace with Japan. He suggested that he would be in a position to improve Japan's relations with Russia. But his objective probably was to win Soviet sympathies for his own cause, and also perhaps to explore the possibilities of securing an asylum for himself, in the event of Japan's defeat. Ever since June 1941, when Hitler invaded Russia, Bose was expressing his conviction that the alliance between Russia and the West would not survive the war. He was apparently devising his future plans on this basis. He would not throw up his hands even if Japan was defeated. He would continue the war on his own, if only he could establish a new base—maybe in Russia.

After a brief stop-over in Shanghai and Singapore, Bose returned to Rangoon where the League had made plans for weighing him in gold, on the occasion of his birthday on January 23. Personally, Bose was averse to such glorification, but he fell in with his colleagues' wishes as they pointed out that it would help to replenish the Azad Hind Government coffers. They proved correct when the equivalent of gold twice Bose's weight was collected. This was the 48th—and last—birthday that he was to celebrate.
By the end of 1944 the Japanese had given up all hopes of resuming the offensive in Imphal. All that they planned to do was to engage the enemy in a holding action. In the Pacific islands they had to surrender one position after another and begin a withdrawal to the mainland. The meaning of these developments could not have been lost on Bose. Nevertheless, he still talked bravely of occupying Imphal and Chittagong, and marching to Delhi. The British Fourteenth Army, however, had by now advanced from the north as well as the north-west, and reached the west bank of the Chindwin. The Japanese had retired to the Irrawaddy on whose banks the I.N.A. had taken its defence positions. The front in Arakan had remained more or less static, the British having pulled out of the Kaladan valley.

The Japanese were in no condition to follow up the retreat, as they were compelled to withdraw a whole division from this front to reinforce their army in North Burma. The remaining battalions were soon overwhelmed by the British who quickly occupied Akyab on January 1, and pressed on with their advance. In north-western Burma, the battle of Irrawaddy was soon joined. The I.N.A. Second Division had taken up positions on both banks of the Irrawaddy, from Myingyan in the north to Prome in the south. The river defence line was hardly ready when the British made a surprise crossing at Thabyikkyin and made a dash towards Meiktila. This was only the first of a series of British crossings, from Kyaukmyang in the north-west to Nyaungn in the south-east. At the latter place, and at Pagan, detachments of the I.N.A. surrendered to the British although the latter's initial attempts to cross the river had failed.

Meanwhile, the Japanese were making frantic efforts to defend
Meiktila. This task devolved on their 72nd Independent Mixed Brigade. The 2nd I.N.A. Infantry Regiment under Lt. Col. P. K. Sahgal was detailed for patrol duties from a defensive base on the western slope of the 5,000-foot high Mount Popa. Accompanied by Japanese and Indian staff officers, Bose proceeded towards Meiktila to see things for himself. On February 25, Bose reached the village of Indaw — about 20 miles south of Meiktila — on a tour of inspection of the front line. Mount Popa was looming large in the distance when news came that the enemy was within a few miles of Meiktila. With reckless disregard for personal safety and unmindful of the earnest pleas of his aides, Bose continued to press forward in the moonlight when Colonel Shah Nawaz who was accompanying him, lost his patience and told him: “Netaji, you are being selfish. Just to show your personal bravery, you are risking your life. But you have no right to risk your life in this way. Your own life does not belong to you; it is a precious trust for India which is in our keeping, and I am going to make sure that the trust is not endangered in this way.” Bose refused to be dissuaded. “Don’t worry about my safety,” he countered light-heartedly, “as I know that England has not yet produced the bomb that can kill Subhas Chandra Bose.”

The argument continued until dawn, which gave quietus to the question of proceeding to the front. As it happened, Bose could barely get away in time before the British occupied Meiktila. It was a hazardous escape under continuous enemy bombing, with the added danger of being betrayed by fifth columnists. He reached Pyinmana the following day and ordered that “X” Regiment be formed from the remnants of the 1st Division encamped there, to hold a defensive position at Yezin, 20 miles to the north. Bose was determined to remain with this Regiment to fight his final battle to the last man and the last round. Gloomy messages, however, began to reach him that the I.N.A. forces were surrendering everywhere to the Fourteenth Army, which, apart from its overwhelming superiority on land was in complete command of the air.

By the third week of March, the British were in full control of most of North Burma, after occupying Shwebo (January 7),

1 Shah Nawaz: My Memories of the I.N.A. and its Netaji, p. 179
Myebon Peninsula (January 12), Ramree (February 10), Meiktila (March 5), Mandalay (March 8) and Maymyo (March 20). Worse than these reverses were the shattering reports of desertions by five staff officers from the Second Division Headquarters at Mount Popa. Leaflets signed by them assuring "safe conduct" to those who wanted to surrender, were dropped by the British from the air, and it was feared that this would have a most unsettling effect on the I.N.A. Lt. Col. Sahgal noted in his Diary: "There is no discipline left, and they (deserters) are a source of nuisance to me because they wander about and give away my positions."

Bose returned to Rangoon to devise the necessary measures to tighten discipline and end desertions. He decided to implement an idea which for long had been simmering in his mind. He issued a Special Order of the Day on March 13, 1945, "to destroy completely the germs of cowardice and treachery". "Every member of the Indian National Army, Officer, N.C.O. or Sepoy," the Order ran, "will in future be entitled to arrest any other member of the I.N.A., no matter what his rank might be, if he leaves in a cowardly manner, or to shoot him if he acts in a treacherous manner." At the same time, the last opportunity was given to all waverers to leave the ranks of the I.N.A., the offer being open for one week. To further underline the campaign against treachery, a "Traitors Day" was observed, and a drama entitled "Traitor" was staged in camps in Rangoon and elsewhere.

All these warnings and threats were of no avail. Demoralisation spread like a contagion in the I.N.A. ranks. Their patriotism and bravery were no match for the onrushing armoured might of the Fourteenth Army. The I.N.A. was scattered in widely isolated pockets which did not know what was happening to one another. Even the Divisional Headquarters had no wireless links or telephone lines, or dispatch riders to keep in touch with the battalion commanders. The supply arrangement had completely broken down, and food and ammunition had become scarce. The disposition of units, and even the secret battle plans, were given away by the deserters, who now consisted of an increasing number of officers. Battalion commanders did not know whom to trust and whom to suspect. When Col.
Sahgal ordered a counter-attack on the British forces which had overrun Legyi, he learnt to his chagrin that the majority of his troops including all company commanders had simply evaporated. Some officers and men, no doubt, performed amazing acts of valour, but they could not stem the tide of defeat. At the end of April, the Indian National Army as such, had disintegrated. On May 13, Shah Nawaz Khan (by now a member of Bose’s War Cabinet) and some other staff officers were taken prisoner near Pegu.

The Burmese National Army under General Aung San revolted in the middle of March, and massacred its Japanese officers. Its relations with the I.N.A., however, remained friendly to the end, thanks to Aung San. On his part Bose refused to allow the I.N.A. to be used against the Burmese National Army. When somebody asked him to follow the example of Aung San, he wryly remarked that were he to take such a step, the Indians in Burma and Malaya would have to pay a heavy price.

Within a few weeks it became clear that in spite of their earlier assurances, the Japanese were making preparations to leave Rangoon. It was evident that they had lost the battle of Burma, and had little heart for further fight. Under the circumstances, resistance by the I.N.A. alone, it was realised, would be futile. Bose received the official intimation of Japanese withdrawal from Rangoon on April 23, but he was still in two minds about his own plans. Personally, he would have preferred to remain in Rangoon, and die fighting, but his Ministers unanimously urged him to leave the place and continue the struggle from Malaya. After all, there was the well-trained Third I.N.A. Division, and there was still the possibility of recruiting volunteers, if the Japanese could supply arms. If it came to the worst and the Japanese surrendered, Bose could go to China, with picked officers and one full regiment, and continue the fight from there—perhaps even from Russia. Bose was nothing if not an optimist, and these suggestions, however far-fetched, seemed to have appealed to him, and he reluctantly decided to leave Rangoon. (Dr. Ba Maw and his Government were also leaving the capital). Bose, however, would not move unless the detachments of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment (which were still in Rangoon) were evacuated before or with him. These brave
girls, who had left their homes at his call were his personal responsibility. He was determined to stand by them in the hour of peril.

On the eve of his departure, Bose issued messages to the Burmese people, to the Indians in Burma, and to the I.N.A.: "I do not leave Burma of my own free will. I would have preferred to stay on here and share with you the sorrow of temporary defeat. But on the pressing advice of my ministers and high-ranking officers, I have to leave Burma in order to continue the struggle for India's liberation. Being a born optimist, my unshakable faith in India's early emancipation remains unimpaired, and I appeal to you to cherish the same optimism. I have always said that the darkest hour precedes the dawn. We are now passing through the darkest hour; therefore, the dawn is not far off. India shall be free!"

About 7,000 men and officers of the I.N.A., under the command of Col. A. D. Loganadhan, remained in Rangoon to protect the life and property of Indians. How well they discharged their responsibility is evident from the fact that no cases of looting, murder or arson occurred between the Japanese evacuation and the British occupation of Rangoon. This was in sharp contrast to what had happened in May 1942, when the British had left the Burmese capital to its fate. Bose donated five lakhs of rupees to the Burmese Government, which was in urgent need of funds.

The British officially occupied Rangoon on May 4. The 300-mile trek of Bose and his party from Rangoon to Bangkok by foot, car, truck, boat and train, mostly at night in order to escape British aerial strafing, was a saga of courage, grit and sheer endurance. The trek continued for three weeks. There was always the danger of being caught by the advancing British units despite the attempts made by the Japanese forces to obstruct their approach to the Sittang-Moulmein Railway. Apart from the hazards of the journey, there was no knowing when and where the next meal would come from. The party heaved a sigh of relief when it reached a safe haven at Bangkok on May 14. It included about 300 I.N.A. men, 100 girls of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, and 100 civilians. Even in days of imminent peril, Bose put his followers' safety and comfort before his own,
though it would have been quite in order for him to resort to the quickest means of a get-away. When a colleague advised him to seek safety, he retorted: "Do you think I am Ba Maw of Burma that I will leave my men behind and run for safety?" \(^1\)

A Japanese newspaperman who was in Bose's party has recorded a shining testimony to Bose's bravery and utter selflessness. When the party came to the Sittang River, it found that all the bridges had been blown up by the retreating Japanese, and the crossing had to be done in ferries, which provided easy targets to enemy bombers. Bose crossed the river only after all his companions were safely on the other side. Thereafter, not enough transport was available. Bose put the ailing and the disabled members of the party on trucks and chose to walk the 70-mile distance from Sittang to Moulmein on foot, carrying his own pack. It took five days.

Meanwhile Germany had unconditionally surrendered in the first week of May, and Japan was expected to follow suit any day. But despair and defeat were not words to be found in Bose's dictionary. His equanimity and cheerfulness amazed his associates. He threw all his energy into the reorganisation of the Indian Independence League and the Indian National Army. Its remaining units and those of the Azad Hind Dal had to be extricated from Burma. There was also the Third I.N.A. Division in Malaya. A second line of defence could thus be built in Thailand. However, he decided to demobilise the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, and tactfully persuaded its girls to leave for their homes.

Bose left Bangkok in the second week of June 1945 for a tour of inspection of the remaining units of the I.N.A. in Malaya. Some of them were still under training. For the next two weeks he was constantly on the move. Apart from the work immediately in hand, he was now greatly exercised by the efforts of Lord Wavell, the Viceroy of India, to secure the co-operation of the Congress and Muslim League. Never in his sojourn abroad, had Bose lost touch with developments in India, and he always tried to influence events so far as he could. Despite the calamity that was closing round him, he made a series of

\(^1\) S. A. Ayer, who was in Bose's party, has written a detailed and moving account of this march. See *Unto Him a Witness*, pp. 14 to 47
broadcasts urging Indians to reject Wavell's proposals, which offered only a few seats on the Viceroy's Executive Council. "While the present is the old offer of Sir Stafford Cripps, appearing in a slightly different form, there are other obnoxious features which render the offer totally unacceptable," observed Bose. "It is only Swaraj for the Viceroy, not for the Executive Council." The Congress could never reduce itself to the position of being only one among the Indian political parties, as the offer implied, he emphasised. The subtle attempts to drive a wedge between the Hindus and the Muslims and to make the Muslim League the sole spokesman of the latter must be repudiated. There was no difference between a patriotic Muslim and a patriotic Hindu, as he had proved in East Asia. Bose was at ease only when he learnt that the Simla Conference had ended in smoke. It was to be his last pronouncement on Indian affairs.

While Bose was busy making these broadcasts as also in formulating his future plans, the Indian Independence League observed the second "Netaji Week" from July 4 to 11. It was amazing that enthusiasm for such a celebration could still be evoked. Mammoth meetings and processions were organised, and funds collected. One of the main items of the Week was the laying of the foundation stone of a memorial to the martyrs of the Indian National Army at Connaught Drive, on the waterfront of Singapore. A huge gathering was present to witness the ceremony and listen to Bose's address. The monument was built in record time — only to be blown up by the British as soon as they landed in Singapore. A greater dishonour of the war dead could hardly be imagined.

Bose was at Seramban when on August 10, 1945, the news of Russia's declaration of war on Japan was relayed to him from Singapore immediately followed by the report of Japan's surrender. S. A. Ayer, his Propaganda Minister, who was present on the occasion, describes the scene in these words: "I said to myself: 'So this is the crash . . . the terrible crash of everything that this great man has built up in the last twenty-four months. Is it the end of everything? Is it the end of all his dreams? Is it the end of all his work — all his efforts — of everything that he has lived for? Is it going to be a staggering blow to him?
How is he going to take it? It is complete, utter pitch darkness. My soul was in anguish. My head was in a swirl, and I thought that hours had passed. Netaji heard the news and after one characteristic 'Um', he was deep in thought for a fleeting second. The next second he was absolutely his normal self. He first broke into a smile, and almost his first words were: 'So that is that. Now what next?' It was the soldier speaking. He was already thinking of the next move, and the next battle. He was not going to be beaten. Japan's surrender was not India's surrender. It was not the surrender of the liberation forces fighting for India's freedom. He would not admit defeat. The I.N.A. would not admit defeat. With a mischievous twinkle in his eyes he said: 'Well, don't you see we are the only people who have not surrendered?' and he joined in the laughter that followed.'

Consultations with his Ministers continued till the early hours of the morning, when Bose, looking as unruffled and fresh as ever, left for Singapore. Followed four days of high-level conferences and non-stop discussions. Although there was still no official confirmation of Japan's surrender, he could lose no time in taking decisions and issuing last-minute instructions to the League branches and I.N.A. camps in Singapore, Malaya and throughout East Asia. He did not forget even the Tokyo Boys. That his aplomb in the face of overwhelming disaster was infectious became evident when a drama on the Rani of Jhansi was staged by the girls of the Regiment named after her. Despite a racking tooth-ache Bose attended the play. As he entered the theatre, three thousand officers and men present there rose and spontaneously joined in the singing of the national anthem.

- Subh sukh chain ki barkha barse Bharat bhag hai jaga.

Symbolically, it served as the final scene of the heroic drama which Bose himself had staged over the previous two years. Subh sukh chain—It was the last time the refrain lingered in his ears.

A radio broadcast from Tokyo announced Japan's surrender in the afternoon of August 15. Bose could no longer remain in Singapore. But where should he go—to Thailand, Indo-China, Japan, Manchuria or Russia? The consensus was: out of

1 Unto Him A Witness, pp. 51-52
Malaya definitely, to some Russian territory certainly, to Moscow if possible. It was to be his final adventure into the unknown.

On the eve of his departure from Singapore, Bose issued his last Order of the Day as Supreme Commander of the I.N.A.:

“Comrades — In our struggle for the independence of our motherland, we have now been overwhelmed by an undreamt of crisis. You may perhaps feel that you have failed in your mission to liberate India. But let me tell you that this failure is only of a temporary nature. No set-back and no defeat can undo your positive achievements of the past. Many of you have participated in the fight along the Indo-Burma frontier, and inside India, and have gone through hardship and suffering of every sort. Many of you comrades have laid down lives in the battle-field, and have become the immortal heroes of Azad Hind.

“Comrades, in this dark hour I call upon you to conduct yourselves with the discipline, dignity and strength, befitting a truly revolutionary army. You have already given proofs of your valour and self-sacrifice on the field of battle. It is now your duty to demonstrate your undying optimism and unshakable will-power in the hour of temporary defeat. Knowing you as I do, I have not the slightest doubt that even in this dire adversity you will hold your heads erect, and face the future with unending hope and confidence.

“Comrades, I feel that in this critical hour, thirty-eight crores of our countrymen at home are looking at us, the members of India’s Army of Liberation. Therefore, remain true to India and do not, for a moment, waver in your faith in India’s destiny. The roads to Delhi are many, and Delhi still remains our goal. The sacrifices of your immortal comrades and of yourselves will certainly achieve their fulfilment. There is no power on earth that can keep India enslaved. India shall be free and before long.”

Bose left Singapore in a plane bound for Saigon on August 16. With him were Colonels Habibur Rahman, Pritham Singh and Gulzara Singh, Major Abid Hassan and Messrs. S. A. Ayer and Debnath Das. Major-General Kiani was asked to remain behind in charge of the I.N.A. in Singapore. At Saigon, the Japanese officers accompanying Bose were asked to go to the Dalat head-
quarters of Field Marshal Terauchi to inquire what aeroplane facilities could be made available to Bose for his further journey. Within a few hours, they returned to inform him that a plane was waiting to take off immediately for an unknown destination, and that there was only one seat available in it. Bose refused to leave alone and without knowing the place to which the plane was heading. The Japanese officers left to make further inquiries but only to rush back with General Isoda himself. After meeting him, Bose held hurried talks with his aides, the issue being whether Bose should leave alone or allow himself to be trapped in Saigon. With great difficulty, Terauchi was later prevailed upon to make one more seat available, though he still refused to divulge the destination, which (it was gathered in a round-about manner) was probably Manchuria. Bose asked Colonel Habibur Rahman to accompany him. The others were told to follow as quickly as they could. The party was soon at the airport, and as Bose climbed into the plane, he said to Ayer: "Well, Jai Hind! I will meet you later." At 5-15 p.m. on August 17, 1945, the plane took off...

Somehow, Bose's followers, who were left behind, had an ominous foreboding. Three days later, when Ayer found a seat on a Japanese bomber bound for Tokyo, his worst fears were confirmed. At the stop-over in Canton he was given the story by a Japanese colonel: "As you know, Netaji left Saigon on the afternoon of August 17. His plane reached Touraine (Indo-China) the same evening. The party rested there for the night, took off the next morning (18th), and landed at Taihoku (Formosa) in the afternoon. After a very brief halt, the plane took off again, but a few minutes later it crashed on the outskirts of the aerodrome. Both Netaji and Habib were injured—the former very seriously. General Shidei was killed on the spot. Netaji and Col. Habib were immediately taken to hospital. Our medical officers did their best but, in spite of all that, Bose..."

The sentence was left incomplete. The colonel was unable to articulate the final, fatal word. It was an inability which somehow was to impart itself to and possess a large number of Indians. They still refuse to believe that Bose died that day.

For the time being, Ayer himself thought so, and told the colonel as much: "No Indian in India or East Asia is going to
believe your story of Netaji's plane crash." But Ayer's doubts—and lingering hopes—were dissipated when he met Habibur Rahman, three weeks later in Tokyo, and heard the details of the air crash and of Bose's death first-hand. According to Habib, Bose's clothes had caught fire as he somehow scrambled out through the nose of the crashed plane. While doing so he received extensive burns on the body and collapsed soon after he got down. Within fifteen minutes both Bose and Habib were rushed to a hospital in Taihoku city. Bose lost consciousness on reaching it. He revived a little later, but felt that he was not likely to survive. A few minutes before his death, which occurred at 9 p.m. (August 19), Bose said: "Habib, my end is coming very soon. I have fought all my life for my country's freedom. I am dying for my country's freedom. Go and tell my countrymen to continue the fight for India's freedom. India will be free, and before long."

