

# For Whom is the Independent Nation State? Subhas Chandra Bose's Views in the 1920s and 1930s

Marek MOROŃ

## Abstract

Subhas Chandra Bose is one of the great personalities of the Indian independence struggle. Yet his name is not well known outside of India. In fact he was a devoted promotor the fight for freedom without either begging for it or negotiating. In this paper the thoughts of Subhas Chandra Bose on the nation state and freedom in the 20-ties and 30-ties of XX century are presented. The process and methods of pursuing freedom for India was not a Gandhian monolith. In such a context, the views of Bose are presented and to a large extend supported by quotations from his speeches and the opinions of Indian academics. The author provides material as a result of his research visit in December 2014 to the Netaji Research Bureau and Department of History of The University of Calcutta. Both institutions are in Kolkata.

**Keywords:** *Subhas Chandra Bose, nation state, free mind, independent India.*

**Marek MOROŃ** PhD from the Jagiellonian University, lecturer at the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations at the Jagiellonian University. During the years 2001-2007 Consul General of Poland in Mumbai. He worked earlier in Polish diplomatic missions to Tehran (1981-1986) and Kolkata (1988-1992). He also lived in Bangladesh, Bahrain and Egypt. Visiting lecturer at the Warsaw University, and K.R. Cama Oriental Institute. He has written a number of papers on nationalism in South Asia. The author of the books *Sources of Bengali and Bangladeshi Nationalism* published in 2013 in Krakow and *Visit of Subhas Chandra Bose to Poland in July 1933* published in 2015 in Kolkata. Member of the Joint Council of Polish Catholics and Muslims.

**E-MAIL:** [marekpl99@hotmail.com](mailto:marekpl99@hotmail.com)

## Preface

The coming decade (2016–2026) will very likely be a time for reviewing Indian history of the last century. This will be a different line of analysis than the subaltern studies. The study of the Indian independence movements and efforts will have to be supplemented by rediscoveries and reshaped to balance the mythology created by The Congress Party. It is thus necessary to introduce the players and their activities within that history, which so far have been marginalised if not entirely consigned to oblivion. This paper may be considered as an attempt to open this subject for discussion. Subhas Chandra Bose is a personality whose thoughts, especially those of the 1920s and 30s require study in the above contexts as well as when considering Indian identity questions of the XXI century.

## 1 Introduction

The process of India's ascension to independence is known throughout the world as one developed almost exclusively by two personalities whose names and stories are a kind of common knowledge which may not seem to require any elaboration. Such a perception held by the "non-India world" and, to some extent, in Indian non-academic circles as well, was born from the decades-long political power wielded by the Congress Party in presenting and sustaining a discourse of freedom fought and won for India by the duo consisting of Gandhi the saint and Nehru the realist. Therefore, it is interesting to present some additional characters whose views contributed towards men of "free mind" being able to build a free India. The most important of such personalities, for a long time banished from much of contemporary Indian history teaching, is Subhas Chandra Bose. Subhas Chandra Bose was born 23 January 1897 and died 18 August 1945. He is known also as *Netaji* i.e. "respected leader". He was an Indian nationalist and prominent personality within the Indian independence movement. Bose was twice-elected as President of the Indian National Congress. S. C. Bose established and was the President of the All India Forward Block. During the 2nd World War Bose was the founder and Head of State of the Provisional Government of Free India and leader of the Indian National Army from 1943–1945. Bose is known and remembered for his leadership of an armed struggle for Indian independence against the British. He would always promote and actively pursue the



idea of complete self-rule i.e. independence for the people of India.

I have concentrated on one particular aspect of Bose's activity, namely his views on who should be the recipient of an independent nation state, presented towards the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s. Much has been written about Bose's activities during World War II. My intention is to focus on Bose's views expressed before that time, which I consider to be not only relevant in present-day India, but also to be a natural basis for the mindset of India's citizens.