These were his last words.
CHAPTER 27

FAILURE—AND ACHIEVEMENT

WITH BOSE'S death, the curtain finally dropped on the Provisional Government of Free India and the Indian National Army. The saga had ended on a note of unrelieved tragedy. Whatever Bose had hoped for and attempted to do since his escape from India, four and a half years earlier, had ended in failure. It was obvious and complete. Italy was the first to collapse and surrender. Germany was in ruins. Japan was reeling under the deadly impact of the atom bomb. Members of the Provisional Government and the I.N.A. had no alternative to capitulation and a forced evacuation to India, which they had failed to liberate. Gloom and darkness surrounded them on all sides.

What were the causes of the failure that had overtaken Bose and the organisations which he had established? Some of them, of course, were obvious. With Japan's defeat, the very foundation on which the Provisional Government and the I.N.A. had built their edifice, had crumbled. Even if Bose had survived the crash and reached Manchuria, he would have discovered that he had lost his fighting potential for good, whatever his more ardent followers might have believed. With victorious Allied armies striding all over the world, Bose would have found it impossible to raise his flag again or to mobilise an army. It was the end!

This does not mean, however, that one should write off Bose as a failure, or his Provisional Government or the I.N.A. as meaningless and wasted efforts. Far from it. Indeed, "it would seem that the I.N.A.'s failure was a necessary part of the enshrinining of Bose as a national hero". By his struggle for freedom in the face of overwhelming odds, he has inscribed his name in

1 Leadership and Political Institutions in India, p. 85
shining letters in the scrolls of Indian history. He has taken his place with Rana Pratap and Shivaji as a national figure in the heroic tradition. Rana Pratap failed, and even Shivaji achieved only a limited success. Yet their names serve as an inspiration to their countrymen. So will Bose's to this generation and the succeeding ones.

Before trying to assess and analyse Bose's failures and achievements, we should have a clear grasp of his main objective. Simply stated and, irrespective of the means he adopted at any given time, it was the freedom of India which was a burning passion with him. His association with the Axis powers, his founding first of the Free India Centre in Berlin and later of the Provisional Government of Free India in Singapore were only a means to an end. So was the Indian National Army. The means proved inadequate to achieve his ends immediately. But in the wider and longer context their delayed-action effect was clearly perceptible in the dawn of freedom on August 15, 1947.

The causes of the military failure of the I.N.A. are manifold and manifest. First of all, one must plainly understand that, all said and done, the I.N.A. was playing a subsidiary role to the Japanese Army. Its fighting capacity, disposition and fate were tied to the Japanese war machine. It could not have been raised at all without Japanese agreement and help. It was entirely dependent for its arms and equipment on Japan. It had necessarily to follow the directions of the Imperial Nipponese Army. Its overall strength was but a fraction of that of the Japanese armies in South-east Asia, and on the fronts, it was supplementary to the main Japanese forces. This should not be taken to imply that the I.N.A. was a Japanese puppet, or that it had no independent existence, or that it did not give a good account of itself in the war. It did so in abundant measure and in numerous battles.

From the very beginning, Bose was firm and insistent that the I.N.A. must have an identity of its own, that it must be engaged as a separate unit and that it should be the first to shed its blood on the soil of India, and play the main role in the liberation of India. The I.N.A. was an ally, not a jackal of the Japanese lion. It must remain true to its emblem — the Springing Tiger.
Bose never compromised on these points, and when he could not make the Japanese commanders in Malaya or Burma agree with him, he took up the issues directly with the Imperial Army Headquarters in Tokyo, and usually he had his way. He had no qualms about the morality or propriety of seeking help from Japan. Did not Garibaldi take help from the enemies of Austria to liberate Italy? Did not Sun Yat-Sen take help from Japan to destroy the Imperial Chinese dynasty? Did not Washington accept French help in the American War of Independence? Did not de Valera accept American aid? The last two, it should be remembered, had fought against the British, and so had Bose. It was as simple as that! His handicap was that he did not get as much help from Japan as he needed, and where it was needed.

The shortcomings of the I.N.A. as a fighting machine have been referred to earlier. They became more and more pronounced as the tempo of the war increased, and the communication and supply lines broke down with the onset of the monsoon. Let alone arms, ammunition and air-cover, the I.N.A. had often to go without food, while medical facilities were non-existent. The Japanese army also later suffered similar privations and hardships. The question why the I.N.A. failed therefore logically resolves itself in the larger question of why Japan failed in the war. A whole literature has grown up on the defeat of Japan and its Axis associates, and one who is even remotely conversant with it will not be the least surprised by the failure of the I.N.A.

The strategy the Japanese devised for the Indian campaign, was itself faulty. In fact, they never recovered from their initial failure to pursue the British to India, after they had reached its borders in their swoop in 1942. A short breather might have been in order, but to tarry for nearly eighteen months until the beginning of 1944 to launch their offensive in India, was improvident, and it proved disastrous. The upheaval caused in India by the Quit India movement had, by then, subsided while the British had got their second wind. It may be that the Japanese believed that their lines of communication were already over-extended and probably they had little interest in the liberation of India as such, or even in bringing it within their
'co-prosperity' sphere, until Bose arrived on the Asian scene in July 1943. A moment's reflection should have shown them, however, that their hold over Burma or Malaya could never be secure so long as the British could count on the vast resources and man-power of India.

In 1942, both the might and morale of the British in India were at the lowest ebb, and they had virtually resigned themselves to withdraw from Assam and West Bengal. As early as April 15, Churchill wrote to President Roosevelt: "The consequences of this Japanese naval action may easily be (a) the loss of Ceylon (2) invasion of Eastern India, with incalculable internal consequences to our whole war plan, including the loss of Calcutta."1 Once the Japanese failed to take the tide at its peak, the opportunity was never to recur.

Even after the Imphal campaign began, it was not pressed in the manner which had earlier paid such handsome dividends to the Japanese Army. On the contrary, General Mutaguchi adopted a dilatory policy in the siege of Imphal. His strategy of encirclement involved far too wide and hilly an area, and his blunder of cutting the enemy's line of withdrawal proved too costly. Once Kohima and Bishanpur were occupied, and the Japanese straddled the Imphal-Dimapur road in the north, the British had no other alternative but to fight it out, as only they knew how when pressed against the wall. General Mutaguchi was so confident of netting the big fish in the Imphal lake—that it was too late by the time he discovered that it was not a fish but a crocodile! About this time, moreover, the Americans had begun to exert their full pressure in the Pacific, and the Japanese found it increasingly difficult to wage the war on all their far-flung fronts. Priorities had to be allocated with the Pacific naturally becoming the main theatre of war. The other fronts—including Burma—had necessarily to run short of supplies, arms, and especially air power.

The Japanese time-table had gone wrong. So had Bose's. At the time he reached Germany in April 1941, there was a reasonable chance of England's difficulty proving India's opportunity. It is not clear if he had then the intention of declaring even a token war against Britain. If he had, the odds at that moment

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1 See The Second World War IV, pp. 159-61
were far less unequal than they proved to be in October 1943. Until June 1941, Britain was facing the Nazi might single-handed. Hitler had not invaded Russia, nor had Japan jumped into the fray. It was more likely that Bose had the modest plan of representing India at the Peace Conference which, he thought, Hitler would hold after victory, just as Ho Chi-Minh had done at the Versailles Conference after the First World War. (Hitler, it was known, was extremely anxious to sign a truce with Britain, so as to free his hands for his projected invasion of Russia.) Bose hoped that his presence would be helpful in influencing the Nazi victors in favour of Indian independence.

In the last seven months of 1941, however, the Second World War underwent a radical transformation, with the unlikely alliance between Britain, the U.S.A. and Soviet Russia, ranged on a global front against the three Axis powers. By the end of 1942, the lineaments of the future course of war were becoming fairly clear. The Nazis were fought to a standstill before Stalingrad, and it was only a question of weeks before the Russians would launch their counter-offensive. Japan had obviously bitten more than it could chew, however frantically it tried.

In India, Gandhi had launched his Quit India campaign on August 8, 1942, and the whole country had become a seething mass of unrest. By the end of the year, 940 people had been killed and 1630 wounded in police and military firing, and over 60,000 arrested. In retrospect, this was the golden time for Bose to go to South-east Asia and to launch his parallel armed struggle against the British. He always considered Gandhi’s and his own struggles to be complementary, and both together would probably have proved more than a match for Britain. Broadcasting on July 12, 1944, Bose said: “The only other alternative plan to mine is that of Mahatma Gandhi embodied in the Quit India resolution. If that plan succeeds, our plan and our activities will be set at naught. On the other hand, if Mahatma Gandhi’s plan fails—as it has failed—then all hopes of Indian independence rest entirely on the fulfilment of our plan.”

But Bose could not leave Germany for six months more, and it was only in July 1943 that he assumed the command of the Indian Independence League and the Indian National Army in Singapore. Another four months had to pass before war was
formally declared, and six more months before the battle was joined in Arakan and Imphal.

By then it was too late, as Bose must have known in his heart of hearts. The entire picture of the war had changed. The British had absorbed the shock of defeat in Malaya and Burma, and brought the situation in India under control. Montgomery had driven Rommel's forces out of North Africa. Mussolini's dictatorship over Italy had been toppled in July, and Sicily was occupied by the Allies the next month. The Russian counter-offensive had swept the Nazi legions back, regained the entire Caucasus, and bottled up the German forces in Crimea. American progress on the Pacific front was slower, but the U.S. forces had wrested the initiative from Japan, and it was not going to be long before America brought its overwhelming power to bear on Japan.

Such was the war situation in December 1942. Its significance would not have been lost on any student of war, least of all, Bose. In a few months the Allies would gain a decisive victory over the Axis. Why then should Bose have taken the plunge at such a critical moment when all prospects of his success were virtually pre-empted? Was it because he was an activist, a karmayogi, a fatalist for whom only the effort mattered, not the fruit thereof? Probably he thought it was Now or Never! And once he had made the decision, he never vacillated or wavered or looked back. He never lost his confidence or his faith. He devoted all his charismatic powers and all his flair for organisation to one cause—the prosecution of war. Success or failure in war did not really matter provided his ultimate objective was gained or, at least, brought nearer by his sacrifices. 'India shall be free and before long!' was his refrain and the parting message to his followers. India, was free before long—to wit, within two years. What more did he ask for? What else did he care for?

The I.N.A., as we have seen earlier, made a heartening debut with the capture of a detachment of the British Indian Army on the Arakan front. It also distinguished itself in action on other fronts, and earned the unstinted admiration of its Japanese comrades. Bose always urged the I.N.A. not to spare itself in the war. He had even formed 'suicide squads' on the lines of
the Japanese Kamikaze. But somehow, he had come to believe that propaganda would play as great a part in the war as actual fighting. He believed that the Indian Army units were too demoralised to fight. Faced with the patriotic presence of the I.N.A., they would simply walk over to its side, and then the British defence would crumble like the walls of Jericho. On January 17, 1944, he said in a Press interview: “The situation in Burma is not favourable for the British because a great majority of the Indian troops in the British Army are unwilling to fight for them. Indian troops of the British Army will not fight against the Indian National Army because they know that it is fighting to liberate the motherland. They will, I feel strongly, join the I.N.A. when they come in contact with it.” The I.N.A. men, too, shared this impression in the beginning, but they were speedily disillusioned.

The Japanese also lay great store by such propaganda, and each Japanese Division had an I.N.A. propaganda and espionage unit attached to it. But more often than not these units were left behind for lack of transport. Even propaganda literature printed, packed and kept ready in Rangoon was unaccountably not lifted for use in time. On the other hand, British propaganda in India, Burma, and on the fronts, was more thorough and effective. While it insulated civilians in India from any knowledge of the I.N.A. knocking on its frontiers, it sowed seeds of doubt and distrust in the I.N.A. A reference has already been made to the “safe conduct” passes liberally dropped on the I.N.A. lines. The boot was soon to be on the other leg, as Bose gradually found to his chagrin.

That despite all such shortcomings and handicaps, the I.N.A. could force its way into India and occupy and administer some 200 square miles of the motherland for weeks, under the flag of the Provisional Government was a feather in its cap. That it could penetrate no further and had to fall back with the main body of the Japanese Army, once the rains set in prematurely, was no discredit to it at all. It was a token, fleeting success—but success all the same, in the face of staggering odds. It was an earnest of what Bose would have accomplished had the I.N.A. been more favourably situated, and better supported by the Japanese. Major-General Shah Nawaz, who was actively
associated with the Imphal campaign, had very bitter things to say about the Japanese attitude. "With a clear conscience I can say," he wrote, "that the Japanese did not give full aid and assistance to the Azad Hind Fouj during their assault on Imphal. In fact, I am right in saying that they let us down badly, and had it not been for their betrayal of the I.N.A., the history of the Imphal campaign might have been a different one. My own impression is that the Japanese did not trust the I.N.A. They had found out through their liaison officers that the I.N.A. would not accept Japanese domination in any way, and that they would fight the Japanese in case they attempted to replace the British. The Japanese were frightened of making the I.N.A. too powerful."

Be that as it may, we cannot get away from the fact that the I.N.A. suffered a crushing defeat on the Imphal and other fronts. But even in its defeat, and the subsequent trial of its officers in the Red Fort, the I.N.A. was "a symbol of India fighting for independence", as Nehru said. "All minor issues faded away... The trial dramatised the old contest: England versus India. It became in reality not merely a question of law or forensic eloquence... but rather a trial of strength between the will of the Indian people, and the will of those who hold power in India." No conquering heroes were hailed with more heartfelt homage than the officers and men of the vanquished I.N.A., when they were brought back to India in the months following their surrender. No less a person than Mahatma Gandhi joined in paying tributes to them. The I.N.A. brought a new upsurge of nationalistic fervour throughout the country. More important, the fervour spread to the Indian Army.

The names of Shah Nawaz, Sahgal and Dhillon, who were the first to be put on trial, became household words in India. And so was the name of Capt. Lakshmi, commander of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. The proceedings of the trial were reported in extenso in all newspapers, and avidly read everywhere. Brochures, pamphlets and booklets, describing the exploits of the I.N.A. and its Netaji, issued forth in a copious flow. Overnight, Jai Hind became the national salutation, Nehru himself

1 My Memoirs of the INA and its Netaji. p. 161
2 Foreword: Two Historic Trials in Red Fort
adopting it enthusiastically. And what of Bose, whose ghost (in the words of Michael Edwardes) "like Hamlet's father, walked the battlements of the Red Fort, and whose amplified figure over-awed the conferences that were to lead to independence". Bose became the man of the hour, nay, of the year. He was more powerful in death than in life. If, by some miracle, he had been resuscitated and restored to India, he would have carried everything before him like Napoleon after his return from Elba. There is no doubt at all about it, at least in this writer's mind.

Field Marshal Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, was quick to detect the new temper of the Army. His commutation of the death and other sentences, passed by the Military Tribunal on the three I.N.A. officers found guilty on the charge of waging war on the King Emperor, was prompted more by considerations of prudence than of clemency.

"Having considered all the evidence, and appreciated to the best of my ability the general trend of Indian public opinion, and of the feeling in the Indian Army," Auchinleck wrote in a Minute, "I have no doubt at all that to have confirmed the imprisonment solely on the charge of 'waging war against the king', would have probably precipitated a violent outbreak throughout the country, and created active and widespread disaffection in the Army, especially amongst the Indian officers and the more highly educated rank and file. To have taken this risk would have been seriously to jeopardise our object.""2

A significant incident occurred when a group of soldiers from a nearby military camp called on Gandhiji, while he was staying at the nature cure clinic at Uruli Kanchan, near Poona. "We are soldiers, but we are soldiers of Indian freedom", they said to Gandhi. "I am glad to hear that," replied Gandhiji, "so far you have been instrumental in the suppression of Indian freedom. Have you heard of Jallianwala Bagh?" "Oh yes, but those days are gone. We were, in those days, like the proverbial frog in the well. We have now seen the world, our eyes are opened." "We admit we are mercenaries, as you once put it," interpolated another. "But our hearts are no longer so."

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1 The Last Days of British Rule
2 J. Connell, Auchinleck, p. 950
“I am glad to hear that,” said Gandhiji. “But let me tell you that my use of that word was not meant to cast any reflection upon you. It was only descriptive of a soldiery that serves a foreign government for a living.” “There was a time,” remarked one of them, “when we were not allowed to read any civil newspaper. And now we go and tell our officers that we are going to see our greatest leader, and nobody stops us.” “I know,” replied Gandhiji, “there is a new ferment and a new awakening among all the ranks today. Not a little of this credit for this change is due to Netaji Bose. I disapprove of his method, but he had rendered a signal service to India by giving the Indian soldiers a new vision and a new ideal.”

After some more conversation, as the soldiers took leave of Gandhiji, they asked “May we shout slogans?” “Well, you may,” replied Gandhiji and they all but brought down the rafters of Gandhiji’s little room by their repeated shouts of Jai Hind, Netaji-ki Jai! It was not Gandhiji-ki Jai! but Netaji-ki Jai! in the presence of the Mahatma, and that too from soldiers who were sent by their masters to fight against Netaji’s I.N.A. barely a year earlier.

As it was, Japan was within an ace of success at Imphal. The fate of the battle there hung in the balance for several weeks. It was touch and go on many occasions. The I.N.A. and the Japanese Army came very near to capturing it, being barely two miles from the bowl of Imphal at one stage. The British garrison wanted to evacuate it more than once and retreat to Dimapur, but there was a steel ring around it drawn by the enemy. Had the road to Kohima been open, the British would almost certainly have pulled out from Imphal. The original Japanese intention was to capture all the British forces and war material (Mutaguchi’s “big fish”). It was sheer bad luck that denied them the prize. Bose, especially, was very keen on bagging this prize. Knowing that the I.N.A. was not powerful enough to undertake a full-scale invasion of India and, at the same time, to forestall a possible Japanese betrayal, he was most anxious that Imphal should be captured intact, so that the Indian Divisions there, totalling more than a lakh of officers and men, could be persuaded to join the I.N.A. Perhaps even more than this, he hoped to make good all the deficiencies
of the I.N.A. in artillery and other war material with the captured booty.

General Slim benefited not only by the stupid lapses on the part of Generals Mutaguchi and Sato, but also by the unseasonal arrival of General Monsoon. It was the premature and torrential rains which hindered the Japanese and the I.N.A. from mounting a decisive offensive. While their movements were bogged in mud, the British had only to stay put behind their “box defences” in Imphal. They were safe also from the attentions of the Japanese air force, the bulk of which was transferred to the Pacific. Its absence enabled them to bring a whole division by air to strengthen their defence of Imphal.

Imphal thus marked a fateful turning point for Bose. Both for him and the I.N.A., the reverses were decisive and final. Bose knew that his most audacious gamble had failed. From then on it could be only the ebb-tide in his fortunes. All his ambitious plans hinged on the capture of Imphal. Even a hard-headed lawyer like Bhulabhai Desai was convinced after closely studying the documents presented by the prosecution, and examining a number of witnesses at the I.N.A. trial in 1945, that “had Bose only been able to take Imphal, the bulk of the Indian Army in India would have deserted the British and flocked to swell the ranks of the Indian National Army.”

Had Imphal fallen, it would have been the story of the fall of Singapore in 1941 all over again. Assam lay undefended and nothing would have prevented the victors from pouring into the plains of Bengal, where the people would have rallied round Bose to a man. And did he not expect Gandhi’s telegram of congratulations in Calcutta? From Calcutta, Delhi was not a far cry. Chalo Delhi! was not altogether an opium-eater’s fantasy as many have dismissed it.

But the hard fact was that Imphal did not fall and that the Japanese and the I.N.A. suffered a disastrous defeat there. But even in its defeat, and the subsequent trial of its officers in Delhi’s Red Fort, the I.N.A. became “a symbol of India fighting for independence”, as Nehru put it. Again, it was the I.N.A. which indirectly sparked the revolts in the Royal Indian Air Force and the Royal Indian Navy. The latter was a most daring

1 D. K. Roy: *Netaji the Man*, p. 200
feat, since the R.I.N. raised the flag of revolt in Bombay, Karachi and Calcutta, right under the nose of the British. It must have reminded them of the rising of the Potemkin in Russia in 1905 and of German sailors at the naval base of Kiel in 1918.

There is a consensus of opinion among Indian and foreign observers that the end of British rule in India was brought appreciably nearer by the aftermath of the I.N.A. The British Prime Minister, Clement Atlee, alluded on March 15, 1946, "to the spread of the national idea, not least perhaps among some of those soldiers, who have done such wonderful service in the war", as being responsible for his subsequent decision to quit India on August 15, 1947.

Surely this was an achievement for which Bose deserves equal credit with Gandhi. As Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan observed: "Future generations would read the amazing story of his life with pride and reverence, and salute him as one of the great heroes who heralded India's dawn."¹

¹ Netaji, Edited by Shri Ram Sharma, p. IV
CHAPTER 28

WAS BOSE A FASCIST?

It was widely suspected before Bose escaped to Germany in 1941 that he had fascist leanings. Afterwards, they were taken for granted. Abroad, he was usually referred to as a fascist, owing to his association with the Axis powers during the war years. His international image is thus sullied. Even in India, his admirers adopted an apologetic air, while trying to refute the allegation. It is only in the last few years that attempts have been made to clear Bose of the charge of fascism, and to present his ideology in the right perspective. In the foregoing pages, Bose's reference to fascism and his dealings with Germany and Japan have been analysed in the proper context. It may be admitted that Bose was not always careful in the expression of his views, and that in the early years of his career, he did not seem to have a clear grasp of what fascism (or Nazism) stood for. He was a worshipper of Shakti (power) and he seemed to have entertained an admiration for Hitler, Mussolini and Kemal Ataturk as strong men, regardless of the ideologies they professed. He was not alone in this, and even Winston Churchill, who later waged an unrelenting war against the first two, had hailed their emergence.

As we have already noted, in January 1938, Bose candidly confessed to R. Palme Dutt that his reference in The Indian Struggle to "a synthesis between communism and fascism" as a desirable policy for India, was not a happy one, and that his political ideas had developed further since he wrote his book three years earlier. He expressed these ideas at some length in his address to the Haripura session of the Indian National Congress (1938), which may be taken as an authoritative exposition of his views. Nowhere in that address has he put forth any plea for fascism or communism or for a synthesis of these two. The

285
gravamen, of his speech is, as usual, the intensification of the struggle against the British Government by all possible means. If there was a reference at all to any "ism" in his address, it was to socialism. He welcomed the formation of the Congress Socialist Party, with whose general principles and policy he was in agreement. "In the first place," he said, "it is desirable for the Leftist elements to be consolidated into one party. Secondly, a Leftist bloc can have a raison d'être only if it is socialist in character." Bose's second address as Congress President to the Tripuri session (March 1939) was brief, due to his illness. In it he laid stress only on giving an ultimatum to the British Government in view of the war which, he felt sure, would erupt within six months. Bose, however, did not inveigh against fascism, in season and out of season, as some others obsessed with international developments did.

When he formed the Forward Bloc, he amplified his ideas on Leftism and socialism in his presidential address to the All-India Anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh on March 19, 1940. He said: "The present age is the anti-imperialist phase of our movement. Our main task in this age is to end imperialism and win national independence for the Indian people. When freedom comes, the age of national reconstruction will commence, and that will be the socialist phase of our movement. In the present phase, Leftists will be those who will wage an uncompromising fight with imperialism. Those who waver and vacillate in their struggle against imperialism — those who tend towards a compromise with it — cannot, by any means, be Leftists. In the next phase of our movement Leftism will be synonymous with socialism, but in the present phase the words 'Leftists' and 'anti-imperialists' should be interchangeable." Even the ten-point programme of the Samyavadi Sangh (which Bose wanted to found for a long time, but which he never actually did), was based neither on fascism nor communism, despite its somewhat authoritarian overtones. Nor had the programme of the Forward Bloc (which Bose founded in 1940) anything in common with fascism or communism. On the other hand, its stress on the abolition of vested interests implies a strong dose of socialism.

The last considered pronouncement of Bose in India was as
president of the second session of the All-India Forward Bloc at Nagpur in June 1940. After emphasising the militant character of the Forward Bloc, he visualised an important role for it in the post-struggle phase: “It will have to preserve liberty after winning it, and it will have to build up a new India and a happy India on the basis of the eternal principles of Liberty, Democracy and Socialism.” Bose’s commitment to socialism, therefore, cannot be questioned. But what exactly did he mean by socialism? His socialism, like that of Gandhi, was neither bookish nor borrowed. According to him, the ideas of socialism have their origin in our own thought and culture. They were not a novelty in this country. We regard them as such only because we had lost the thread of our history. Bose considered that the gospel of Vivekananda was nothing but socialism. It needed only to be adapted to the circumstances, at any given time.

These ideas were first expressed in 1929, and thereafter Bose probably never cared to engage himself in any scientific study of socialism or, for that matter, any other “ism”. Having been a student of philosophy, he was more at home with Kant and Hegel than with Marx and Engels. He was attracted towards the Hegelian Dialectic rather than the Marxist Canon. He often referred in his speeches and writings to the Hegelian Dialectic, which he thought was the nearest approximation to truth. Bergson’s theory of creative evolution also appealed to Bose: Evolution implies a new creation at every age which cannot be calculated in advance by the human intellect. Bose’s frequent references to Bergson’s *elan vital* may have been actuated by his own changing views and programmes.

The fact is that Bose was a pragmatist and activist who was not afraid of the hobgoblin of consistency. His ‘native hue of resolution’ was never ‘sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought’. He rarely indulged in ideological hair-splitting, in which many of our intellectuals wallow. In his young days he was influenced by the doctrine of renunciation. In later life Lord Krishna’s advice to Arjun on the battle-field of Kurukshetra provided an all-inclusive code of conduct for him. No wonder alien ideologies could not strike roots in such spiritual ground.

As against ideologies, men of action had a strong fascination
for Bose. Lenin, who at a critical moment of history gave the slogan “All power to the Soviets” and thus laid the foundation of modern Russia; Kemal Ataturk, ‘great as a general, great as a diplomat and great as a builder’, and, in his earlier years, Hitler, too, who had raised Germany from the ashes of the First World War—all appealed to him. His taste in heroes was eclectic and disregarded ideology. After all, his first hero was Swami Vivekananda, who entered his life when he was barely fifteen, and ushered within him a spiritual revolution ‘which turned everything upside down’. Vivekananda was more than a hero: He was a guru to Bose.

To associate such a man with the crudities, vulgarities and cruelties of fascism is to do violence to common sense. During the fevered days of the war, it was the fashion to damn one’s opponent as a fascist, a Quisling, a Nazi stooge, a Japanese puppet and what not. Indian communists were true to type in heaping such abuses on Bose’s head. Even a man like M. N. Roy, who should have known better, joined this chorus in the palmy days of the National War Front. Roy went to the length of condemning even the Quit India movement as ‘the first outburst of Indian fascism’.\(^1\) Now, however, when the worst term of abuse in the Marxist lexicon is not ‘fascist’ but ‘revisionist’, we should be able to take a more balanced and level-headed view of Bose. Whatever he was, Bose was NOT a fascist. Basically, and simply, he was a revolutionary, tracing his lineage to those who waged the first war of independence in 1857. More proximately, Bose drew inspiration from revolutionaries like Veer Savarkar, Lala Haradayal, Raja Mahendra Pratap, Maulvi Barkatulla and Maulvi Obeidullah (the last three men had formed the first Provisional Free India Government in Kabul during the 1914-1918 war) and Rash Behari, who personally handed over the torch of revolt to him in 1948.

Bose’s creed as a revolutionary was simple: to wage war against British imperialism by every means on every front, till freedom was won. “By revolutionary, I mean a person who stands for the complete independence of his country, and who is not prepared to compromise over the question of indepen-

\(^1\) *I.N.A. and The August Revolution*, p. 70
dence", Bose declared in a broadcast on June 27, 1943. "Furthermore, a revolutionary believes that the cause for which he is fighting is a just one, and that cause, therefore, is bound to triumph in the long run. A revolutionary can never get disheartened or depressed over any failure or set-back, for his motto is 'Hope for the best but be prepared for the worst'. As revolutionaries fighting for the freedom of India, our faith in our final victory is unshakable just as our determination to fight under all possible circumstances is unflinching. It is with this invincible spirit that we face the British, and look forward to the future. For us, as revolutionaries, the independence of India is a settled fact. There is no power on earth that can stand between us and our goal of freedom."¹

Imperialism and fascism were two sides of the same coin, with the difference that the former was far more strongly entrenched than the latter. India was under the heel of British imperialism for over a century. Before one started breaking lances against German Nazism or Italian fascism or Japanese expansionism, one had to extricate oneself from it. This may sound an oversimplification, but such was the dominating passion of generations of Indian nationalists. To go no further back than Tilak, he too, was an apostle of the doctrine of Britain's difficulty being India's opportunity although the Lokmanya utilised the opportunity of the First World War in a different manner.

Against this background, and on this premise, no surprise need be caused if Bose joined the Axis powers. One should rather say no surprise need be caused if Bose tried to exploit the Axis powers as a means for his own ends of terminating British rule over India. Ethically, Bose's tactics were no more objectionable than Stalin's pact with Hitler in August 1939, which lighted the fuse for the Second World War.

Bose's action was on a par with that of Winston Churchill, who pledged his all-out help to Stalin on June 21, 1941. To recall his historic words: "No one has been a more consistent opponent of communism than I have been, for the last 25 years. I will unsay no word that I have spoken. But all that fades away before the spectacle that is now unfolding. Any man or

¹ Arun: Testament of Subhas Bose, p. 130
state who fights against Nazism will have our aid. Any man or state which marches with Hitler is our foe."

Bose, too, could well have said in almost identical words: "No one has been a more consistent opponent of Japan than I have been for the last 25 years. I will unsay no word that I have spoken. But all that fades away before the spectacle that is now unfolding. Any man or state who fights against British imperialism can offer us his aid. Any man or state which marches with the British is our foe."

If Stalin's war-time alliance with Hitler did not imply his acceptance of the fascist ideology, by what strange logic may we impute to Bose fascist guilt merely because of his war-time association? Why was his collaboration with Japan so "immoral" as to stink in the nostrils of self-styled democrats abroad and, even more so, in India? Granted Japan was using Bose, but so was Bose using Japan, even though it might have looked like the tail wagging the dog. If the Provisional Government of Free India, set up by Bose in Singapore, was a put up affair, it was no more so than the busload of emigre governments shepherded by Churchill in London. If Churchill found his ally de Gaulle a more difficult cross to bear than his declared enemies, so did General Tojo and his successor, Koiso, find Bose. He was no more their puppet than de Gaulle was, Churchill's puppet. His conscience was as clear as that of the French leader, and his motives as honourable.

For nearly two years in Europe, and for a slightly longer period in South-east Asia, Bose carried his head high. He neither fawned nor cringed. He moved as among equals, and he accepted aid only on his own terms. "For months," writes N. G. Ganpuley who was an eye-witness, "certain Nazi officials went on insisting on terms which were impossible for a nationalist and patriot like Subhas to accept. Rather disgusted with them he told his Nazi partners: 'For the sake of my country I have risked my neck to come to Germany. For the same reason, I am prepared to return to India if I cannot achieve my purpose. The British C.I.D. is very efficient, but just as I escaped in spite of it, I shall escape your Gestapo also'."\(^1\)

Ayer recounts a similar incident in Malaya when Bose was

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\(^{1}\) _Netaji in Germany_
highly displeased with the unhelpful attitude of the Hikari Kikan. He wrote to the Japanese Foreign Minister Shigemitsu complaining about it, and suggesting the “replacement of the Kikan by a Japanese minister directly accredited to the Provisional Government”. He went to the length of warning Shigemitsu that unless he received satisfaction, he would withdraw from the leadership of the Government and I.N.A., and remain a private citizen, or he might collect a suicide squad and march to the front entirely on his own. Needless to add, an ambassador was promptly appointed!

Bose was accepted as the representative of 350 million Indians. He refused to serve as a propagandist for the Axis, though he had to profess tacit compliance with its war aims. He made no commitments, open or secret, to the Axis powers. In a broadcast on May 1, 1942, he declared: “I am no apologist of the three powers, and it is not my task to defend what they have done or may do in future. That is a task which devolves on these nations themselves. My concern is with India and, if I may add further, with India alone.”

Bose observed again on March 1, 1943: “The internal policy of free India is, and should be, the concern of the Indian people themselves, while the external policy should be one of collaboration with the enemies of Britain. While standing for full collaboration with the Tripartite Powers in the external sphere, I stand for absolute self-determination for India where her own national affairs are concerned, and I shall never tolerate any interference in the internal affairs of free India.”

Bose was fighting for India’s freedom alone. His Provisional Government was a projection, so far as he could make it, of Indian nationalism. His I.N.A. was only the fighting arm of the liberation movement. There could be many ways to freedom, and to hold that the non-violent way was superior to the other is to arrogate an ethical supremacy which Gandhi alone could honestly claim for it. For most others, violence or non-violence was merely a question of tactics. It would have been the easiest thing for Bose to stay put in British jails, and to immunise himself from the hurly-burly of the struggle, as he frequently observed in his broadcasts from abroad. But it did not appeal to a fighting spirit like Bose’s, as it was not to appeal
later to Jayaprakash Narayan and scores of other patriots, who followed Bose’s example by breaking out of their jails, and conducting the freedom struggle by whatever means they could—violent or non-violent. Similar was the justification of those who went underground in 1942 “to do or die”.

“Indians viewed the Bose-Axis phenomenon in simple national, racial and psychological terms. They knew and idolized Bose, the dedicated patriot. Their foremost concern being national liberty, they saw eye to eye with the patriot that their enemy’s enemy was a friend. They were thrilled to learn that with the assistance of an Asian power, their revolutionary leader Subhas had set up an Indian National Army to challenge the mighty British Empire in the field of battle, for the emancipation of the motherland. The very idea of an Indian army founded and commanded by an Indian of unquestionable patriotism was enough to evoke enthusiasm and applause from an unarmed people, long used to watching the displays of British military might. The people’s vision on the complex issues of the war was conventional, and was conditioned by feelings of national pride, racial revenge, and repeated frustrations in the freedom struggle.”

Bose stuck to his resolve as much in South-east Asia as in Germany. By the time he reached Singapore, he had gained more confidence and had become sure of his ground. In his very first speech accepting the presidency of the Indian Independence League (July 4, 1948), Bose reiterated that his loyalty was to India and to India alone. This was not only the constant burden of his speeches and broadcasts, but the basis on which all his activities were planned and conducted. He took scrupulous care to establish and maintain the separate identity of the Indian National Army. The derisive epithet JIFs (Japanese Indian Forces or Japanese Inspired Forces), which the British applied to it, had to be given up after their very first clash with it in the Arakan campaign. In the communiqué reorganising the I.N.A., Bose made it clear to the world that the Indian National Army had been organised by Indians, and consisted solely of picked soldiers from Indian volunteers, who had taken

1 Chattar Singh Samra: Leadership and Political Institutions in India, p. 83
a solemn oath to achieve the complete independence of India. He emphatically stressed, again and again, that the I.N.A. was entirely of Indians and for Indians. And the only task to which it had solemnly dedicated itself was the winning of India's complete independence.

Bose had extracted an assurance from Japan that only the Indian Tricolour, and not the flag with the Rising Sun, would fly on Indian soil. When he bade farewell to the First I.N.A. Division, which was leaving for the Imphal front, Bose warned that where the question of the independence of the country was concerned, the I.N.A. was to trust no one, not even the Japanese allies. The surest guarantee against betrayal was its own armed might. "If ever you find the Japanese trying to establish any type of control over India, turn round and fight them as vigorously as you will fight the British."

Bose's stress on the purely Indian motivation and conduct of his movement became even more pronounced when he transformed the Indian Independence League into the Provisional Government of Free India, and became its head. He jealously guarded its sovereign character. There was not the least trace of subservience in his dealings with Japanese liaison officers or military commanders, who soon learnt to entertain a healthy respect for his tactics and temper. For instance, when the Hikari Kikan prepared some propaganda leaflets for British Indian troops, and began to use them without first showing them to Bose, he treated General Isoda, its Chief, to such a flood of invective that the General was never wholly at ease with him again. Bose was always polite and courteous in his dealings with the Japanese, but he would never compromise his independence or honour or, much less, allow himself to be browbeaten. Consequently, while the Japanese in South-east Asia gave up their uppishness and arrogance so far as the Indians were concerned, the latter gained a new self-respect and identity. In Malaya, before 1942, the word "Indians" applied to coolies. The former British rulers and planters treated them as such. But with their departure, Indians began to hold their head high and, after October 1943, behaved as free men. No wonder that they rallied enthusiastically under Bose's banner and gave him their whole-hearted support.
An outstanding testimony to Bose’s independence and status, as head of the Provisional Government, was provided when defeat had overtaken him, and he was about to make his final departure from Rangoon. Just about that time, Hachiya, the Japanese Minister-Designate to the Provisional Government of Free India, arrived at the Burmese Capital. Due to some bungling, he was without his credentials. Bose would not condone such a breach of protocol and flatly refused to receive Hachiya! Even the Burmese knew that they could not trifle with Bose. Thakin Nu tells of an amusing incident where he had to give the seat of honour at a dinner to Bose, much to the chagrin of the Japanese Ambassador and Commander-in-Chief. After all Bose was the head of the Free Government of India, while they were merely officials, however high placed.\(^1\) Surely, no “fascist puppet” could conduct himself so proudly. When his principal prop and ally was knocked out of the war, Bose calmly declared: “Japan has been defeated, not we!” This was entirely in keeping with Bose’s background and character.

“May be,” his critics might concede, “he was not a fascist, but he certainly was inclined towards dictatorship, and would have established one in India, given half a chance.” Even a person like M. Sivaram, who had come in close contact with Bose as his publicity chief in South-east Asia, visualised such a possibility in his book The Road to Delhi: “Subhas planned a fascist-communist dictatorship for India combining the politics of fascism and the economics of communism, blending the two systems into a pattern of benevolent autocracy adapted to Indian conditions.” He mildly reiterated the charge in an article in the Sunday Standard.\(^2\) “Netaji had other plans,” Sivaram wrote, “including a ten-year dictatorship. His idea was for a patriotic benevolent dictatorship suited to Indian conditions, and acceptable to India’s masses.”

May be, Bose had privately confided such a plan of dictatorship to Sivaram, but strangely enough, nobody else among his many associates, including S. A. Ayer, Minister for Propaganda of the Provisional Government, who was his constant companion during most of his sojourn in South-east Asia, was ever

\(^1\) See Thakin Nu, *Burma under the Japanese*, pp. 83-84

\(^2\) *If Subhas Were Alive*, January 23, 1966
given an inkling of it! Ayer says that Bose was "a democrat at heart and a dictator in effect"—not on account of any of his actions, but solely due to his over-powering personality. But this is true of every great man. Even Nehru was a dictator in this sense. Nor was any such plan outlined or even vaguely indicated in all the numerous pronouncements of Bose since 1941. Earlier, he had sometimes referred to dictatorship, as in his Haripura address, when he argued against the withering away of Congress after freedom had been won. "On the contrary," he said, "the party must take over power, assume responsibility for administration, and put through its programme of reconstruction" as the Congress actually was to do in 1947. This did not usher in a dictatorship, nor did it make India a totalitarian state. This was due to the democratic basis of the Congress, and the existence of other parties. The Forward Bloc was not based on the leader principle, nor did it ever espouse dictatorship.

Although Bose moved in the company of dictators for four years, there is no evidence that he himself was bitten by the ambition of becoming one. If he had been attracted at all by dictatorship, he would have been flattered rather than offended by General Tojo's remark that after liberation he (Bose) would be "all in all in India". On the other hand, all his activities and utterances were based on the faith that he was only a soldier and a missionary of freedom, and that he would achieve and hold it only as a custodian and trustee for the Indian people. It was for them to decide what form of government they wanted. "Once our enemies are expelled from India, and order is established," Bose explicitly stated in his message to Gandhi on July 6, 1944, "the mission of the Provisional Government will be over."