## 2 Subhas Chandra Bose's speech on 25.12.1928: Independence of India

The third All-India Youth Congress took place on 25 December 1928 in Calcutta, two days before the annual session of the Congress Party. Subhas Chandra Bose delivered an opening speech to the delegates of the Youth Congress. Since the proceedings of the annual Congress Party session were to include a debate on whether to demand dominion status from the British or to set a clear goal for the complete independence of India, Bose referred to this point while addressing the youth gathering. Bose was an advocate and promoter of putting the issue of independence in a "clear and unequivocal manner".<sup>1</sup> In his speech to the Youth Congress Bose said:

You may ask what we gain by this resolution of independence. I say we develop a new mentality. After all what is the fundamental cause of our political degradation? It is a question of mentality and if you want to overcome the slave mentality you will do so by encouraging standing up for complete independence.<sup>2</sup>

While the independence of a state is synonymous with sovereign rule in all state affairs without any references to external principals, dominion status as debated at the end of the 1920s in India is not a precisely defined term as many others concerning the state (like nation, nationalism, identity, etc.). However the claim for dominion status for India was far from an aspiration to independency.

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<sup>1</sup>S. C. Bose, *The Essential Writings of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>Ibidem, p. 99.



Attaining dominion status, rather than independence, was the goal of M. K. Gandhi and Congress leaders at the time of Bose's speech to the Youth Congress. The majority of the Raj officials simply did not believe that Indians were capable of ruling themselves and would be in any foreseeable future. When we read notes of the meeting between Motilal Nehru (Jawaharlal Nehru's father) and Sir Grimwood Mears, the Chief Justice of the Allahabad Court, which was held on 24 March 1929, we may be amazed at the expressions and statements used by Nehru. Justice Mears relates the meeting in his letter to the Viceroy Lord Irving:

The Pandit said to me 'Assume dominion status to consist of 1.2.3.....10 ingredients. If in the discussion the least objection is taken to our having 2, 5 and 7 we shall acquiesce readily. Once we get the dominion status of any quality – in however limited a degree we shall be content to prove ourselves responsible and then readily and without argument be given other and wider powers as with the passing of time we prove ourselves capable'.<sup>3</sup>

Justice Mears who held the post from 1919 till his retirement in 1932 knew the Nehru family, both Motilal and Jawaharlal. In 1923 Jawaharlal was elected president of the Allahabad municipality. His efficiency in the post was much praised by those who worked with him.<sup>4</sup> The statements cited above made by Motilal during his conversation with Justice Mears reflect the way the Congress leaders' minds worked. We may compare Motilal's words as quoted above, with the opinions expressed in the XIX century by the Congress.

“The merciful dispensation of providence which has placed India under the great British dominion...’ - such phrases were often heard at the early sessions of the Congress”.<sup>5</sup> The attitude of asking, if not begging<sup>6</sup> is characteristic of requests or suggestions as made in the aforementioned conversation in 1929. When on 31 October 1929 the Viceroy in his speech implicitly stated that constitutional progress in India may eventually lead to attaining the dominion status, many of the prominent figures of the Indian freedom movement issued a declaration of gratitude to the Viceroy.<sup>7</sup> Bose opposed any praise or thanksgiving for such paternalistic gestures. I mention here

<sup>3</sup>M. Bose, *Raj, Secrets, Revolution. A life of Subhas Chandra Bose*, p. 92.

<sup>4</sup>F. Moraes, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, p. 101.

<sup>5</sup>B.R. Nanda, *The Nehrus: Motilal and Jawaharlal*, p. 48.

<sup>6</sup>M. Bose, *The Lost Hero: A Biography of Subhas Bose*, p.117.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibidem*.



a few examples of the most moderate approaches of the Congress elite in order to project Subhas Chandra Bose's views on relations with the British and his guidelines on achieving independence. These were almost in their entirety fundamentally different from the aforementioned moderate views of Gandhi's mainstream Congress.

### 3 Subhas Chandra Bose's views in comparison with the Gandhian Congress mainstream.

Among the figures whose thoughts had significant influence on Bose was Swami Vivekananda. Remembering Vivekananda's words "give up being a slave" Subhas Bose said: "The greatest curse for a man is to remain a slave".<sup>8</sup> The differences not just of opinion, but in the very concept of how to deal with the British and how to pursue the cause of independence for India, between Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose were significant. Bose understood the value of Gandhi's non-violence, but never accepted it as the only philosophy for national struggle. Gandhi always avoided extreme measures. This was not Bose's attitude.<sup>9</sup>