If Bose was not a puppet or a pliant tool of the Axis, it may be asked, what exactly were his relations with the Axis powers? What *quid pro quo* could he offer them? He was, first a representative of the people of India, who were straining to free themselves from the British leash. Though he was expelled from the Indian National Congress, the German and Japanese Foreign Offices knew that he had a considerable following among the Leftist elements in India. Winning friends and in-
fluencing opinion is the prime aim of foreign propaganda—never more so than in war time. By helping Bose, the Axis powers might have legitimately hoped to gain the goodwill, if not the friendship, of Indians. India occupied a strategic position on the world map. It provided unlimited resources and manpower to the British, and a valuable base to the Americans, whose sole links with Chungking China lay through the Ledo road on its north-eastern passes. As Lord Curzon had forecast in 1905, the geographical position of India had pushed her in the forefront of international politics. It was necessity and not charity or generosity which prompted Japan to help Bose to raise the I.N.A. Japan was interested in freeing India from Britain, for thus only could the British be denied the use of India as a base, and the deployment of an Indian army for holding its empire in the East. Besides, there were more than two million Indians in the South-east Asian territories which Japan had occupied. Bose was in a position to mobilise them in her favour.

As for Germany, her interest in Indian freedom dated back to the First World War, when the Kaiser's Government had sent a ship-load of arms to help Indian revolutionaries. Dr. Schacht the German financial wizard, had toured India and established contacts on the eve of the Second World War. He must have told the Fuehrer that India would not remain long in bondage. Helping Bose would thus be a sound, long-term investment, whatever the result of the war. Nazi Germany might have given up the only imperial policy of Drang Nach Osten, but still it had an immense stake in the East. It had earlier given asylum to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Rashid Ali of Iraq.

But Bose was a bird of a different feather. He was in Berlin solely to advance the cause of Indian independence, now that Germany was at war with Britain. "Bose was in no way a collaborator in the evil sense which the word has acquired in recent years," wrote Paul Leverkuehn, a German commentator. "Rather, he was a true Indian patriot with but one idea. He was prepared to do nothing simply for Germany's sake, but anything and everything, including the harnessing of German interests, for India."

Bose was not interested in, or ideologically involved with,
the National Socialist philosophy. He or the Free India Centre had no contacts with any prominent member of the Nazi Party. On the other hand, his chief sympathiser and friend in Berlin was Baron von Trott, the head of the India section of the German Foreign Office, who (with Count Staffenburg and others) was later hanged by the Nazis for his complicity in the plot to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944. Von Trott first came in touch with Indians at Oxford, where he went as a Rhodes Scholar in the 'thirties, and had later kept himself well-informed on the developments in India. It was Trott's favourable report that persuaded the German Foreign Office to give up its earlier suspicion and lukewarm attitude towards Bose, and to extend him diplomatic facilities for establishing the Free India Centre in Berlin and for raising the Indian Legion. So close were Trott's relations with Bose that he was one of the two witnesses to the latter's marriage with Frl. Schenkl. There is also reason to believe that Trott used his association with the Free India Centre to further his own anti-Nazi activities.

Surely if any single, conclusive proof were needed to absolve Bose of sympathies for fascism, it is provided by his close association with a man like Trott,¹ during his stay in Germany from 1941 to 1943. It was just as well that Bose had left Germany long before the execution of the daring plot hatched by Trott and Staffenburg (among others), to kill Hitler and destroy Hitlerism.

¹ For further details about Trott see *This Europe* by Girija K. Mukerjee and also his address on "Netaji Day" in Netaji Research Bureau Bulletin No. 7, (January 1966).
CHAPTER 29

BOSE AND GANDHI

The tenor of the relations between Bose and Gandhi, set at their very first meeting in 1921, continued throughout. Bose never gained a "clear perception" of the Mahatma's plan of action, nor could he ever overcome the "somewhat depressing effect" of the talks he had with Gandhi then or later. Bose could neither attune himself to Gandhi's "inner voice", nor fathom his spiritual depths. He was not the first man to be baffled by the complex amalgam of saint and politician that Gandhi was. He was second to none in personal regard for the Mahatma, but the liberation of his motherland counted with him more than any human being. He loyally responded to Gandhi's calls to action, but he was unsparing in his criticism whenever he thought that Gandhi took a wrong turn, or backslided. He scrutinised every policy of Gandhi with the cold eye of reason. Respect for the Mahatma did not mean a blind subservience to his will, or an apish imitation of his ways of living. Bose was never a votary of non-violence. He could not appreciate Gandhi's obsession with it. To Gandhi, means were an end. To Bose, ends were more important than means, and no end could be more noble and paramount than that of freedom.

As Chattar Singh Samra notes: "The Mahatma was ever ready to negotiate and bargain with Britain. His non-violent non-cooperation movements were, in effect, strategies to wrest more and more concessions from the rulers by exercising an orderly mass pressure without precipitating a mass upheaval, destructive of social order. He always avoided extreme measures if he could. He was essentially a reformist who, at times, took revolutionary measures under the compulsion of domestic and international events. Bose, on the other hand, was essentially a revolutionary who often followed passive programmes because
of the force of internal and external circumstances. He had little faith in compromise and conciliation. He advocated a more radical, a more vigorous course of action to liberate India. He wanted non-cooperation and civil disobedience campaigns to proceed in successive stages culminating in complete surrender on the part of the foe.”

Bose was a young man in a hurry, and failed to see the wisdom of the old leader’s patience and perseverance in efforts to conquer his opponents by love. British imperialism (he felt) understood only brute strength and not soul force. While participating wholeheartedly in Gandhi’s non-cooperation movements, he always wanted to widen their scope and quicken their tempo. Whenever these movements were halted or withdrawn, as happened more than once, Bose became furious, and gave vent to his anger and frustration. He was not alone in this. Leaving aside senior leaders like C. R. Das, even Jawaharlal Nehru’s reactions were not dissimilar. But while Bose indulged in open and at times, sweeping condemnation of Gandhi, Nehru gave vent to his emotional outbursts only in the pages of his Autobiography. Quite early in his life, Nehru was “completely bowled over” by Gandhi. He hitched his political wagon to Gandhi’s spiritual star. There was no getting away from this nexus, which soon grew into a “heart union” — Gandhi’s own words these — from which neither could resile. All that Nehru could do was to rationalise his own weakness and frustration in words which delight even if they fail to convince.

On the other hand, Bose gradually developed only a “love-hate” relationship with Gandhi. He knew too well Gandhi’s greatness, and his dominating position in Indian politics. He knew that no other leader — or combination of leaders — could challenge Gandhi’s supremacy, although for some time he had entertained a sneaking hope that Nehru and he together could rally the radical elements and give a successful fight to Gandhi and his Old Guard. But Nehru was not to be severed from his umbilical cord, and Bose alone could not achieve much. The Forward Bloc he founded in 1940 proved a poor and distant second to the Congress. To have his own way, and to fulfil his destiny, Bose had to leave not only the Congress but India too.

1 *Leadership and Political Institutions in India*, p. 75
While he occasionally rebelled against Gandhi's leadership, and criticised it in no uncertain terms (even suggesting as in Vienna in 1933 that it was washed out), he adored and venerated Gandhi the man. In sharp contrast to the asperity and bitterness which are evident in his correspondence with Nehru, prior to and after the Tripuri Congress session (February-April 1939) 1 is the persuasive, pleading and almost prayerful tone of the letters he wrote to Gandhi about the same time. He has never a harsh word to say against Gandhi personally, although it was the Mahatma's deliberate absence from Tripuri that had landed him in political hot waters. All he wanted was Gandhi's help, guidance, co-operation and confidence. In a Press statement issued on February, 1939, Bose said: "I do not know what sort of opinion Mahatmaji has of myself. But whatever his view may be, it will always be my aim and object to try and win his confidence for the simple reason that it will be a tragic thing for me if I succeed in winning the confidence of other people but fail to win the confidence of India's greatest man." Notice the childlike concern Bose evinces about Gandhi's health in his letter to Nehru on April 20, 1939, (though he himself was ill then): "I am rather worried about Gandhiji's fever. I do hope that it will pass off soon. If however it persists—which God forbid—what shall we do? Please give some thought to this contingency. I am worried because his health is so weak now."

Throughout 1939 and 1940 Gandhi remained firm and unrelenting, as only he could. He refused to move his little finger to help Bose out of the morass, or even to offer him advice. In contrast to Bose's long letters, his own replies were brief and to the point. He told him that having won the Congress presidential election on his own, it was for Bose to take the next step as he thought fit. He was free to nominate his own men to the Working Committee and otherwise conduct Congress affairs as he desired.

In one of Gandhi's letters (April 2, 1939), however, occurs a significant passage: "Though we have discussed sharp differences of opinion between us, I am quite sure that our private relations will not suffer in the least. If they are from the heart,

1 See the following chapter
as I believe they are, they will bear the strain of these differences." A few days earlier, Gandhi had suggested that Bose should come to Delhi and stay with him. "I undertake to nurse you to health while we are slowly conferring."

Gandhi scrupulously refrained from casting aspersions on Bose's motives or imputing the taint of fascism to him, as some did. (He did not indulge in such a facile accusation even after Bose had openly joined the Axis powers). All that he emphasised was that "Bose's ways are mistaken; they are not my ways." Replying to a correspondent who asked: "Is not Subhas Babu right when he ascribes to the Congress High Command, including you, the reformist and the liberal tendency?" Gandhi wrote in the Harijan in January 1940: "Of course, he (Bose) is right. Dadabhai was a great reformist. Gokhale was a great liberal and so was Pherozeshah Mehta. So, too, was Surendranath Banerjea. They were in their days the nation's tribunes. We are their heirs. What Subhas Babu in his impatience to get forward forgets is that it is possible for me to compete with him in the love of the land, in spite of our having reformist and liberal tendencies. But I have told him he has youth before him and he must have the dash of a youth. He is not held down by me or anybody else. He is not the man to be so held. It is his own prudence that holds him. And in that way, he is as much reformist and liberal as I am. Only I with my age know it, and he in his youth is blind to the good that is in him. Let my correspondent be assured that, in spite of our different outlooks and in spite of the Congress ban on him, when he leads in non-violent battle they will find me following him, as I shall find him following me if I overtake him. But I must live in the hope that we shall gain our common end without another fight."

This was indeed the gist of Gandhi's advice to Bose when the latter called on him at Sewagram in June 1940. A poignant interest attaches to these talks since it proved the last occasion when they met. Fortunately a full record of the talks was kept by Nathalal Parikh who was specially asked by Bose to be present. Parikh wrote: "After listening to Bose at great length, Mahatmaji said: 'Subhas, I have always loved you. You are keen on launching some mass movement. You thrive when there
is fight. You are terribly emotional, but I had to think of several factors. I am an old man now and must not do anything in haste. I have the greatest admiration for you. Regarding your love for the country and determination to achieve its freedom, you are second to none. Your sincerity is transparent. Your spirit of self-sacrifice and suffering cannot be surpassed by anybody. But I would like these qualities to be used at a more opportune moment.'

"Subhas said that that was the most opportune time and that it was impossible to think of any other situation in which India could start the struggle. Gandhiji replied: 'Why do you think we cannot get better opportunities later on? I am sure we will have many such opportunities. Whether England wins or loses this war, she will be weakened by it; she will not have the strength to shoulder the responsibilities of administering the country, and with some slight effort on our part she will have no alternative but to recognise India's independence. Both politically and morally, I feel, we should not be hasty in launching a movement at the present juncture. My conscience tells me to wait for better times.'

"Subhas said, 'Bapu, if you give a call, the whole nation will respond to it.' Gandhiji replied, 'Even if the nation is ready, at a moment like this, I must not do anything that is inopportune.' Subhas said, 'If you think that this moment is inopportune, I want your blessings for starting such a movement.'

"Gandhiji: 'You don't need my blessings, Subhas. How can I bless a movement which I consider inopportune, and which I feel is morally unjustifiable now? You have got the qualities of a great leader, and if your conscience tells you that this is the best time for striking out, go ahead and do your best. If you come out successful, I shall be the first to congratulate you. But my advice to you is not to be hasty. You are too emotional, and you must realise that everyone who talks of supporting you will not do so when the testing time comes. So be careful in whatever you do. You can always write to me and consult me. My heart is entirely with you, my love for you and for your family is great, and therefore, I would not like you do anything that will inflict any unnecessary suffering. I would like to tell
you again that India will get better opportunities in future, and will be in a better position to give a fight to England than it is now.'”

It was their fundamental difference on the issue of an ultimatum to the British Government that finally led to the parting of their ways—Bose going to Germany and Japan to wage a war on the British, and Gandhi retiring to his cottage in Sevagram, until he came out like an angry lion with his roar of Quit India on August 8, 1942. Such a development itself could be construed as a belated vindication of Bose’s stand—a veritable triumph for him. Did not Bose maintain all along that it was only when Britain was involved in a war that we could fight it with the maximum chances of success, that Britain’s difficulty was India’s opportunity?

Whatever had happened in the three years since Bose’s resignation, could have been easily forecast by any realist. That Britain would respond to Congress appeals, or to Gandhi’s soul-power and grant freedom to India, was an arrant delusion. What did it matter if it professed to be fighting for freedom and democracy? Churchill had certainly not become the first minister of His Majesty to liquidate the British Empire. How Gandhi was forced to resile, step by step, from his spontaneous offer of unconditional co-operation with the British Government in September 1939, till he asked Britain to Quit India in August 1942, need not detain us here. It calls for a separate full-length study of the mind and methods of the Mahatma. Suffice it to note that in contemptuously spurning the “post-dated cheque on a crashing bank” offered by Sir Stafford Cripps, and asking the British to clear out at once, Gandhi had arrived at precisely the position which Bose had taken when he resigned from the Congress in 1939. Partly at least, Gandhi’s new attitude was influenced by his feeling that the Japanese might soon drive out the British from India.2

“Gandhiji did not express this opinion about the outcome of the war in clear-cut terms,” wrote Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, “but in discussions with him I felt that he was becoming more

1 Life and Work of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, p. 45
and more doubtful about an Allied victory. I also saw that Subhas Bose’s escape to Germany had made a great impression on Gandhiji. He had not formerly approved many of Bose’s actions, but now I found a change in his outlook. Many of his remarks convinced me that he admired the courage and resourcefulness that Subhas Bose had displayed in making his escape from India. His admiration for Subhas Bose unconsciously coloured his view about the whole war situation.

“This admiration was also one of the factors which clouded the discussions during the Cripps Mission to India... There was a news flash that Subhas Bose had died in an air crash. This created a sensation in India and Gandhiji, among others, was deeply moved. He sent a message of condolence to Bose’s mother, in which he spoke in glowing terms about her son and his services to India. Later on it turned out that the report was false. Cripps, however, complained to me that he had not expected a man like Gandhiji to speak in such glowing terms about Subhas Bose, who had openly sided with the Axis powers.”

Was it due to a dim realisation of the metamorphosis that had come over him, that in a conversation with Louis Fischer, an American journalist, on the eve of launching the *Quit India* movement, Gandhi defended Bose as “a patriot of patriots?” “He may be misguided. I think he is misguided. I have often opposed Bose. Twice I kept him from becoming the president of the Congress. Finally, he did become the president, although my views differed from his. But suppose he had gone to Russia or to America to ask for aid to India. Would that have made it better?”

“Yes, of course,” Fischer said. “It does make a difference to whom you go.”

“I do not want help from anybody to make India free,” Gandhi declared. “I want India to save herself.”

“Throughout history,” Fischer recalled, “nations and individuals have helped foreign countries. Lafayette went from France to assist America in winning independence from Britain. Thousands of Americans and other foreigners died in Spain to save the Spanish Republic.”

1 *India Wins Freedom*, p. 41
“Individuals, yes,” Gandhi said. “But America is the ally of England which enslaves us. And I am not yet certain that the democracies will make a better world, when they defeat the fascists. They may become very much like the fascists themselves.”

Bose, on his part, was happy to feel that the gulf between Gandhi and himself was at last bridged, that both of them were fighting the same battle, albeit with different means, that the fate of the war was to be decided in India and that, win or lose, he would have to reckon with Gandhi. He had always kept himself in touch with developments in India, and tried his best to influence them by his broadcasts. It is indeed surprising how he could keep himself so well-informed on the Cripps Plan negotiations, the progress of the Quit India movement and the Simla Conference. On all these issues, he had something pertinent to say because he did not want them to lead to a tame compromise. That would have been an anticlimax after the August 8 explosion.

Gandhi’s 75th birthday was observed by Indians in Malaya as enthusiastically as in India and Bose broadcast a homage to “India’s greatest leader”. He paid a touching tribute to Kasturba Gandhi, who had passed away during detention at the Aga Khan Palace, Poona, calling her “the mother of the Indian people”, and he expressed his deepest sympathy to Gandhi in his bereavement. But the most significant message he addressed to Gandhi was on July 6, 1944, when he laid his soul bare before him, as it were, in a memorable broadcast. Bose first explained the attitude of overseas Indians towards Gandhi:

“Ever since you sponsored the Independence Resolution at the Lahore Congress in December 1929, all members of the Indian National Congress have had one common goal before them. For Indians outside India, you are the creator of the present awakening in our country. In all their propaganda before the world, they give you that position and the respect that is due to that position. For the people of the world, we Indian nationalists are all one—having but one goal, one desire and one endeavour in life. In all the countries free from British influence, that I have visited since I left India in 1941,

1 See Louis Fischer: A Week with Gandhi, p. 46
you are held in the highest esteem as no other Indian political leader has been during the last century. The high regard in which you are held by patriotic Indians outside India, and by foreign sympathisers of India's freedom movement, was increased a hundred-fold when you bravely sponsored the *Quit India* resolution in August 1942."

Then Bose referred to the obduracy of the British Government, and the factors that had impelled him to escape from India:

"I can assure you, Mahatmaji, that before I finally decided to set out on a hazardous mission, I spent days, weeks and months in carefully considering the pros and cons of the case. After having served my people so long to the best of my ability, I could have no desire to be a traitor, or to give anyone a justification to call me a traitor.

"It was the easiest thing for me to remain at home and go on working as I had worked so long. It was also an easy thing for me to remain in an Indian prison, while the war lasted. Personally, I had nothing to lose by doing so. Thanks to the generosity and affection of my countrymen, I had obtained the highest honour which it was possible for any public worker in India to achieve. I had also built a party of staunch and loyal colleagues who had implicit confidence in me.

"By going abroad on a perilous quest I was risking not only my life and my whole future career, but what was more, the future of my party. If I had the slightest hope that without action abroad we could win freedom, I would never have left India during a crisis. If I had any hope that within our lifetime we would get another chance — another golden opportunity — for winning freedom, as during the present war, I doubt if I would have left home. But I was convinced of two things: first, that such a golden opportunity would not come within another century, and, second, that, without action from abroad, we would not be able to win freedom merely through our own efforts at home. That is why I resolved to take the plunge."

Bose repeated the assurance that he would never allow himself to be fooled or deceived by Axis powers, and observed that it was only after Japan took the most momentous step in its history — the declaration of war on Britain and America — that
he decided to visit Japan of his own free will. Thereafter, he explained the change that had come over Japan which had been “seized by a new consciousness”. Bose’s expectations about the new Japan need not detain us here, as they were never put to the test on account of defeat, which makes even the proudest nation humble. Bose gave a solemn assurance that neither he nor his colleagues entertained any personal ambitions, or hopes for reward for their efforts:

“I can assure you, Mahatmaji, that I and all those who are working with me, regard themselves as the servants of the Indian people. The only reward that we desire for our efforts, for our suffering and for our sacrifice is the freedom of our motherland. There are many among us who would like to retire from the political field once India is free. The remainder will be content to take up any position, however humble it may be. The spirit that animates all of us today, is that it is more honourable to be even a sweeper in Free India than to have the highest position under British rule. We all know that there are hundreds of thousands of able men and women at home, to whom India’s destiny could be entrusted, once freedom is achieved.

“Nobody would be more happy than ourselves if, by any chance, our countrymen at home should succeed in liberating themselves by their own efforts or if, by any chance, the British Government accepts your Quit India resolution, and gives effect to it. We are, however, proceeding on the assumption that neither of the above is possible, and that an armed struggle is inevitable...”

A ringing peroration and a personal appeal concluded this striking broadcast: “India’s last war of independence has begun. Troops of the Azad Hind Fouj are now fighting bravely on the soil of India, and in spite of all difficulty and hardship, they are pushing forward slowly but steadily. This armed struggle will go on until the last Britisher is thrown out of India, and until India’s national flag proudly flies over the Viceroy’s House in New Delhi. Father of our nation! In this holy war of India’s liberation we ask for your blessings and good wishes. Jai Hind!”

1 See A. C. Chatterji: India’s Struggle For Freedom, pp. 216-225
It is unlikely that Gandhi heard this broadcast, but one feels that his blessings were always with Bose, for did he not believe with Tulsidas that “all is right for the brave”? Gandhi availed himself of numerous occasions in 1945 and 1946, when he gained personal knowledge of the exploits of Bose and his I.N.A. to pay unreserved tributes to them. To begin with, the Mahatma had not the least hesitation in hailing Bose as “Netaji”. In his opinion, the greatest and the most lasting achievement of Netaji was that he abolished all distinctions of caste, creed and class. He was neither a mere Hindu nor a mere Bengali. He was an Indian first and last. What was more, he fired all under him with the same zeal, so that they forgot in his presence all distinctions, and acted as one man.

Gandhi paid more than one visit to the I.N.A. prisoners in their detention camps. In an address to them he observed: “Netaji was like a son to me. I came to know him as a lieutenant full of promise under the late Deshbandhu Das. His last message to the I.N.A. was that, whilst on foreign soil they had fought with arms, on their return to India they would have to serve the country as soldiers of non-violence under the guidance and leadership of the Congress.

“Though the I.N.A. failed in its immediate objective, it has a lot to its credit of which it might well be proud. The greatest among its achievements was to gather together, under one banner, men from all religions and races of India, and to infuse in them the spirit of solidarity and oneness, to the utter exclusion of all communal and parochial sentiment. It is an example which we should all emulate.”

Yes, Bose was like a son to Gandhi—a wayward, rebellious son who occasionally pitted himself against the father. Hence the love-hate relationship between them. And perhaps Bose could be excused if he sometimes felt just a twinge of jealousy for his elder brother—the anointed heir-apparent of Gandhi—Jawaharlal Nehru.
CHAPTER 30

BOSE AND NEHRU

IT WAS a great misfortune of the Indian nationalist movement that Bose and Nehru could not join hands in the struggle for freedom. Next to Gandhi, they were the two towering figures in Indian politics. Both were radicals and leftists. Both stood for complete independence. Both were the idols of the country's youth. Both had unbounded energy, courage, and the capacity to suffer and sacrifice. Both had much in common. They were born in prosperous families, received the same western education, shared the same patriotic outlook. Both were Cantabrigians and both subscribed to the same western political concepts. Everything pointed to their close and fruitful association.

A secret circular of the Government of India had noted in February 1929 that "the decision of future policy appears to be almost entirely with young men, notably, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Babu Subhas Chandra Bose". This forecast was probably based on the fight they jointly gave to Gandhi at the Calcutta Congress in 1928, on the issue of complete independence. But the difference between their temperament and tactics was distinctly noticeable even then and it was to grow until it widened into an unbridgeable gulf at the Tripuri Congress, eleven years later. The twain never met and, from whatever angle one looks at it, it was a tragedy for India. It was a tragedy for them too, for each, in his own way, loved and respected the other.

Paradoxically, their differences stemmed mainly from their approach to Gandhi. It was a political variant of the eternal triangle, so to say, with Gandhi as the central figure. Both Bose and Nehru conceded the power, influence and greatness of Gandhi. Both had serious doubts about the methods and politi-
cal philosophy of Gandhi. Both frequently expressed their dissent from the Mahatma. One could put in parallel columns, the criticism levelled against Gandhi by Nehru and Bose right from the withdrawal of the first non-co-operation movement by the Mahatma in 1922, to the approach of the war in 1939. If Bose's *Indian Struggle* reads like a long tirade against Gandhi's policies and tactics (with occasional blasts against Nehru), the *Autobiography* of Nehru too, highlights his bouts of anger and bewilderment over Gandhi's inscrutable actions. Such bouts, however, were more than balanced and compensated by his paeans for the Mahatma. Both Nehru and Bose were rebels, but Nehru rebelled only to surrender, while Bose carried his rebellion to its logical conclusion—expulsion from the Congress. Very early in his political career Nehru learnt to resolve the conflict between his head and heart, by subordinating the head to the heart. To the end, Bose was governed by his head.

It would be as easy to blame Nehru for this surrender as to applaud Bose for his independence. Each acted according to his innermost impulses, temperament and ideals. Notwithstanding his fiery temper, Nehru had Hamlet-like characteristics: vacillation when confronted with unpleasant choices, excessive indulgence in the 'pale cast of thought', and an ingrained aversion to extremes. He was also conscious that compromise was essential in politics, and that the paramount need was to preserve and maintain Congress unity. But above all this was his deep emotional attachment to Gandhi, and his firm conviction that the Mahatma must remain the focal point of India's fight for freedom, and that the Congress could never afford to drop its pilot. He had thus, again and again, to yield his principles to the shifting policies of Gandhi, whose soothing words always helped to erase the humiliation and pain he felt in the process. He was freed of this emotional and spiritual dependence on the Mahatma only in 1948, though, even afterwards, he must have often wondered what his master would have counselled him at any particular juncture.

Bose was quite the opposite. His political tutelage was not under Gandhi but under C. R. Das and he came into his own early in life, after Das's death in 1925. There was thereafter, no one to counsel patience and restraint to him, or to curb his
extremist propensities. He took his stand on "all or nothing". Bose was fully aware of the greatness of Gandhi and of the absolute hold he had on the Congress. But he never believed that Gandhi's leadership was indispensable: on the other hand, he often wondered if it was not a hindrance to the speedy attainment of freedom. He believed that if the younger elements could come together under a Leftist banner, they could carry the Congress with them. And for this consummation, he looked towards Nehru. Nehru was an acknowledged Leftist leader but his practice often belied his professions. For him, there always fell "a shadow between the conception and the creation, between the emotion and the response". No wonder that all this provoked intense annoyance and bitterness in Bose's mind.

Left consolidation thus remained an empty dream, whatever lip service Nehru paid to it and however hard Bose tried to achieve it. When it was very near attainment in 1939, Gandhi adroitly turned the tables on Bose, its architect and symbol. If Nehru had made common cause with Bose then—or at any time before—our recent history would have been different, and even free India might have taken a different shape. Even after independence, the Left seems to come together only to break into more fragments.

Was there a rivalry—open or otherwise—between Nehru and Bose for leadership of the Left, if not of the Congress, as suggested by Michael Brecher in his biography of Nehru? No evidence is forthcoming for such an assumption. Despite all his soaring confidence in himself, Bose knew that Nehru was a senior and stronger man. Nehru was nine years older and had become President of the Congress three times before Bose was invested with that honour in 1938. Bose had a hard core of loyal supporters but, by and large, the popular following was overwhelmingly in favour of Nehru. Above all, Bose was aware that Nehru was Gandhi's man and heir-apparent, who was used by him as a leash on the Left. It was foolish and futile even to think of posing as a rival to Nehru. Nehru, on his part, was far too strongly entrenched in the Congress set-up, and in the affec-

1 See p. 134
tion of the people to suspect that he could have any possible rival.

It is, therefore, far-fetched and unwarranted to suggest that there was "unstated but very real" rivalry between the two. On the other hand, we find Bose writing to Nehru from Badgastein (Austria) on March 4, 1936, promising to give him full support, and adding: "You are the only one to whom we can look up to for leading the Congress in a progressive direction. Moreover, your position is unique, and I think that even Mahatma Gandhi will be more accommodating towards you than towards anybody else. I earnestly hope you will fully utilise the strength of your public position in making decisions. Please do not consider your position to be weaker than it really is. Gandhiji will never take a stand which will alienate you." Bose concluded the letter with the assurance that if he was allowed by the Government to return to India, his services would be at the disposal of Nehru, who was just then elected President of the Congress for the second time. On March 13, Bose again repeated that he could think of no one else in whom he could have greater confidence.

Two years later, when Bose had become the President of the Congress, he wrote to Nehru who was in Europe: "You cannot imagine how I have missed you all these months." Even when Bose hurled a 27-page broadside at Nehru in March, 1939, expressing his wrath and bitterness, he observed in the very second paragraph: "Ever since I came out of internment in 1937, I have been treating you with the utmost regard and consideration in private life and in public. I have looked upon you as politically an elder brother and leader, and I have often sought your advice." Nehru, on his part, reciprocated his warm feelings for Bose right in the midst of the acrimonious correspondence he was conducting with him, on the happenings at Tripuri. "Personally I have always had, and still have, regard and affection for you, though sometimes I did not like at all what you did, or how you did it."  

The simmering personal differences, and the ideological dis-

1 A Bunch of Old Letters, pp. 172-73  
2 ibid, p. 329  
3 ibid, p. 350
agreements between Bose and Nehru came to a head at the time of the presidential election in 1939, spilled over at the Tripuri session, and lingered till the end of the year when Bose was expelled from the Congress. Both Bose and Gandhi knew where they stood in this crisis. Having won a decisive victory over the Mahatma, Bose wanted to exploit it for the consolidation of the Left, and for accelerating the tempo of the struggle against the British Government by giving an ultimatum to it. Gandhi was then vehemently against both these objectives, and therefore was bent on ousting Bose. Only Nehru did not know his own mind in this unhappy controversy. His Hamletian complexes perplexed him continuously, until he sought release from them in a visit to Chungking in August 1939. Of course he was for Bose— but was he? Of course, his place was with Gandhi—but was Gandhi’s attitude to Bose fair or right?

Everybody hailed Bose’s victory as a victory for the Left. It was a definite indication of the feelings among the rank and file. To Gandhi it was “plain that the delegates do not approve the principles and policy for which he (Gandhi) stood”. The Times of India wrote: “Mr. Bose’s election does represent a Congress trend to the left.” The Bombay Chronicle concurred: “The election clearly indicates a trend towards radicalism and mass assertiveness.” That Bose’s success was not a fluke was shown when the Communist leader Adhikari gained the highest number of votes in the elections to the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee. Communist candidates similarly topped the poll in the Bombay Municipal elections held about that time. Only Nehru could not make out the writing on the wall! Paradoxically, he first thought that Bose’s candidacy itself would mean a set-back for the Left. “The Left was not strong enough to shoulder the burden by itself and when a real contest erupted in the Congress, it would lose and then there would be a reaction against it.”1 Little could he realise that his own ambivalence was the main cause of the weakness of the Left.

Bose exposed this and other failings and weaknesses of Nehru in the letter he sent to him on March 28, 1939.2 He gave vent to all the accumulated anger, anguish and bitterness in his

1 *ibid*, p. 356
2 *ibid*, see pp. 329-349
heart in a brutally frank manner. One rarely comes across a fierce indictment like this—even in exchanges among political adversaries. The opening sentences must have fallen like a bombshell on Nehru: "I find that for some time past, you have developed a tremendous dislike for me. I say this because you take up enthusiastically every possible point against me; what could be said in my favour you ignore. What my political opponents urge against me you concede, while you are almost blind to what could be said against them..."

"Then let me come to the resignation. Twelve members (of the Congress Working Committee) resigned. They wrote a straightforward letter—a decent letter—in which they made their position unequivocally clear. But your statement—how shall I describe it?... It was unworthy of you. Your statement gave one the impression that you had resigned, but until now, to the general public, your position remains a mystery. You appear as if you are riding two horses. You have an idea that you are extremely logical and consistent in what you say or do. But other people are often puzzled and perplexed at the stand you take on different occasions."

Bose then explained the happenings before, during and after the Tripuri session and declared: "Since the presidential election you have done more to lower me in the estimation of the public than all the twelve ex-members of the Working Committee put together. Of course if I am such a villain, it is not only your right, but also your duty to expose me before the public. But perhaps it will strike you that the devil who has been re-elected President, in spite of the opposition of the biggest leaders, including yourself, of Mahatma Gandhi and of seven or eight Provincial Governments, must have some saving grace."

Bose then mentioned the resolution on "National Demands" passed at the Tripuri Congress. "I am sorry that such a beautifully vague resolution containing pious platitudes does not appeal to me. If we mean to fight the British Government for our Swaraj, and if we feel that the time is opportune, let us say so clearly, and go ahead with our task."

Thereafter Bose referred to international affairs, on which he finds Nehru's policy "even more nebulous", and asks him to
state it precisely: "Frothy sentiments and pious platitudes do not make a foreign policy. It is no use championing lost causes all the time, and it is no use condemning countries like Germany and Italy all the time on the one hand and, on the other, giving a certificate of good conduct to British and French imperialism."

Did Nehru belong to the Left or the Right? "You say in one of your recent letters that you speak and act for yourself and should not be taken as representing anybody else. Unfortunately for us, it never strikes you that you appear to others in the role of an apologist for the Rightists." Again: "You call yourself a socialist, — sometimes a full-blooded socialist. How a socialist can be an individualist as you regard yourself, beats me. The one is the antithesis of the other. How socialism can ever come into existence through individualism of your type is also an enigma to me."

Bose alluded to the idea of national unity on which Nehru frequently harped, and warned him that "the unity we strive for or maintain must be the unity of action and not the unity of inaction. . . . Unity is a revolutionary movement, is not an end in itself, but only a means. It is desirable only so long as it furthers progress."

Bose then laid his finger on Nehru’s failings as a member of the Working Committee, where he behaved as a “spoilt child”. "You would generally hold forth for hours together and then succumb at the end. Sardar Patel and the others had a clear technique for dealing with you. They would let you talk and talk and they would ultimately finish up by asking you to draft their resolution. Once you were allowed to draft the resolution, you would feel happy, no matter whose resolution it was. Rarely have I found you sticking to your point till the last."

Bose amplified this point: "In recent years the Congress resolutions are often verbose and long-winded. One should call them ‘theses’ or ‘essays’ rather than ‘resolutions’ . . . . I am afraid you have had a hand in giving this new shape and form to our resolutions. So far as I am concerned, I would rather have practical resolutions than lengthy theses."

The lava of words flowed on, over page after page, while Bose dragged every weak point of Nehru into the open. He
concluded by asking him to clarify his policy and programme, not in vague words but in realistic details. "Are you a Socialist or Leftist or Centrist or Rightist or Gandhist or something else?" More pertinently, Bose wanted to know exactly where Nehru stood on Pant's resolution at the Tripuri Congress "which was charged with the spirit of pettiness and vindictiveness".

Nehru must have been taken aback by this onslaught. Never in his political career had anybody X-rayed him in such a candid manner, or hurled such charges and accusations at him. His sensitive mind must have been deeply distressed by Bose's missive. Obviously he could not let it go unanswered, nor could his nature allow him to attempt to take an eye for an eye, give a Roland for an Oliver. Within a week, he sat down at his desk one night and replied\(^1\) to Bose's letter point by point and paragraph by paragraph, though he thought that to deal properly with it he would have to write a book! He began thanking Bose for writing to him fully and frankly about himself, and about various incidents: "Frankness hurts often enough, but it is almost always desirable, especially between those who have to work together. It helps one to see oneself in proper perspective from another's, and a more critical viewpoint."

Nehru proceeded: "Your letter is essentially an indictment of my conduct and an investigation into my failings. It is, as you will well realise, a difficult and embarrassing task to have to reply to such an indictment. But so far as my failings are concerned, or many of them at any rate, I have little to say. I plead guilty to them, well realising that I have the misfortune to possess them. May I also say that I entirely appreciate the truth of your remark, that ever since you came out of internment in 1937, you treated me with the utmost regard and consideration, in private as well as in public life. I am grateful to you for this. Personally I have always had, and still have, regard and affection for you, though sometimes I did not like at all what you did or how you did it. To some extent, I suppose, we are temperamentally different, and our approach to life and its problems is not the same." After this urbane and disarming introduction, Nehru goes to the heart of the problem—his

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1 A Bunch of Old Letters, pp. 350-363
relations with Gandhi and the Mahatma’s position in the Congress and the country.

“The choice before me became one of withdrawing myself quietly from the Congress Working Committee and co-operating with it from outside, or of challenging Gandhiji and his group. I felt that it would be injurious in the interests of India and our cause for me or you to create this definite split. It is of course absurd to say that there should be unity at any cost. Unity may be harmful and injurious at times, and then it must go. It all depends on the circumstances then prevailing, and I was convinced at the time, that the pushing out, or the attempt to push out Gandhiji and his group, would weaken us greatly at a critical moment. I was not prepared to face that contingency. At the same time, I disliked many of the developments that were taking place, and disapproved of the general attitude of Gandhiji in regard to certain matters, such as States and Ministers.”

Referring to the controversy on federation, Nehru wrote: “What you said in your statements was totally unjustified. It is obviously not good for a person holding a responsible position as the Congress President, to repeat press rumours or bazaar statements. He is supposed to be in the know, and even a hint from him brings conviction to others. You did not mention any names, it is true, but every reader of your statements necessarily came to the conclusion that it referred to some members of the Working Committee. No greater insult could be offered to a person than to suggest that he had secretly betrayed the cause he publicly stands for, and even arranged mutual distribution of ministries in the federation. It was a fantastic statement and it hurt to the quick.”

Nehru now warmed up: “Such a statement was an effective barrier to any further co-operation between you and Gandhiji, for the others, in a sense represented Gandhiji. I was keen that there should be co-operation between you two, as the alternative seemed to me highly injurious. I pressed you, therefore, to clear this barrier and to have a frank talk with Gandhiji. I thought you agreed to do so. I was astonished to find later from Jayaprakash and Gandhiji that you did not even mention the sub-
ject. I must confess that this upset me greatly, and it made me realise how difficult it was to work together with you."

After referring to Bose's various recent acts of commission and omission, Nehru proceeded: "All this seemed to make clear that you intended to pursue a path with companions of your own choice, and that the old members of the Working Committee were an encumbrance and not particularly wanted. It became quite essential for them to resign; not to do so would have been unfair to you, to the country and to themselves, and contrary to democratic procedure. I do not understand how they could have stayed on or how their resignations created a deadlock. Not to have resigned would have created an impasse, as this would have prevented you from taking such action as you thought proper."

Referring to his own conduct Nehru wrote: "I adopted, as you have rightly pointed out, a rather foolish attitude. I did not actually resign and yet I acted as if I had done so. The reason for this was that I entirely disagreed with the whole approach of my colleagues. I felt strongly that, under the circumstances I could not offer you my co-operation, but I felt equally strongly that I was in a sense breaking with the others."

Then Nehru explained his attitude to Bose's candidature: "I was against your standing for election for two major reasons: it meant, under the circumstances, a break with Gandhiji, and I did not want this to take place. It would also mean, I thought, a set-back for the Left. The Left was not strong enough to shoulder the burden by itself, and when a real contest came in the Congress, it would lose, and there would be a reaction against it. I thought it probable that you would win the election as against Pattabhi, but I doubted very much whether you could carry the Congress with you, in a clear contest with what is called Gandhism."

Nehru then referred to Bose's association with "a number of odd individuals" who were apparently influencing him greatly. "These individuals were, some of them, personally desirable, but they did not represent, to my mind, any Leftist opinion or any organised opinion. That is why I call them adventurist in the technical political sense." Again: "The fact that in international affairs you hold different views from mine and did not
wholly approve our condemnation of Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy added to my discomfort and, looking at the picture as a whole, I did not at all fancy the direction in which you apparently wanted us to go."

Nehru then pointedly mentioned another personal aspect: "I felt, all along, that you were far too keen on re-election. Politically there was nothing wrong in it, and you were perfectly entitled to desire re-election and to work for it. But it did distress me, for I felt that you had a big enough position to be above this kind of thing. I felt also that you could influence policies and groups far more if you had acted otherwise." Further on: "I wrote to you that your re-election had done some harm and some good. I still hold to that opinion, though the harm might outweigh the good in the sense that it leads to disruption in our ranks."

Nearing the end of the letter, Nehru modestly repeated: "There is no need for me to discuss my own failings which you point out. I admit them and regret them." Regarding his interpretation of Pant's resolution, however, Nehru indulges in a familiar quibble: "I do not think it was a motion of no-confidence, but it was certainly one which indicated a want of full confidence in your judgment. Positively, it is a vote of confidence in Gandhiji."

Answering Bose's question whether he was a socialist or an individualist Nehru concluded: "Is there any contradiction in the two terms? Are we all such integrated human beings that we can define ourselves in a word or a phrase? I suppose I am temperamentally and by training an individualist, and intellectually a socialist whatever all that might mean. I hope that socialism does not kill or suppress individuality. Indeed I am attracted to it because it will release innumerable individuals from economic and cultural bondage. But I am a dull subject to discuss, particularly at the tail-end of an inordinately long letter. Let us leave it at this, that I am an unsatisfactory human being, who is dissatisfied with himself and the world, and whom the petty world he lives in does not particularly like."