At the time of Bose's entry into politics, the scene in India was already occupied by established players and, perhaps more importantly, the invention of mass politics on Indian turf appeared to have grown into a formidable force, created and skilfully operated by M. K. Gandhi. There are opinions that the phenomenon of Gandhi could have only happened in India. The majority of people, i.e. the masses, held ancient religious beliefs which included avatars (God incarnated in a man) and they looked upon Gandhi as such. His doctrine of Ramraj, non-violent religious politics saintly dressed in loin clothes in the environment of mass superstitions, induced the masses in the 1920s to support him. Bose said: "Born in any other country he [Gandhi] might have been a complete misfit"<sup>10</sup>. When in 1920 at the Congress meeting in Nagpur, Mohammad Ali Jinnah did not address Gandhi as "Mahatma", but merely as "Mr Gandhi" the gathering protested strongly. They wanted Jinnah to revere him as a kind of an avatar, a "God man", which Jinnah declined to do.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup>A. Ghosh, *Netaji: A Realist and Visionary*, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup>Ibidem, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup>S. Debnath, *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: His Philosophy, Political Thought and Contribution*, p. 225.

<sup>11</sup>Ibidem, p. 224.



Gandhi did not see the future India as a modern country. It is possible to elaborate extensively on Gandhi's metaphoric statements about distance from modernity but his phrasing and guidelines certainly point towards such an approach. Even arguments on this subject made by M. J. Akbar, in my opinion one of the top minds of 21st century India, do not sound convincing to me.<sup>12</sup> Even though the very term "modern" may have a number of definitions, none of them would include the separation of India from the outside world and maintaining it as some kind of a rural paradise with guidelines for its functioning coming from spiritual leaders. This is not far from what Gandhi envisaged for the future India.

Ashrams are not new institutions and ascetics and yogins are not novel phenomenon. [...] But it is not their lead that we shall have to follow, if we are to create new India at once happy and great. We must be inspired by robust optimism. We have to live in the present and adjust ourselves to modern conditions.<sup>13</sup>

These are the words of Subhas Bose from his speech made on 25 December 1928, the one that included the quotation at the beginning of the paper. Bose believed that the modern would come to India soon. "Gandhi's is the last generation before the modern comes".<sup>14</sup> Naturally with this kind of view, Bose could not agree with Gandhi's concepts for the future India. He openly opposed and criticised Gandhi.

While pointing to the Gandhian non-modern guidelines it may be appropriate to mention that it was by no account India alone where concepts of considering the "modern" as something undesirable were alive. In July 1942 there was a conference in Kyoto on the subject of "How to overcome the modern?" Fighting the modern was not the monopoly of Asian-rooted ideas. The "modern" is a European ideology born in the 18th century promoting the secular and the materialistic throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Fighting the modern emotional appeal is often called Occidentalism (however the same term is used to describe the promoters of Western ideas in 19th century Russia: "*zapadniki*"<sup>15</sup>). The modern was described at the Kyoto conference as a basically European thing and a phenomena of Westernisa-

<sup>12</sup>M. J. Akbar, *Barbarians of the Faith: They Are at the Gates of both Peshawar and Paris*, passim.

<sup>13</sup>S. Debnath, *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose...*, p. 227.

<sup>14</sup>S. Ghosh, *Subhas Chandra Bose: A Psycho-Analytical Study*, p. 119.

<sup>15</sup>A. Flis, *Chrześcijaństwo i Europa. Studia z dziejów cywilizacji Zachodu*, p. 337.



tion. It was synonymous with a disease that infected the Japanese spirit.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Occidentalism may be described as an attempt to dehumanise the image of the West. Occidentalism in Asia was to a large extent a reaction against colonialism and was loaded with negative emotions, if not hatred, towards the West.

Gandhi certainly neither radiated nor expressed any contempt or loathing towards the West but saw it as a kind of pollution of the established dharma. In such a line of thinking this pollution had to be contained and kept at bay, away from the healthy spirit of India. If we take a look and compare the earlier activities of Gandhi and Bose and their respective views, we will see that they were influenced by very different concepts and temperaments. Gandhi (as has been peculiarly forgotten) believed for a long time in the idea of “imperial citizenship” ideology rather than Indian nationalism. Moreover, during his almost twenty-year struggle for the rights of Indians in South Africa he always referred to these rights in the context of the British Empire. The idea of imperial citizenship in India indicated a way of getting political rights within the framework of the British Empire. For a long time Gandhi considered it a perfectly sound and progressive idea as well as being the ultimate aim for the Indians. This concept was shared by a large section of the Western educated elite of Indians at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Yet it was neither promoted nor even considered as a politically promising instrument for creating mass politics or inspiring the masses. Gandhi understood that imperial citizenship, interesting as it was for some of the Westernised “literati”, would not get mass support. It was Gandhi who mastered the art of creating mass politics in India. However, his temperament had not developed out of revolutionary ideas but rather from the concept of negotiating, if not adapting the methods to achieve results by not contradicting directly the essential position of the British.<sup>17</sup>