The reply, which was long (but shorter than Bose's own which provoked it), thus ended on a note of true humility which distinguishes a cultured mind. Nehru meets Bose's aggres-
sive indictment with meek yet telling arguments. He admits and confesses his own failings and drawbacks, thus taking the wind out of Bose’s temper. He is not able to repudiate all the charges levelled against him by Bose, but a dispassionate observer will pronounce honours to be more or less even in this heated exchange. The entire correspondence (published in Nehru’s *A Bunch of Old Letters*) makes rewarding reading even at this distance of time. It provides an insight into the political approach and psychological make-up of these two great men, and it could well become the subject matter of a book. Bose was not mollified. Shortly after, he wrote to his nephew Amiya Nath Bose (April 17, 1939) : “Nobody has done more harm to me personally and our cause in this crisis than Pandit Nehru.”

Nehru and Bose met, soon after, at Jamadoba where Bose was recuperating, and again at the end of April 1939 at the A.I.C.C. session in Calcutta. But as we have seen, the efforts of Nehru and Mrs. Naidu to bridge the gulf between Bose and the Old Guard did not succeed, nor did Nehru change his own neutral stance. Characteristically, he again refused to become a member of the new Congress Working Committee nominated by Dr. Rajendra Prasad who succeeded Bose. But at the same time he pledged his co-operation to it!

Bose and Nehru might have casually met during the next eighteen months, but no further attempts were made by either for a rapprochement. The iron had entered Bose’s soul, and he would pursue his struggle for freedom single-handed by other means and under different skies. Nehru, on his part, seems to have felt to the end of his life that what he did during the Tripuri crisis, was all for the best. He told Taya Zinkin many years later : “It is true, I did let down Subhas. I did it because I had realised that, at that stage, whatever one’s view might be about the way India should develop, *Gandhi was India*. Anything which weakened Gandhi, weakened India. So I subordinated myself to Gandhi, although I was in agreement with what Subhas was trying to do. I suppose it is right to say that I let Subhas down. India had to come before either of us.”

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1 See *supra*, p. 158
ing that Nehru had wronged him never disappeared from Bose's mind either. Although he addressed appeals to Gandhi on numerous occasions in his broadcasts from Berlin, Singapore and Rangoon, not once did he mention Nehru's name.

The break, which occurred between Bose and Nehru at Tripuri, was building up for over a decade. It was the natural consequence of their different temperaments, policies and techniques. Both jointly came under the rebuke of Gandhi at Calcutta in 1928, for championing complete independence, though Nehru's support to Bose's resolution, explicitly rejecting Dominion Status was, on his own admission, "half-hearted".¹ A few months later, under the pressure of Gandhi and his father, Nehru "allowed himself to be talked into signing" the Delhi Manifesto which was issued by a so-called "leaders conference".² The signatories to the manifesto accepted the Viceroy's declaration on a Round Table Conference, and agreed to participate in it, to the intense annoyance of Bose and other Leftists like Dr. Kitchlew. The Lahore Congress (1929), which committed the Congress to complete independence, marked a personal triumph for Nehru, but it only confirmed Bose's suspicion that Nehru had become a captive of the Mahatma. At the Karachi Congress in March 1931, Nehru was adroitly put up by Gandhi to move the resolution approving the Delhi Pact. Bose, too, for once considered discretion the better part of valour, and did not oppose it on the ground that there would be little support for such a course from the delegates.

In 1932, Bose was arrested, and for the next five years he was either in prison or in exile. When Bose and Nehru came together again at the Haripura Congress in 1938, he seems to have forgotten his earlier disappointments over Nehru and again expected his co-operation for Leftist consolidation. Meanwhile, Nehru had grown in stature, having become President of the Congress at consecutive sessions — Faizpur (1936) and Lucknow (1937). For many months during 1938, Nehru was on a tour of Europe. The first real political contact between Bose and Nehru since the Karachi Congress occurred in early 1938, only to end in a clash.

¹ Autobiography, p. 186
² ibid., p. 197
Dilip Kumar Roy in his book *Netaji - The Man* has tried to probe the reasons for what he calls "the instinctive disaccord" between Bose and Nehru. Roy details at some length an illuminating conversation he had with Bose—the subject being Nehru—when Bose expressed his views on him without any inhibitions. Unfortunately, Roy does not mention when the conversation took place, though the context indicates the year to be 1937 or 1938. Early in the talk Bose conceded Nehru's greatness: "A man who has attained the eminence of Jawaharlal is not made of the common stuff; let there be no mistake. None can possibly doubt that he has a rare intellect, perspicacity and penmanship." But he agreed with Roy that Nehru was not of the same stature as Das or Gandhi, not to mention Tilak or Aurobindo. "When Nehru airs his views on politics, social organisation or ethics, he is always worth listening to, but religion is not a domain to which he has secured a passport. His strictures and diatribes (on religion) are not inspired by experience; they are based only on the observation of its social effects which are peripheral. He is looked upon by almost everybody in India as an infallible guide on everything under the sun, even though on his own showing, he vacillates at every step."

Referring to Nehru's love of Gandhi: "I have no quarrel with him on that account. He may love him or adore him; that is none of my business. But surely this continuous boosting of personal loyalty which forces one again and again to cramp one's style cannot be right, especially in politics where such actions may prove contagious. Why not take a leaf out of the book of Gandhi himself? Didn't he adore Gokhale? But whenever it was necessary, mind you, he took precious good care not to follow his idol. For a man of action, a statesman, an administrator and, above all, one who aspires to be a world figure, it would be madness to think that one could do without a backbone."

Bose went on: "I don't really mean I can't understand his (Nehru's) idolatry of the Mahatma. I am not such a fool as I look. But any fool can see that he idolises Moscow with his brain and the Mahatma with his heart. He protests and changes his posture every time only to feel more complacent about it."

1 See pp. 105-116
all. But, after all, Dilip," (and here Bose reveals himself) "when one has undertaken to lead people (to freedom) one can't go on extolling anti-imperialism and non-violence in the same breath. One point I wish to emphasise: if Nehru really wants to serve India through politics, he must make sure of his foundation, for if he doesn't take care to seek solid ground under his feet, it will prove slippery, and he will never be able to stand erect."

Bose's verdict might be considered right or wrong—or partly right and partly wrong—according to one's predilections. But one cannot imagine Nehru talking about his colleagues—or even opponents—in this manner. His sensitive spirit instinctively recoiled from baring itself even before his wife or daughter.
CHAPTER 31

BOSE THE MAN

IN ONE of his letters to Mahatma Gandhi in 1939, Bose wrote: "If there is anything in life on which I pride myself it is that I am the son of a gentleman, and as such, I am a gentleman. Deshbandhu Das often used to tell us ‘Life is larger than politics’. That lesson I have learnt from him. I shall not remain in the political field a single day if by doing so I shall fall from the standards of gentlemanliness, which are so deeply ingrained in my mind from infancy, and which I feel are in my blood."

Sentiments like this may bring a smile to the lips of self-styled radicals and long-haired revolutionaries, not to mention the latter-day Hippies. But they simply cannot dismiss a man like Bose with their pet appellation of bourgeoisie, or as belonging to the old and discredited order of the Bhadralok. For there was no greater radical and revolutionary in India in the first half of the twentieth century than Bose. Yet, he stuck to the old-fashioned virtues of a gentleman, not only in the hurly-burly of politics in India, but also in his later life-and-death struggle in South-east Asia.

His courtesy and kindliness impressed everybody who came in contact with him, and very rarely did he lose his temper. He was always well turned out and he cut a fine figure as much in his khadi kurta and dhoti or churidar and achkan, as in a western suit. Later in South-east Asia he appeared the very personification of a warrior in his starched military uniform and shining top boots. In his Cambridge days he was fastidious about his clothes. This fastidiousness had to be given up during the non-cooperation movements. Even then, Bose was always neatly turned out. In Germany and later in South-east Asia, when he assumed supreme command of the Indian National Army, he
had necessarily to be well-dressed. The ease with which he sported his uniform, and the faultless manner in which he inspected parades or took salutes, would have done credit to a professional soldier.

Attention to clothes, however, was only an incidental part of the role he was playing. For his earliest inclinations were towards renouncing the world and adopting the ochre robes of a sanyasi. That in fact appeared to be his *swadharma* to those who were in close contact with him in his young days. They looked upon him almost as a budding Vivekananda. It was by accident that he plunged into politics and later sought a romantic-cum-emotional release in an armed revolution. But the mystic strain never left him. That was his main solace and support in the storm and stress of war. He constantly sought the guidance of God though the only symbols of his religiosity were a rosary of beads and a miniature copy of the *Gita*, which he always carried with him. Many a night he used to go to the Ramakrishna Mission in Singapore, change into a silk dhoti, and spend a couple of hours in prayer and meditation.¹

Bose was fair and handsome, with the typical features of a Bengali. Though of average height, he gave the impression of being short, especially when he wore the regional ensemble of *dhotti*, *kurta* and *chadar*. On the other hand, a military uniform set off his figure to advantage, and he looked impressive. Round-faced and cherubic, he had a ready smile on his lips and a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. Bose brightened at the sight of young people, and often overlooked a tight schedule of engagements to sign their autograph books. Always cool and collected, he did not lose his patience either when crowds broke cordons of volunteers to greet him, or when they failed to turn up in the expected numbers. During his tour of Gujarat in 1940 to popularise the Forward Bloc, his local supporters became nervous over an anti-prohibition speech Bose had delivered in Bombay. They warned him that his attitude might be the undoing of his new movement in that region. Bose asked them with a smile: "Then shall I wind up the show and go to the Himalayas for penance?" The mammoth crowd that gathered that very evening confounded his colleagues.

¹ See S. A. Ayer, *Unto Him a Witness*, p. 269
Bose's hairline began to recede at an early age and in later life, he became practically bald, which resulted in giving a domelike appearance to his forehead. Nevertheless, baldness and the efforts of baldheads to hide their shining pates were a frequent subject of banter with him. Bose's meticulous attention to clothes did not, unfortunately, extend to the ordering of his daily routine. His unpunctuality had become a standing reproach of his friends. He was unpunctual in replying to letters, in keeping appointments, and even in going to railway stations to catch trains, which his attendants sometimes frantically tried to detain for a few minutes. He carried this unpunctuality with him even on his frequent propaganda tours in the country, much to the annoyance of Press correspondents who accompanied him. (He tried to make up this shortcoming by his unfailing courtesy to them). There was a memorable occasion when he presented himself at a wedding in Calcutta exactly thirteen hours after the ceremony.

This irregularity extended to his food also. He was not choosy or demanding about what he ate and he never had any fixed hours for his meals. His work and engagements came first; food next. It was not uncommon for him to invite friends to his table at any hour of the day or night, thus completely unhinging the kitchen schedule. He made up this laxity by imbibing tea at all odd hours, 20 to 30 cups being his usual daily quota. He took to coffee also in South-east Asia to enable him to work at night. His bearer could tell in advance when the master would retire for the night by the number of cups of coffee he drank after dinner. If he drank one cup, it meant that he had decided to go to bed at midnight or before 1 a.m. Two cups indicated 2 a.m. or later. And when he ordered coffee to be sent again to his room, it meant an all-night session. He had developed the Churchillian penchant for conducting his official work during the night thus keeping his aides, stenographers and secretaries busy round the clock. He was, however, invariably mindful of their welfare and made sure that they had something more solid than tea or coffee to sustain themselves.

In his later days, Bose became a chain smoker. He lighted one cigarette after another, especially when he was engaged in an animated conversation or a heated debate. He smoked his
cigarettes almost to the butt end. He was also fond of supari\(^1\) which he munched from morning till night. "Always excess!" his personal physician Colonel Raju used to exclaim, throwing up his hands in despair. He carried this excess even to a game of badminton.

A friend who knew Bose since his childhood has described him "as an affectionate and dutiful son, a loving kin, a devoted brother, a tender and sympathetic friend and a great favourite of children". Among the Bose brothers and sisters, Sarat and Subhas were closest to each other, something of the relations between Motilal and Jawaharlal developing between them. Sarat Chandra, the elder by eight years, was also a political leader in his own right and defended Subhas like a tiger, especially at the Tripuri Congress and later. Ten months after Subhas's escape, he was arrested under the Defence of India Rules and detained for four and half years in South India. Later, he became a member of the Interim Government for a short time.

Though generally a man of few words, Bose opened his heart to intimate friends like Dilip Kumar Roy in letters and conversation. Roy's book Netaji the Man, gives many revealing glimpses of Bose's innermost feelings, and of the sufferings and ordeals he had to go through. It also shows the lighter side of his nature and provides many instances of his sense of humour. In Malaya also, he used to indulge in chaff and banter and occasionally enjoyed a joke even against himself. He had the priceless gift of seeing himself as others saw him. He used to take a childish pleasure in forecasting the abuses which the B.B.C. (Bluff and Bluster Corporation) or the A.I.R. (Anti-Indian Radio) would level at him in their broadcasts.

Bose was fond of domestic pets and kept a small menagerie in his bungalow in Rangoon. But he drew the line at cats, which he could never stand. Nevertheless, he was patient with Major Abid Hasan (who was staying in the same quarters) whose army of cats used to crawl all over the place, much to Bose's annoyance. "For the life of me I can't understand," he frequently complained, "how any man can allow his cats to sleep on his bed. Abid sees nothing wrong in it!"

\(^1\) Betel-nut
Bose’s purse was always open to his comrades and co-workers. They were welcome to approach him for help at any hour of the day or night. He would extend his helping hand even to the dependants and families of disabled or deceased colleagues.

His achievement in banishing communalism and parochialism received fervent tributes after his death from Gandhi and Nehru, among others. But probably Bose never considered it an “achievement” at all. It came naturally to him to treat all as fellow-Indians and he never cared even to know whether a man was a Hindu or a Muslim, or whether he belonged to Kashmir or Kerala or Bengal. On two of the most crucial occasions in his life, first, when he travelled by submarine from Germany to Japan, and next when he flew from Singapore on a fatal journey, his sole companion was a Muslim—Abid Hasan and Habibur Rahman respectively.

The Provisional Government of Free India and the Indian National Army were thoroughly cosmopolitan in character. His Ministers belonged to all provinces and communities, and included a woman. His most devoted generals like Shah Nawaz Khan and the Kiani brothers were Muslim. It was a wealthy Muslim merchant of Rangoon—Habib—who donated all his property worth about a crore of rupees as the price of a garland, auctioned by Bose. None of his personal and household staff was a Bengali. Very likely, he was not even conscious of it. And his last assignment—raising a memorial to the martyrs in Singapore—was entrusted to an Anglo-Indian—Colonel Stracey. Incidentally, the national anthem of the Provisional Government was also composed by a Muslim, Hussain, who was generously rewarded by Bose for the inspired composition.

General Chatterji in his book India’s Struggle for Freedom has cited an instance of the scrupulous manner in which Bose guarded the nationalist (the word “secular” was not in vogue then) character of his movement. When the trustees of a Chettiar temple invited Bose to visit the shrine with the inducement of a substantial contribution to the I.I.L. Fund, he agreed to go only if he could take his colleagues with him. If the trustees objected to the presence of non-Hindus in the temple, he would not go, even if thereby he had to forego the promised donation. When the trustees reluctantly agreed, Bose took with him Mus-
lim, Christian, Hindu and Sikh officers, whom he conducted right to the doors of the sanctum sanctorum. The Brahmin priest applied tilak (holy mark) to the forehead of all the officers, who also partook of the temple prasad (oblations). Such instances could be multiplied.

Bose had a neat and fluent hand, and he had never to pause or grope for words. He was master of his thoughts, as also of his material. Ayer has graphically described how Bose wrote the historic proclamation establishing the Provisional Government on sheet after sheet of paper at a stretch one night, while he (Ayer) was typing it in an adjoining room. There was no need to change even a comma in the typescript. All the books of Bose were written during exile, as Nehru's were written in jail. Bose, however, did not achieve even a moiety of Nehru's fame as a writer. Romain Rolland said that the Indian Struggle disclosed the best qualities of the historian—lucidity and high equity of mind—and that it was an indispensable work for the history of the Indian movement. But at best it is a polemical work, while Nehru's Autobiography, which was published a year later, made a contribution to English literature. In his preface, Bose candidly admitted the defects and shortcomings of the book, which were primarily due to the difficulty in getting books of reference in Vienna, where it was hastily completed in 1934. The original manuscript which he carried with him while he was hurrying to the bedside of his dying father, was confiscated when he landed at Karachi. When the book was published later in London, the Government of India promptly banned it and seized all the copies it could lay hold of. But a few copies were nevertheless smuggled into India and avidly passed from hand to hand. The first Indian edition was published only in the year following the attainment of freedom.

The major portion of Bose's unfinished autobiography (published under the title An Indian Pilgrim) was written in ten days in December 1937 at Badgastein in Austria. He could never find time to complete it owing to his constant preoccupation thereafter. Bose's autobiography makes interesting reading, though it is more or less a matter-of-fact narrative and never rises to the lyrical heights of Nehru's book. Bose also contributed occasional articles to the periodical Press in India and
Europe, notably to the *Modern Review*. He had also become a journalist in his own right, first in the twenties as the editor of *Banglar Katha*, journal of the Swaraj Party, and later in 1940 of the *Forward Bloc*, mouth-piece of the party.

He liked to see films whenever he could get away even for an hour. He also took keen interest in listening to radio programmes, specially on foreign affairs, from stations all over the world.

Like his writing, Bose's serious reading was also done during his days of exile. During his incarceration in Mandalay in the twenties, he had entrusted the task of selecting and sending books to Dilip Kumar Roy. In one of his letters we find him asking for books by Bertrand Russell, while in another he mentioned Turgenev's *Smoke*. In 1936, while he was a detenu in Darjeeling, he requested Jawaharlal Nehru to do similar service for him. He asked for (among other books) (1) *Historical Geography of Europe* by Gordon East, (2) *Clash of Cultures and Contact of Races* by Pitt Rivers, (3) *Science and the Future* by J. B. S. Haldane, and (4) *Africa View* by Huxley. Obviously his intellectual hunger was for a more serious pabulum than who-dun-its.

Bose could not be called an orator, whether in English, Hindi, or even in his native Bengali. But he was fluent and rarely fumbled for words. It was his obvious sincerity and air of conviction that appealed to his audience. He seems to have undergone a metamorphosis as a speaker in Germany and in South-east Asia, where his personality and the revolutionary fire of his words made an instant and lasting impact on the thousands who assembled to listen. His stirring broadcasts from 1942 to 1945 take a high place in our patriotic literature.

Bose was sentenced to imprisonment eleven times and spent nearly eight years as His Majesty's guest, including three years of banishment in Burma. For another three years, he was in exile in Europe. Such a fate was not uncommon for patriots of his generation, but on no other top-ranking leader did the wrath of British rulers fall as frequently and relentlessly as on Bose. What distinguished his jail terms from those suffered by other leaders of his rank was that he had to undergo the ordeal of a hunger strike twice, and was once subjected to a severe
lathi beating (apart from what he had to put up with as a free man). Rigours of prison life took a heavy toll of his health, and it was suspected, after his return from Burma, that he had contracted tuberculosis.

Bose was a great lover of music, especially devotional music. He wrote in a letter to D. K. Roy from Mandalay: "He who has no music in his composition, or whose heart is dead to music, is unlikely to achieve anything big or great in life." His reaction to mystic songs was intense, and he could not tolerate any Philistine disturbance in a musical soiree. He was fond of poetry, his favourite poet being the mystic A.E. (George Russell).

Though normally open-hearted, Bose had a secretive side to his mental make-up. Like all revolutionaries, he knew how to keep a secret. He never divulged how exactly he escaped from Calcutta to Berlin. Even after he reached Berlin, his presence there was kept a closely guarded secret for some months. Again, the plan for his departure from Germany to Japan had to be devised and executed in strict secrecy for obvious reasons. But the most puzzling mystery of all was the secrecy over his marriage in 1942 with Fraulein Schenkl. Few among his associates even in Germany knew of it, while the first inkling of it reached India only in 1945. He never publicly mentioned his marriage during his stay in Germany. Even privately he referred to it only on the eve of his submarine voyage to the Far East, in a letter to his brother, Sarat Chandra Bose.

The letter, written in Bengali and dated February 8, 1943, read: "Revered Majdada, today I am again setting out on a perilous journey—homeward this time. May be I shall not reach my destination. If any calamity befalls me on the way, it will not be possible for me to send any further news about myself. I am, therefore, leaving here a personal message which will be conveyed to you in due time. I have married here and have got a daughter. Please have some affection for my wife and child, when I will be no more in the world, as you have had for me throughout my life. May my wife and daughter complete my unfinished work with success—this is my last prayer to God. —Your affectionate brother, Subhas."

In South-east Asia also, he never mentioned his marriage to
any of his colleagues, although he talked freely with them on all topics under the sun. There was nothing improper or irregular about the alliance, and those who have met Frau Bose testify to her being an estimable woman of independent nature. Why then did Bose maintain such secrecy over his marriage, even after his wife had borne him a daughter? Did he, by any chance, consider that it was a fall from spiritual grace, a betrayal of his ideal of \textit{brahmacharya}? But though he always lauded the ideal, he is not known to have taken a vow as such to remain a bachelor.\footnote{Anthony Elenjimittam in his book \textit{The Hero of Hindustan}, however, relates an incident in which Bose is quoted as having taken such a vow: "Subhas you shall be a \textit{Brahmachari} throughout your life, because of the great work you have to accomplish in your country, I said to myself."} (This word is a poor substitute for the Indian concept of a Brahmachari.) Or was it only a case of image-keeping? His more fanatical admirers and followers had somehow come to believe that Bose would ever remain single. \textit{Ergo} he must try his best not to injure their blind faith in him. Long after Bose’s relatives had openly accepted the fact of his marriage and fatherhood, articles and booklets continued to be written violently disputing and denying "the malicious rumours" of his marriage, and at that to a European woman. Many people asserted that their hero could do no such "dishonourable" thing. Even his friends were usually reluctant to talk about it on the specious ground that it was a purely personal affair. They thus unwittingly heightened the mystery. Whether it is a heavenly bond or only a social contract, marriage is no more personal than one’s other activities. But it is too late in the day to labour the point now when even Bose’s daughter is happily married to an American.
CHAPTER 32

NETAJI

NEVER WAS the time more propitious, and never was the ground better prepared for the emergence of a leader, than was South-east Asia in June 1943 when Bose arrived on the scene. With the ignominious retreat of the British from Malaya and Burma eighteen months earlier a new spirit of nationalism had possessed the two million Indian residents in greater East Asia. They were savouring liberation from their former masters, and hoping that their motherland also would soon be free. The Indian Independence League was fairly well established in most countries of South-east Asia, though its relations with the Japanese rulers were strained latterly. Its fighting arm, the I.N.A., on the other hand, was in a state of virtual disintegration since the arrest of General Mohan Singh in December 1942. This was a matter of great concern to the members of the League. They were keenly conscious that an old and ailing man like Rash Behari could not provide the dynamic leadership their movement needed. They had become increasingly anxious that Subhas Chandra Bose should come and take its helm.

In fact the “Teacher”, as Rash Behari was respectfully called, was himself anxious to entrust it to Bose’s young hands. Bose had favourably responded to the invitation. But how could he manage such a long and hazardous journey from Germany in war time, and when would he actually arrive? This had become the main topic of conversation among Indians in South-east Asia.

A thrill went through their hearts, therefore, when they learnt early in June 1943 that Bose had arrived in Tokyo and that he was holding talks with the Japanese Government. Their joy knew no bounds when they heard him broadcast on June 21 that he was ready to lead them to freedom. In a sense, Bose had
conquered the minds and hearts of his compatriots in South-east Asia long before his arrival. Nevertheless, they felt the overwhelming impact of his personality the moment he landed in Syonan on the morning of July 2, 1943. “The first thing that struck me most at that moment,” wrote General J. K. Bhonsle, (who later became Netaji’s Chief of Staff), “was his arresting personality, his face radiating cheer and optimism.” Here was a leader of whom they could be proud; here was NETAJI in person!

That title had already been conferred on him in Germany and he had assiduously cultivated all the qualities that were necessary for living up to it. A long sadhana (preparation) had gone into its making. He had faith in his cause. He had confidence in himself. He had the daring to bid for high stakes. He had the capacity to rouse the masses and to evoke the best in them. In the previous two years, he had learnt to deal with the dictators, and how to play the diplomat’s game. He had raised the Indian Legion and gained an insight into the mind of the simple and brave jawans. What more could be needed for a leader? He was the leader, the NETAJI!

Without such boundless faith Bose could not have built the edifice of the Free India Government, raised a 60,000 strong national army and reached the gates of India within nine months. Indians in East Asia responded whole-heartedly to their Netaji. They rallied under his banner in their thousands—men, women and even children. If the kids could do nothing, they could at least lustily shout Jai Hind! Soldiers of the I.N.A., who were bewildered by recent happenings, came under his spell even before he had donned the uniform of their Supreme Commander. Similar was the case of their officers. General Shah Nawaz Khan, who had defied Mohan Singh and kept scrupulously aloof from the I.N.A., “found a leader and decided to follow him”. As he said long afterwards, in his deposition to the Court Martial: “When Netaji arrived in Singapore, I watched him very keenly. I had never seen or met him before, and did not know very much about his activities in India. I heard a number of public speeches, which had a profound effect on me. It will not be wrong to say that I was hypnotized by his personality and his speeches. He placed the true picture of
India before us, and for the first time in my life, I saw India through the eyes of an Indian.” The hard-boiled journalist, S. A. Ayer, who happened to be in Malaya only because he was caught in the onrushing tide of the Japanese advance, was bowled over even more quickly. The senior Army doctor, A. C. Chatterji, the former judge, A. N. Sarkar, the hard-headed businessman, Yelappa, not to mention a mere woman like Lakshmi Swaminathan and numerous others, young and old, high and low, Hindus, Muslims and Christians—all were literally captivated by Netaji. Only Napoleon and Gandhi had this magnetic quality. Bose himself hardly possessed it while in India.

When exactly was he then touched by this afflatus of leadership? Did it spring up suddenly from his innermost mysticism? Or was it due to mantra-shakti? (But his only mantra was India must be free!) Was it merely an emanation of his environment? Or was it simply that Bose’s hour had come—as Winston Churchill’s did, three years earlier, after years of frustration and obloquy?

Bose wasted no time in Singapore in surveying the situation as political leaders are wont to do. On the third day of his arrival, he had taken over the command of the Indian Independence League; within seven weeks he had become Supreme Commander of the Indian National Army; within four months he had formed the Provisional Government of Free India and declared war on Britain and America. Within eight months, the I.N.A. was on the Arakan front, and on March 22, 1944, it had crossed the frontier and raised the Tricolour on the soil of India! Netaji was a man in a hurry; he knew that he must catch time by the forelock and march on the double to Delhi! He was aware that he had a date with destiny. He therefore devoted all his energies to mobilise the people, to raise the sinews of war, to establish a government, to recruit and train an army. And all the while, he had to conduct endless discussions with the cantankerous Hikari Kikan. In between, he had to be constantly on the move, paying personal visits to the battlefields. He drove himself so hard that his aides and Ministers could scarcely keep pace with him.

Netaji did not rest content with merely kindling the people’s enthusiasm. He saw to it that it was channelled into fruitful acti-
vities. His superb capacity for organisation was noticeable since his young days. It had won grudging tributes from high officials of the Government of India, who considered him the more dangerous on that account. His faculties as a leader were seen at their peak during the two years in South-east Asia. No problem was too big and no detail too small for his personal attention.

His visits to I.N.A. camps, hospitals and even messes were no less frequent than those to the I.I.L. headquarters. No wonder then that the I.N.A. soldiers adored Netaji and were ready to lay down their lives for him. As with his men, so with his military and civilian officers. Their devotion to him was never so great as in his last days. To a man they wanted to accompany him wherever he chose to go. They felt utterly desolate when they had to bid their last good-bye to him—only they did not know for a long time that it was the last!

Netaji "captured the hearts of soldiers with his deep personal interest in their welfare", wrote General J. K. Bhonsle. "He took great interest to understand the various military problems that came up before him. His grasp of detail was unique. If any one of us placed before him a plan or a scheme, he would not be satisfied until he discussed it in all its varied aspects. It was not an easy task to convince him of the soundness of a scheme, but once he was satisfied, he would tell us to go full steam ahead. We were given the fullest liberty to use our discretion and judgment in working out details. This threw a very heavy responsibility on us; but at the same time, it was a chance to put forth the very best effort that we were capable of. If we succeeded, we were given full credit in public. If we failed, a word of blame was uttered in private."1

In the twenty-five and half months of his sojourn in South-east Asia—that was all the life span that was left to him—the lustre of his leadership never dimmed; it shone more brightly in adversity and even after the final catastrophe overtook him. His soldiers and colleagues, or the people at large, never lost faith in him. His soothing words did more to speed the wounded soldiers onto their feet than the ministrations of doctors and nurses. During the retreat from Imphal a bomb splinter maim-

1 Article in Advance
ed a young jawan, and he lay bleeding profusely by the roadside. When the medical orderly began to bandage his leg, the boy cried out: "No, no, let it bleed, for Netaji has said that if we give him our blood, he will give us freedom!" Shah Nawaz Khan was an eye-witness to this incident. There were numerous instances of such devotion.

Bose could not remain content with being a great leader; he had necessarily to be a great diplomat as well, if his mission was to succeed. It was a quality for which he was not distinguished nearer home. In Europe, he had to move warily with the Nazi hierarchy before he could enlist Hitler's support. He fared better with Mussolini, who promised to sponsor a tripartite declaration for Indian independence. The Duce's agreement influenced the German Foreign Office to back Bose. With Tojo, Bose soon established friendly ties. The two almost seemed to have become mutual admirers. They praised each other's character, courage and statesmanship. Even after Tojo's resignation, Bose defended his policies "with particular vehemence", according to Ayer.¹

Bose was present at the Greater East Asia Conference in Tokyo, in November 1943, which was attended by General Tojo, Premier of Japan, Dr. Ba Maw, Adipadi of Burma, Dr. Jose P. Laurel, President of the Philippines, Wang Ching Wei, President of China, Chang Chinghui, Prime Minister of Manchukuo, and Prince Wan Weithayakon of Thailand. Bose distinguished himself so much at the conference that he became an object of envy, though he was present only as an observer. His dignified bearing and friendly manners won him the hearts of the people of Japan who hailed him wherever he went.

Netaji's diplomacy had to undergo an acid test during his sixteen months' stay in Rangoon where he shifted the headquarters of the Provisional Government of Free India in January 1944. Rangoon was to serve as the main base of the I.N.A. till the end of the war. This created many knotty problems as three separate and independent authorities operated in Burma. The Japanese exercised supreme authority in military matters; the Government of Burma was sovereign in internal affairs, and

¹ See: Unto Him A Witness, p. 184
the Free India Government was more or less autonomous, although its status was essentially that of a guest.

With its large Indian population, Rangoon became a major centre of the I.I.L. and I.N.A. activities. Mass rallies, fund collection drives and military parades became the order of the day and their very success provoked jealousy among some Burmese politicians who had the ear of Dr. Ba Maw. The prevailing shortage of food, clothing and other necessities in Burma aggravated the ill feeling especially because the Indians seemed to have abundant supplies of these. A rift gradually developed between Dr. Ba Maw and Netaji, despite the latter's earnest efforts to allay suspicions and remove the misgivings of Dr. Ba Maw. Bose offered to share with the Government of Burma the food, clothing and other material collected by his own Government. His task was not made easier by the disharmony existing between the Big Three of Burma—Dr. Ba Maw, the Adipadi, Thakin Nu, his Foreign Minister and General Aung San, his Commander-in-Chief. Each of them was a distinct character and together they scarcely formed a happy team. Fortunately, the rift between Netaji and the Adipadi stopped short of widening into a gulf, thanks to Thakin Nu and Aung San, who had great admiration for the Indian leader. Consequently, on the surface at least, the relations between the two Governments remained smooth and normal and the war preparations of the I.N.A. did not suffer.

Despite the air of adoration around him, Netaji was not without critics or detractors. A few men like K. P. K. Menon, who was a member of the I.I.L.'s Council of Action till the end of 1942, was right on the scene and vocal too. ("What is the state of the head of the Head of State?"—he once quipped.) Some, who became Bose's critics after his death, deserve to remain nameless. There are others who feel that Bose did not behave fairly by Mohan Singh. Then there are the armchair strategists who, from hindsight, expatiate on the utter hopelessness of Netaji's undertaking and hold that a leader has no moral right to gamble with the lives of his followers. A cold and realistic assessment of the fortunes of war and of the strength of armies and resources marshalled on either side, does impart a certain validity to this view. This writer, too, considers (as explained
in an earlier chapter) that Bose's time-table was set quite wrongly and that he was too late on the scene, with too little. His campaign would have had a far better prospect of success had it been launched at least a year earlier. But Bose was not the one to engage himself in assessments or balance-sheets. Otherwise, in the first place, he would not have had to resign from the Congress presidency in 1939, or, secondly, to escape from India in 1940. When the higher call came he cared the least for saving his own skin.

There are others who grant Netaji's overwhelming personality, but question his tactics and strategy. Hugh Toye quotes Fujihara as being of this view: "As leader of the Army, Bose became the foundation of spiritual strength, and was the pivot of the I.N.A. organisation. However, the standard of his operational tactics was, it must be said with regret, lamentably low. He was inclined to be idealistic and not realistic. For instance, without being familiar with the fighting power of the I.N.A., he was always demanding that it be employed in a separate and decisive role. When the tide turned, and the Japanese Army had retreated, he urged that the I.N.A. should continue to confront the Allies until their aim was achieved."¹

Netaji was only a layman and did not claim to be a strategist. Let alone Netaji, even his army officers were comparatively junior and did not have the benefit of staff college training, although some of them were later made generals. Most of the platoon and company commanders were raised directly from the ranks in 1941 by Mohan Singh. But even assuming that Netaji had, like the Fuerher and Churchill, developed pretensions to super-generalship, Fujihara ignored the simple fact that the overall strategy of the war was decided not by Netaji but by his own superiors. Their dazzling successes in 1941 and 1942 seem to have gone to their heads. Otherwise, General Mutaguchi would not have spent his time in tending his roses while the Imphal offensive was being ground down to a standstill.

Bose's faith, courage, equanimity and sense of humour never deserted him through all the vicissitudes of the struggle. He was a sthitapradnya (one who has attained a state of mental equipoise as described in the Gita) in defeat as in victory. How-

¹ Subhas Chandra Bose: The Springing Tiger, p. 194
ever, he had developed an intense allergy to any kind of treachery. It's least suspicion would make him furious. Desertions of men and even officers increased in the later stages of the war, despite the attempts made by Bose to stop the rot. This made him more sad and desperate than the ebbing fortunes of the war. Even earlier, in cold rage he had personally confronted Captain Durrani, who was accused of aiding and abetting deserters, and passing on secret intelligence to the enemy. “You should be grateful to me,” Bose is reported to have shouted at Durrani, “that I have saved you from the Japanese firing squad, and that you will be shot by Indians.” In the event, Durrani, who was subjected to some third degree, lived to receive a George Cross from the British in 1946.

In fairness to Netaji, it must be repeated that he never compelled I.N.A. soldiers to go to the front. He always gave ample chance to those who suffered from battle fright or simple nerves to withdraw from the Army. Netaji naturally insisted that those who made a free choice, should not subsequently shirk their duty or go over to the enemy.

One need not further dilate on Netaji’s activities and achievements in Sout-east Asia. But the question remains: What is his place in Indian history? There need not be the least doubt or hesitation in answering this question. His place is along with that of Gandhi, as co-architect of our freedom. He might have failed in his immediate mission, but even that failure brought India’s independence nearer. Indeed, it was an essential part of the Bose legend. The volcanic forces released by the I.N.A. trial and the legend of Netaji in the latter part of 1945, closely followed by the R.I.N. mutiny in 1946, were equally responsible, if not more, than the “Quit India” movement of 1942 for the realisation by the British rulers that their days in India were numbered.

Another question: Would the partition of India and the subsequent communal massacres during the course of the greatest mass migration in history have been averted had Bose been alive? Could he have succeeded in achieving for 350 million people what he did for a microcosm of India in South-east Asia? There are not a few who give an affirmative answer to this hypothetical question, but to indulge in such “Ifs” of
history, is a futile pastime. If Bose had not been killed in an
air crash . . . If Marshal Blucher had not arrived on the
battlefield of Waterloo in the nick of time . . . If Lenin had
not been allowed to reach Russia in a sealed train in 1917 . . .
If dispatch-rider Adolf Hitler had been bumped off by a stray
bullet in the First World War . . . Such “Ifs” are endless, and
they open out intriguing possibilities. There are some historians
who facetiously hold that the history of the world would have
been different had Cleopatra’s nose been a little longer.

It is best, therefore, not to try to visualise the course of In-
dian history had Bose survived the air crash in Taihoku in
August 1945. We cannot get away from that stark reality, how-
ever we may wish to.

Netaji passed away in seeming defeat. But martyrs never die
in defeat; their death itself is their greatest triumph, their
crown and consummation. With a passion surpassed only by
saints in their quest of God, Netaji had dedicated himself to
the freedom of his motherland. In his juvenile innocence, he
had deified the Indian peninsula as a goddess—and throughout
his life he knew no other god, goddess or godling. Such single-
minded dedication is not possible for the common run of men,
but Netaji was nothing if not uncommon. He was a mystic who,
by some quirk of fate, had been turned into a revolutionary,
and one may be quite sure that in his last moments, he had no
regrets, no sense of failure or frustration. He died in the full
faith (and the words on his lips) that “India will be free” . . .
His was a richly fulfilled life though it was cut short so tragically. He was barely 48.

The nature and extent of Bose’s achievements could be better
understood if we consider what legacy some of his foremost
contemporaries would have left if the Great Reaper had taken
them away at the same age as he did Bose.

This is no doubt a rather far-fetched and unrealistic com-
parison, but it would be helpful in getting a measure of Bose’s
greatness. First, Nehru (born 1889) : In his 48th year he was
the third-time President of the Indian National Congress. A
unique honour no doubt, but his posthumous fame would have
rested mainly on his Autobiography. Next de Gaulle. In his
48th year, de Gaulle (born 1890) was Commander of the 4th
Armoured Division of the French Army and had attracted some attention for his unorthodox views on tank warfare. But that was all. After him, Ho Chi Minh (exact birthdate unknown): In his 48th year there was no Ho Chi Minh at all! He was known in Viet Namese revolutionary circles as Comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc. Let us extend the analogy to Gandhi (born 1869) and Churchill (born 1874), both of whom were Bose's seniors by more than a score of years. In his 48th year, Gandhi had returned from South Africa and had just left for Champaran to launch his first satyagraha campaign on Indian soil. Churchill, after his early stormy career, was dubbed a political chameleon and, in his 48th year, was in virtual retirement, after his defeat in the general elections.

Subhas Chandra Bose was a Man of Destiny, if there ever was one. What is the mark of a man of destiny? That he is born with a mission. That he creates his own milieu to fulfil it. That he infuses others with his own faith and purpose, makes them embrace poverty, suffering, death itself for the cause. That he writes his will across the lives of millions.