On the contrary Subhas Chandra Bose was greatly impressed and influenced by the personalities and ideas of the revolutionary movement of Bengal. It could be seen as a line of influences parallel and sometimes synonymous to the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda and Ramakrishna.<sup>18</sup> The other great personality of the Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru, when put in power as the first Prime Minister of independent India did not follow Gandhi's

<sup>16</sup>I. Buruma, A. Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies*, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup>S. Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire*, passim.

<sup>18</sup>A. Ghosh, *Netaji...*, p.16.





guidelines on how India should function. Yet, Nehru – a Fabian acolyte as one source would say<sup>19</sup> – came to believe that only by not opposing Gandhi would he be able to move forward and perhaps more importantly – upward. Nehru was assured of his conclusions having been witness to the methods Gandhi used to finally get rid of Bose from the Congress in 1939.

#### 4 Subhas Chandra Bose's quest for a new mentality in India

Bose did not guess correctly that following Gandhi's generation, modernity would come to India. He believed that a modern India could only be built by people who were ready for it in terms of education and formal qualifications and, moreover, by people with the mentality of free men, convinced of their own value. In his interview for the Free Press on 25 February 1933, just before sailing to Europe, Bose said: "The task of the party is i.e. [...] to create a new generation of men and women fully trained and equipped for the battle of life".<sup>20</sup>

The new man and woman were to be free from the burden of the slave mentality otherwise, as Bose indicated, they would not be able to move India towards the modern world. No matter what "modern" might mean, it would certainly not be the India of the bullock cart, ashram and spinning wheel. As the chairman at the Students Conference held in Lahore on 19 October 1929 Bose said: "The only method of achieving freedom is for us to think and feel like free men".<sup>21</sup> To possess a free mind and to act in a natural manner as a free man was, according to Bose, the fundamental condition for the people of India to shape their country and follow their destiny.

In my book "Sources of Bengali and Bangladeshi nationalism" (written in the Polish language)<sup>22</sup> I use the term "semi-slave mentality". Such a state of affairs (that is being treated with contempt as second class citizens for decades) created in a significant portion of South Asia people a trait which, from the European perspective, was perceived as a semi-slave mentality.

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<sup>19</sup>M. Bose, *The Lost Hero...*, p. XV.

<sup>20</sup>S. Ghosh, *Subhas Chandra Bose...*, p.117.

<sup>21</sup>S. Debnath, *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose...*, p. 218.

<sup>22</sup>M. Moroń, *Źródła nacjonalizmu bengalskiego i bangladeskiego*, p. 44.





I used the expression in my book mentioned above based on my personal experience of having visited and lived on the Subcontinent in different periods since 1967. For me there appeared to be a kind of embarrassment, servility, a subaltern attitude in the behaviour of the locals and a natural positioning of themselves as inferior in all aspects to visitors from the “West”. During my first sojourns as a teenager, I was confused when encountering such attitudes and simply did not understand why such behaviour might occur. It obviously did not seem to me to be a natural condition of the human mind and spirit, of men. It was overcoming such a mentality, ridding themselves of that strange subaltern or slave mentality that Subhas Chandra Bose indicated as a necessity for creating an Indian state of free citizens.

What is this slave mentality? One of the descriptions of the phenomenon is as follows:

By slave mentality I mean the emotional mind set of some people embedded generation after generation that says: I am poor not rich, weak not strong, dependent not independent, helpless not self-sufficient, slave not master and because of this please – I need help, I am depending on you, I can't do this alone and this becomes a mantra of servitude.<sup>23</sup>

Feelings of inferiority are another way of expressing what a slave or colonial mentality may be. The said concept refers to the situation when the colonised people perceive the coloniser as intrinsically and generally superior to them. While both my personal evaluations quoted from my book as well as the descriptions or definitions presented above refer to the second half of the 20th century it is also possible to proffer some present-day opinions of sharply self-critical Indians.

In Sanjeev Subhlok's blog we find the following:<sup>24</sup> “Indians are probably a slave ‘species’. Not for them the independence of mind and determination of purpose that Vivekananda talked about”. The last citation I bring forward as an example of baseless views, which may be irrelevant to the state of affairs in India in the second decade of the 21st century, yet I wish to emphasise the consistent references to the same sources, i.e. Vivekananda.