All this Netaji did.
1897 : January 23, Born at Cuttack (Orissa).
1913 : Passes matriculation and joins Presidency College, Calcutta.
1916 : Expelled from the Presidency College and rusticated from Calcutta University.
1917 : Joins the Scottish Church College.
1920 : Stands 4th in the I.C.S. Examination.
1921 : Resigns from the I.C.S.; returns to India; meets Gandhi and C. R. Das; joins Congress.
1922 : First imprisonment and release.
1923 : Becomes the editor of Forward.
1924 : Appointed Chief Executive Officer, Calcutta Municipal Corporation.
1924 : October 24, Arrested and detained without trial in Mandalay (Burma).
1927 : May 16, Released owing to serious illness. Becomes member of the Congress Working Committee.
1928 : May 3, Presides over the Maharashtra Provincial Conference, Poona.
1929 : Presides over Rangpur Political Conference; Students Conference, Lahore; Youth Conference at Nagpur and Amravati.
1929 : December, Asks Congress to form a parallel government to implement the Independence resolution passed at the Lahore Session.
1930: January 23, Sentenced to one year’s rigorous imprison-
ment.
1931: July 4, Presides over the All-India Trade Union Con-
gress session at Calcutta.
1933: Arrested and jailed.
1938: Released on medical grounds. Goes to Europe. Ban on
return to India.
1936: April, Returns to India despite ban. Imprisoned under
Regulation III of 1818.
1937: March, Released from jail.
1938: President of Haripura Congress Session.
1939: Elected President of the Tripuri Congress Session after
a bitter contest.
1939: April 28, Resigns Congress presidency.
1939: Organises Forward Bloc.
1940: Launches Holwell Monument satyagraha.
1940: July, Imprisoned under Defence of India Rules.
1940: November, Decides to go on fast unto death. Released.
1941: January, Escapes from India, goes to Kabul and from
there to Berlin.
1942: The Conference of Indians in South-east Asia invites
him to take charge of the Indian Independence League
and the Indian National Army.
1943: March, Leaves Germany by submarine.
1943: July 2, Arrives Singapore.
1943: July 4, Assumes leadership of the Indian Independence
movement in South-east Asia.
1943: August 8, Assumes supreme command of the I.N.A.
1943: October 21, Proclamation of Provisional Government of
Free India.
1944: February 2, I.N.A. opens offensive on the Arakan front.
1944: March 18, I.N.A. crosses frontier and stands on Indian
soil.
1944: March 21, Netaji’s first proclamation to the people of
India.
1944: March, The Japanese Army launches offensive on the
Kohima-Imphal front.
1944: June, The Japanese Army suffers defeat; begins its disastrous retreat from the Kohima-Imphal front.

1944: July 4 to 11, “Netaji Week” observed throughout Southeast Asia to commemorate his assumption of leadership a year earlier.

1944: July 14, The Japanese Army High Command announces its formal decision to suspend its Kohima-Imphal campaign.

1944: December, The British Fourteenth Army launches its counter-offensive on the entire Burma front.

1945: January 1, The Fourteenth Army takes Akyab.

1945: March end, The British in full control of North Burma.

1945: April, The I.N.A. finally withdraws from the Burma front.

1945: April 24, Netaji leaves Rangoon.


1945: May 14, Netaji arrives in Bangkok after a hazardous trek from Rangoon.

1945: June 18, Leaves Bangkok for Singapore.

1945: August 6, The first atom bomb in history dropped on Hiroshima.

1945: August 8, Russia declares war against Japan.

1945: August 14, Japan’s unconditional surrender to the Allies.

1945: August 16, Netaji leaves Singapore for an unknown destination.

1945: August 18, Arrives at Taihoku (Formosa) 2 p.m.

1945: August 18, Netaji’s plane crashes while taking off from Taihoku, 2.38 p.m. He is removed to hospital.

1945: August 18, Netaji passed away, 9 p.m.
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(Specific references are given in the footnotes to books cited but
not included in the above list.)
INDEX

Ali, Maulana Mohommed, 45, 49
All-Bengal Young Men’s
Conference, 46
All-Bengal Youth League, 49
All-India Congress Committee,
45, 79, 81, 130-32, 140, 152,
158, 155-63, 167, 171, 172, 175,
320
All-India Trade Union Congress,
95, 110
All-India Youth Congress
(‘Navajawan Bharat Sabha)
69, 94, 95
All-Parties Conference, 67-69, 71,
73
Ambedkar, B.R., 103
Amery, L.S., 185
Amrit Bazar Patrika, 47
Aney, M.S., 153
Ansari, Dr. M.A., 67, 80
Anusilan, Party 66
Arya, 22
Atlee, Clement, 131, 284
Atmashakti, 128
Auchinleck, Field Marshal, 226-
27, 281
Aung San, 265, 338
Ayer, S.A., 241, 268, 270, 271,
272, 290, 294, 295, 328, 329,
335, 337
Azad Hind, 223
Azad Hind Radio, 206, 207, 209,
216, 239, (See, Congress
Radio, Azad Muslim Radio)
Azad Hind Sangh (See, Free
India Centre)
Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam, 44,
46, 49, 112, 131, 141, 143, 144.
152, 183, 186, 192, 303-4
Azad Muslim Radio, 210 (See
also, Azad Hind Radio and,
Congress Radio)
Ba Dr. Maw, 239, 246, 265, 267,
337, 338
Bajaj Jamnalal, 142
Banerjea, Surendranath, 50, 301
Banglar Katha, 47, 330
Bari, Abdul, 81
Barkatulla, Maulvi, 288
Basu, B.K., 66
Basu, J.N., 60
Benes, Dr. 118
Bengal Legislative Council, 13-
14, 50, 60, 61, 65
Bengal Provincial-Congress Com-
mittee, 42, 43, 47, 48, 50; 66,
67, 81, 99, 150, 172, 183
Bengal Swadeshi League, 89
Besant, Mrs Annie, 80
Bevin, 131
Bhonsle, General, J.K., 223, 234,
334; 386
Bhowmik Madan, 56
Birkenhead, Lord, 67
Bombay Chronicle, 313
Bombay Girni Kamgar Union, 75
Bombay Presidency Youth
League, 69
and Japanese authorities, 217, 240, 244, 253, 260 (See, also, Japan and Indian National Army)
and Nehru, Jawaharlal, 127, 144, 149, 158, 161, 309-23
and Patel, Vithalbhai, 106-12
and Provisional Government of Free India, 240-43, 247-49, 256
and Rolland, Romain, 122-24
and Swaraj Party, 46-54
as President of Indian National Congress, 131 ff.
as Youth and Labour leader, 46-47, 49; 69-71, 77-79, 94-95
at Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress (1928), 72-74
at Cambridge, 32-39
at College in Calcutta, 21-30
at School, 15-17
at Tripuri session of the Indian National Congress (1939), 151-54
birth and family background, 12-15
contest for a second term as Congress President, 141-49
controversy about his death, 9-11
early association with Congress, 42 ff
escape from India, 191 ff.
expulsion from Congress, 172-73
in Berlin, 200 ff.
in jail, 44, 56-63, 83, 84, 88-89, 103-5, 127; 184-90
in Vienna, 106 ff.
interest in philosophy and religion, 17-20, 22-24, 104-5
last and fatal flight, 270-72
marriage, 218, 297, 331, 332
on English people, 33
on Japanese power, 129-30, 202, 207
on Military training, 29
on relationship between Gandhi and Nehru, 79-80
personal qualities of, 324-32
propaganda abroad for Indian Freedom, 125-26
qualities of leadership, 334 ff.
resignation from the ICS, 34-39
resignation of Congress Presidentship, 159-66
Roy, Dilip Kumar, on 30, 36-37, 129
Social Service, 22-23, 27-28, 47
Tagore, Rabindranath, on, 167-69
Voyage to Japan, 217-18
Bose, Sunil C., 61
Bose, Suresh Chandra, 9
Brecher, Michael, 311
Calcutta Municipal Corporation, 52, 53, 55, 56, 65, 66; 89
Calcutta Municipal Gazette, 53
Cambridge, 32-36, 39
Caveeshar Sardar Sardul Singh, 169
Chakravarty, Satis, 56
Chatterji, Col. A.C., 223, 241, 328, 335
Chattopadhyaya, Kshitish, Prasad, 32, 38
Chaudhury, Nirad, 181
Chinghui, Chang; 387
Churchill, Sir Winston, 93, 113, 187, 276, 285, 290; 303, 342
Ciano, Count, 203; 209
Communist Party of India (The National Front), 50, 171, 179

Congress Bulletins, 101
Congress Democratic Party, 82
Congress Radio, 210 (See, also; Azad Hind Radio, and Azad Muslim Radio)
Congress Socialist Party, 118-20, 126, 136, 171, 178, 179, 286
Craik, Sir Henry, 128
Cripps Mission, 208, 303, 304, 305
Curzon, Lord, 296

Daily Worker, 121
Dandi March, 86, 87
Das, Beni Madhav, 16-17
Das, C.R., 36, 40-60, 64-66, 106, 125, 163, 299, 308, 310, 322, 324
Das, Debath, 270
Das, Dr J.M., 47
Das, Jatindra Nath, 76, 77, 188
Das, K.C., 181
Das, Nillanth, 127, 128
Das, Purna Chandra, 56
Das, S.R., 50
Das, Vasanti Devi, 43, 46, 64; 83
Daulatram, Jairamdas, 142
de Gaulle, Charles, 290, 341
de Valera, Eamon, 107, 113, 131; 188, 275
Deo, Shankarao; 142
Desai, Bhulabhai, 98, 102, 128, 142, 226; 283
Desai, C.C., 32, 37
Deva, Acharya Narendra, 143
Dharamvira, Dr., 129
Dhillon, 280
Duke, Sir William, 35
Durrani, Captain, 340
Dutt, Batukeshwar, 75, 76
Dutt, R. Palme, 121, 285
Edwardes, Michael, 281
Fischer, Louis, 304
Fitzwilliam Hall, 32; 36
Forward, 48, 60
Forward Bloc, 9, 111, 167; 169-71, 173, 175, 177-81, 183, 187, 200; 286, 287, 295, 299, 325
Forward Bloc, 174, 177, 185, 330
Free India Centre, (Azad Hind Sangh) 203-6, 209, 211, 216, 218, 274, 297
Fujiiwara, General, 221, 222, 228, 230, 239

Gandhi, Kasturba, 305
Gandhi-Das Pact, 52, 56
Gandhi-Irwin Pact, 93-96, 99
(See also Irwin, Lord)
Ganguli, Dipin, 56
Ganguly, Charu Charan, 38
Ganpuley, N.G., 196, 205, 215, 216, 290
Ghose, Aurobindo, 22, 69-71, 193, 322
Ghosh, Surendra Mohan, 56
Ghurye, G.S., 32
Gilani, G.Q., 229
Gill, Col. N.S., 223, 230
Goebbels, 208, 209
Gokhale, Gopal Krishna, 131, 301, 322
Habib, 328
Hachiy, 260, 294
Hallett, 127
Haradayal, Lala 288
Hardinge, Lord, 219
Harrijan, 145, 172, 176, 177, 184, 301
Hassan, Abid, 218, 270, 327, 328
Hindu Mahasabha, 65, 181
Hindu-Muslim Pact, 50
Hindustan Samyavadi Sangh, 104, 110, 111, 114-16, 119, 128, 171, 286
Hingston, Maj., 63
Ho Chi Minh, 342
Hoare, Sir Samuel, (Lord Templewood), 96, 101
Hunt, Lt. Col., 222
Huq, Maulana Fazlul, 184

Independence of India League, 69, 79
Indian Civil Service, 30-31, 33-38, 95
Indian Independence League, 217, 220-25, 229, 234-36, 238-40, 259, 261, 267, 268, 277, 292; 293, 328, 333, 335, 336, 338
Indian Legion, 204, 205, 213-16, 218, 234, 297, 334
Indian Legislative Assembly, 50, 51, 53, 60, 64, 67, 75-76, 102, 107, 118; 127, 185
Indian National Army, beginning of, 220-24
Bose takes leadership of, 236-38, 338, 334
early conflict about status vis-a-vis Japanese army, 230-33
establishment of Rani of Jhansi regiment, 243-44
evaluation of, 274 ff., 284
handicaps of, 251-52; 274-76
Imphal Campaign role of, 244-45, 250 ff.
mobilization of men and money, 247-48
on the defensive against the British army, 262 ff.
reasons for early growth, 225-28
relations with Japanese army, 235, 250-51
Indian Statutory Commission (Simon Commission) 67-69, 76, 77, 89, 118
The Indian Struggle, 59, 79, 104, 113, 121, 147, 235, 285, 310, 329
Irwin, Lord, 67, 80, 85, 86, 90, 92, 93, 96, 98 (See also, Gandhi-Irwin Pact)
Isoda, Gen., 253, 271, 293
Italy, 140, 187, 200, 201, 203, 209, 214, 273, 275
Iwakuro, Col., 230, 231
Iyengar, A. Rangaswami, 48
Iyengar, Srinivas, 82
Jayakar, M.R., 64
Jinnah, M.A., 71, 138
Jugantar Party, 66, 128
Justice Party, 68, 130
Kabul, 195-99
Kase, Toshikazu, 255
Kawabe, Gen., 250
Keith, A.B., 118
Kelkar, N.C., 48, 64
Kelsall, Lt.Col., 61
Kemal, Mustapha, 113, 121
Khan, Abad, 195, 197
Khan, Abdul Ghaffar, 87, 98
Khan, Major-General
Shah Nawaz, 226, 232, 252, 263, 265, 279-80, 321, 334, 337
Khare, N.B., 138-39, 192-93
Khaparde, 62
Kiani, Col. M.Z., 234, 254, 270, 328
Kitchlew, Dr., 81, 321
Koiso, Gen., 260, 261, 290
Kripalani, J.B., 142
Kunizuka, Lt., 230
Kurk Kitt, 113
Lajpat Rai, Lala, 45, 56, 65, 68, 72, 125
League of Nations, 110
Liberal Party, 60
Linlithgow, Lord, 180
Lloyd George, D., 81, 97
Loganadhan, A.D., 249, 266
Lytton, Lord, 47
Macdonald, Ramsay, 80, 90, 97, 102
Majumdar, A.K., 165, 196
Malaviya, Madan Mohan, 44, 65, 80, 103
Malhotra, Uttam Chand, 9, 196-99
Manchester Guardian, 131
Mandalay, 56, 57, 163, 331
McSweeney, Terence, 76, 188
Mehta, Phirozeshah, 301
Menon, K.P.K., 229, 338
Miller, Webb, 88
Misra, Maj. L.S., 252
Mitra, Satyendra Chandra, 56
Modern Review, 122, 129, 155, 330
Monteford Act, 36, 43, 49
Moonje, Dr., 80
Mukerjee, Hiren, 166
Mukerji, Girija, 201, 205, 215, 216
Mukherji, Sir Asutosh, 26
Mullick, S.N., 43
Munich Pact, 147
Munshi, K.M., 165, 166, 180
Muslim League, 137, 138, 267, 268
Mutaguchi, Gen., 253, 276, 282, 283, 339

Naidu, Sarojini, 46, 87, 160, 162, 320
Nambiar, A.C.N., 205
Nandji, Sharda (Swami), 9, 10
Naoroji, Dadabhai, 12, 301
Narayan Jayaprakash, 119, 153, 292, 317
Nariman, K.F., 69
National College, 42
National Front, (See Communist Party of India)
National Volunteer Corps, 17, 42
Nationalist Party, 64, 65, 118
Navajawan Bharat Sabha, (See All India Youth Congress)
Nehru, Motilal, 40, 45, 47, 48, 50, 51, 55, 64, 68, 71, 72, 74, 80, 81, 86, 88, 89, 92, 327
’Neo-Vivekananda Group’, 21-22
Nu, Thakin, 294, 338
Oaten, E.F., 25-26
Obeidullah, Maulvi, 288
Ogawa, Major, 230
Oshima, Gen., 217
Pant, Govind Vallabh, 148, 152-56, 159, 160, 164
Parikh, Nathalal, D., 193, 301
Patel, Goverdhanbai I., 111
Patel, Purshottamdas T., 111
Patel, Vallabhbhai, 79, 89, 93, 98, 100, 111, 112, 142, 143, 159, 315
Patel, Vithalbhai, 48, 75, 80, 106-12, 125, 132, 186
Pibulsonggram, Field Marshal, 228, 238
Prasad, Rajendra, 40, 103, 142-44, 162, 167, 172, 320
Pratap, Raja Mahendra, 288
Presidency College, 21, 25, 26, 28
Protestant European School, 15
Provisional Government of Free India, 240-43, 244, 247, 248, 256, 260, 261, 265, 273, 274
Puri, Satyanand (Swami), 224
Quaroni, Alberto, 198, 199
Qureshi, Shuaib, 67
Radhakrishnan, S., 284

Radical Democratic Party, 171, 172
Raghavan, N., 224, 229, 231
Rahman, Col. Habibur, 270-72, 328
Rajagopalachari, C., 40, 48, 148
Ramakrishna, 18, 19, 21, 22, 193
INDEX

Rathor, Maj., 252
Ravenshaw Collegiate School, 16, 17
Ray, P.C., 21
Reading, Lord, 44
Reddaway, 36
Responsivist Party, 64
Reynolds, Reginald, 85
Ribbentrop, 203
Rolland, Romain, 122-24, 329
Round Table Conference, 44, 45, 80, 81, 89, 90, 92, 93, 96-98, 102, 109, 321
Roy, Dr. Bidhan Chandra, 50, 63
Roy, Dilip Kumar, 30, 32, 36-38, 57-59, 104, 129, 149, 322, 323, 327, 330, 331
Roy, Kiron Shankar, 88
Roy, M.N., 172, 288
Roy, P.C., 86
Roy. Satkaripati, 50
Russia, 112, 177, 179, 187, 196-200, 203, 204, 217, 218, 244, 261, 265, 268-70, 277, 304
Russo-German Pact, 200
Saha, Gopinath, 53, 54
Saha, Meghnad, 139
Sahay, A.M., 241
Sahgal, Lt.Col. P.K., 263-65, 280
Salt Act, 86, 87
Samra, Chattar Singh, 298
Samsa, B.N., 66
Sapru, Tej Bahadur, 80, 92
Saraswati, Sahajanand, (Swami), 171
Sarkar, A.N., 248, 335
Sarkar, Hemanta Kumar, 30, 33
Sarkar, Mukundlal, 103, 104, 193
Sastri, Srinivasa, 80, 92
Sato, Gen., 254, 283
Saturday Evening Post, 108
Savarkar, Veer, 181, 182, 216, 288
Schnekl, Emilie, 218, 297, 331, 332
Scottish Church College, 28
Sen, Keshav Chandra, 14
Sengupta, J.M., 65, 66, 81, 88
Shankarlal, Lala, 166
Shedai, Iqbal, 214
Shidei, Gen., 271
Shigemitsu, 291
Shraddhanand, Swami, 65
Sidhanta, N.K., 32
Simon, Lord, 67, 75, 80 (See, Indian Statutory Commission)
Singh, Sardar Ajit, 56
Singh, Baba Amar, 220
Singh, Bhagat, 75, 76, 93-94
Singh, Gyani Pritam, 220-24
Singh, Col. Guzara, 254, 270
Singh, Col. Pritham, 270
Sirkar, Sir Nilratan, 50, 63, 129
Sitaramayya, Pattabhi, 64, 81, 140-44, 146, 165, 318
Sivaram, M., 294
Slim, Field Marshal, 254, 283
Slocombe, George, 88, 89
Smiles, Sir Walter, 106
Staffenburg, Count, 297
Statesman, 42
Stracey, Col., 328
Subhaswadi Janata Parishad, 10
Sugiyama, Gen., 220, 245
Suhrawardy, Shaheed, 52
Sunday Standard, 294
Swaminathan, Capt. Lakshmi, 241, 244, 280, 335
Swaraj Party, 47-55, 64-66, 68, 163
Tagore, Rabindranath, 39, 157, 167-69
Tagore, Satyendranath, 38
Talwar, Bhagat Ram, 195, 198
Tanaka, Maj. Gen., 255
Tegart, Charles, 54
Terauchi, Field Marshal, 220, 244, 245, 250, 271
Thevar, M.L., 9
Tilak, Bal Gangadhar, 12, 42, 56, 62, 289, 322
Times of India, 313
Tojo General, 208, 220, 224, 228, 235, 236, 240, 243-46, 253, 258, 290, 295, 337
Toye, Hugh, 339
Tynanuer, Alfred, 108
Urquhart, Dr., 28, 29

Vidyarthi, Ganesh Shankar, 94
Vidyasagar Ishwar Chandra, 14
Vienna, 104, 106, 107, 119, 127
Vivekananda, Swami, 12, 17-22, 84, 193, 287, 288, 325
von Trott zu Solz, Adam, 202, 297

Wadia, Mr. Justice, 112
Wavell, Lord, 267, 268
Welfare, 72
Whitley Commission, 77, 95
Wilkinson, Ellen, 67
Willingdon, Lord, 96, 98, 100, 102
Wingate, Gen., 250
Woermann, Ernst, 203, 204

Yamamoto, Col.; 217, 218; 241; 244
Young India, 55, 75
Zinkin, Taya, 320
Biography - Subhas Chandra Bose