Subhas Chandra Bose should have been the greatest pride of the British Raj. Had he been considered a product of the Raj and also of Bengal, the

<sup>23</sup>J. Moore, ‘Slave Mentality’ Caused Katrina’s Chaos, [www 01] (accessed 14.12.2014).

<sup>24</sup>S. Subhlok, *Sanjeev Subhlok’s Revolutionary Blog*, [www 02] (accessed 22.04.2012).



Raj itself could not have been more proud than to present Bose as their own man. What the British thought of the Bengalis may best be presented with the quotation below. The member of the Council to the Governor General of Bengal Lord Thomas Macaulay wrote in his text published in 1860:

The physical constitution of a Bengali is faint, even very weak. He lives in a permanent steam bath. His actions slow, his limbs delicate, even lazy. For centuries he was thumbed upon by other more courageous and stronger breeds. Courage, independence, braveness are the characteristics that his psychological construction is not prepared for. His mind is as his body. He is weak to the point of being defenseless. These characteristics raise sympathy mixed with contempt from the children of cold climate. [...] Big promises, cunning excuses, lies, cheating, forgery are the defensive and offensive weapon of these people from the Ganges delta.<sup>25</sup>

The Bengalis were included by the British in the list of the so called “non-martial races”, meaning that the Bengalis were weak and allegedly had all the characteristics mentioned in Macaulay’s publication, whereby they were worse than the martial races, i.e. the peoples of Punjab, Baluchistan, and Rajputana. When reviewing the story of the 19th century relations between the British and the people of the Subcontinent we will find that it was Bengal and the Bengalis who not only were able to appreciate European novelties, but would soon come to the conclusion that statehood and sovereignty did not have to be a European monopoly.

It is perhaps true that the peoples of the Western regions of the Indian subcontinent were more willing to fight throughout the Raj period than the peoples of Bengal or South India, but it was the Bengalis who recognised the benefits arising from interactions with European thought as well as the parliamentary and the judiciary systems which they successfully adapted as their own.

Bose’s mind set and views may be naturally seen as those of a European realist and at the same time of an Indus deeply conscious of his cultural and civilisational roots; what is important to note, he did not see any contradiction in identifying himself as both. These are Bose’s two opinions on the

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<sup>25</sup>T. B. Macaulay, *Critical, Historical, and Miscelenous Essays*, p.19–20.



subject: “We want to build a new modern nation on the basis of our old culture and civilization”<sup>26</sup>; “India is a nation fully holding its head high in the modern age”<sup>27</sup>.

Bose realised the Indian head was not held so high, otherwise he would not have exhorted for an abandonment of the “slave mentality”. In his book, Amita Ghosh says that Bose was a born optimist and at the same time his modernism was rooted in tradition.<sup>28</sup> These characteristics did not contradict themselves in Bose’s views and opinions.

## 5 Subhas Chandra Bose – politician or a hero, rationalist or a visionary

Bose’s views and political indications were based on his vast historical knowledge and were a result of his “bird-eye view on the whole panorama of the history of world”.<sup>29</sup> He would often mention some examples of empires whose rise was eventually followed by a fall and applied this sequence of processes to the British Empire. Bose’s emotional attitude towards Britain contrasted in some way with his knowledge and historical fluency because it was almost entirely negative.

This is interesting, if not strange since, as supposedly an experienced politician, Bose must have been aware that emotions in politics affected one’s judgment and thus could not be of assistance, not to mention serve as guidelines in political activities. Bose argued that there should be no compromise with Britain since compromise was only possible “when there are common interests”.<sup>30</sup> In Bose’s view, Britain and India had no common interests, no kinship, no common culture or race, and economically India was but a supplier of materials and jobs which in terms of administration were primarily for the British etc.

These arguments may well be debated but it should be noted that Bose did not say that Britain and India, in its modern model as Bose saw it, shared common ideas on statehood, judiciary, political system, economic development and last but not least a set of values. In fact these values which Bose

<sup>26</sup>A. Ghosh, *Netaji...*, p.31.

<sup>27</sup>Ibidem, p. 31.

<sup>28</sup>Ibidem, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup>S. Ghosh, *Subhas Chandra Bose...*, p.108.

<sup>30</sup>Ibidem, p. 109.



himself to a large extent considered as his own became the official principles of an independent India. For example at the presidential address at Haripura in 1938 he stated that “the way for Britain is to transform the empire into a federation of free states”.<sup>31</sup> But then a decade earlier in 1928 Bose said that a free state could be attained by free people, free first of all in terms of rejecting forever the slave mentality. Power can be won in a struggle only by free people and “only those who won power can handle it properly. If 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”.<sup>32</sup>

In my discussions at the Netaji Research Bureau on 10 December 2014, an opinion of a certain American historian (I regret to say that I misplaced a note containing his name) was mentioned. The historian stated that India attaining independence was like a father giving his child the keys to a car and letting him drive alone for the first time.

Keeping in mind that two weeks after declaring independence, Nehru and Patel asked the last Viceroy to stay a year longer as Governor General and help run the state machine, we may say the child wanted his father to watch for some time if he or she would really manage to drive that car. In his Revolutionary blog Sanjeev Sabhlok writes:

The truth is that Indians could not organize themselves to defeat the British till the British left largely on their own accord because they were weakened by two wars and India has become a drain not a source of wealth.<sup>33</sup>

Neither the opinions nor the facts are brought in this paper, to build any kind of conclusions on something being right or wrong, good or bad. Rather the point is to show that all the time there was – towards the end of the 1920s and in the 1930s – another Indian independence discourse, another political temperament and vision of gaining independence, different than the Gandhian one. Bose neither asked nor negotiated for the keys to drive the automobile.

We can rather imagine him saying: “Just give me the keys for my automobile, I have the driving license and I am a good mechanic who knows what

<sup>31</sup>Ibidem, p.110.

<sup>32</sup>S. C. Bose, *Collected Works, Vol. 9: Congress President Speeches, Articles and Letters January 1938 – May 1939*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup>S. Subhlok, *Sanjeev Subhlok's Revolutionary Blog*, [[www 02](http://www.02)].



my car needs". Bose once told Nehru:<sup>34</sup> "Frothy sentiments and pious platitudes do not make foreign policy". Bose threw in his lot with the Congress since there was no space for a new mass political movement. He was not impressed by the hindu rashtra and Hindutva of Savarkar, RSS or Mahasabha. The communists, while close to Bose's revolutionary sympathy, rejected religion. In fact they rejected spirituality and replaced it with materialism. This of course could never be accepted by Bose.

The space for a pan-Indian mass movement was occupied and controlled by M. K. Gandhi. It is a separate issue whether Bose was capable or would have managed to create a mass political movement as a phenomenon on the scale that Gandhi successfully created. Having waded through the voluminous correspondence between Gandhi and Bose, we eventually come to a momentum of exchanges of what may be termed some final remarks.

When, in spite of what Bose would expect, Gandhi engaged in comparatively local issues in the Rajkot Princely state rather than in the vital issues of the Congress Party he criticised him for setting priorities of this kind. Gandhi responded in his letter of 2 April 1939 (dispatched from the Birla House):

The views you express seem to me to be so diametrically opposed to those of others and my own that I do not see any possibility of bridging them [...] What is wrong is not the differences between us but loss of mutual respect and trust.<sup>35</sup>

Finally in his letter written in Rajkot on 10 April 1939 Gandhi tells Bose:

You are wrong if you think that you have a single personal enemy among the old guard [in the Congress].<sup>36</sup>

It does not really matter whether Gandhi meant that he was not a single enemy of Bose or that there were no personal enemies of Bose and all the enemies were just political. We may better understand the meaning of Gandhi's words when we read his letter to R. Tagore answering a message conveyed by C. F. Andrews, the letter Tagore wrote to Gandhi. Gandhi says: "Let him [Bose] trust that no one in the Committee has anything personal against Subhas. For me he is as my son".<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup>S. Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire*, p. 161.

<sup>35</sup>S. C. Bose, *Collected Works*, Vol. 9..., p.145.

<sup>36</sup>Ibidem, p. 166.

<sup>37</sup>M. K. Gandhi, *Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 94.



The correspondence between Gandhi and Bose even in 1938 and 1939 always contained mutual inquiries on health and offers of assistance in health problems. So the phrase “for me he is as my son” does not come as a surprise though should be seen as nothing more than pleasant rhetoric, poles apart from a shrewd and indisputable line of action by Gandhi to outmanoeuvre and eventually push Bose out of the Congress.

At one point, as if there were any doubts about the matter, Gandhi stated: “after all Subhas Bose is not an enemy of this country” (Bardoli, 31 January 1939).<sup>38</sup> Bose’s personality is described as “being a born optimist with energy, a visionary but no proper organization and planning”.<sup>39</sup> Yet the above plus his profound knowledge of history and apparent political abilities are a basis for questioning whether he could not foresee the nature of events forthcoming after Hitler came to power in 1933. A man of wisdom, as we may consider Bose to be, should never have believed that Hitler would help the Indians against the British. The idea of pursuing his goal – the independence of India against all odds and by any means at hand cannot be regarded as having been profoundly considered from a political point of view.<sup>40</sup> Yet he proceeded according to it.

Bose of the 1920s and 1930s was an Indian freedom fighter operating within the perimeters of his views and convictions as well as the existing contemporary political environment. The views were rather those of a hero, but the demands of the political environment called rather for a shrewd if not Machiavellian approach. This kind of environment Bose could not reconcile with.

No doubt we may say that Subhas Chandra Bose was a man of action, an admirer of those who could see the right moment for a spontaneous response. This may be seen as a natural inclination of the revolutionist that Bose was at heart. He was also a man of “no compromise” principles as far as his main, if not only goal was concerned, i.e. independence for India. Compromises and variations in applying force are integral elements of politics. Bose confirmed his views on compromises in his speech at the Ramgarh Anti-compromise Conference organised parallel to the annual Congress Party session in 1940 where he said: “Struggle must take a form of militant direct action”.<sup>41</sup> Even

<sup>38</sup>S. C. Bose, *Collected Works*, Vol. 9..., p.88.

<sup>39</sup>S. Ghosh, *Subhas Chandra Bose...*, p.56.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 200.

<sup>41</sup>A. Ghosh, *Netaji...*p. 37.



earlier his vocabulary had been equally uncompromising. In his Haripura address in February 1938, he spoke about the problem of achieving freedom: “The time is opportune for renewing our efforts for the final solution of this problem”<sup>42</sup>.

## 6 Subhas Chandra Bose – a rare glimpse of Subhas in love

This chapter presents a glimpse of Bose’s private life which makes quite a contrast with other Indian freedom fighters whose relations with the opposite sex were either nil or did not have any component of romance. Bose focused practically all his efforts and his natural revolutionary zeal on the freedom of India. These efforts were to be pursued at all cost and against all odds. This opinion may be contrasted with the background of Subhas Bose the rationalist, who in fact admired the rational lines in European thought, and the aspiring politician who for some time indeed fulfilled the role of a leader.

Here we may note in Bose some level of emotional restlessness, a tendency towards hasty decisions or impulsiveness as emphasised by Swagatha Ghosh.<sup>43</sup> The only item in Bose’s correspondence where I found the aforementioned characteristics of emotion, restlessness or impatience unconnected with the quest for the freedom of India but rather to his private life was in a letter written to Mme Emilie Schenkl dated 12 August 1937 in which she informed him about her trip to Genoa. He wrote in response: “I was glad to receive your letters from Vienna, Genoa and Pollau. I would like to know who arranged your trip to Genoa? Who was the gentleman who called you to Genoa? I think it was an Indian, isn’t that so? Who was the gentleman for whom you worked for few months in Vienna?”<sup>44</sup>

These words do not contribute directly to answering the title question of who should get an independent nation state. However they allow us a unique glimpse into the private space of Bose the freedom fighter. We may presume his words express a man’s anxiety about some peculiar situations his future wife seemed to find herself. Is Bose jealous or is he suspicious that someone for political reasons wants to get close to him via Ms Schenkl? Certainly jealousy cannot be excluded.

<sup>42</sup>S. C. Bose, *Collected Works*, Vol. 9..., p. 10.

<sup>43</sup>S. Ghosh, *Subhas Chandra Bose...*, p.200.

<sup>44</sup>S. C. Bose, *Collected Works*, Vol. 7: *Letters to Emilie Schenkl 1934–1942*, p. 154.





If we look at the other figures devoted to the struggle for India's freedom like Savarkar, Hedgewar, C. R. Das, the whole top brass of the Congress Party (with the exception of J. Nehru) we will not come across any – shall we say – explicitly manifested love affairs or expressions of such emotions as love. The deeply hidden relations with Emily Schenkl allow us the insight that Bose was not only a hero and a revolutionary, but also a delicate if not shy man who kept his personal feelings away from what he considered his destiny i.e. the struggle for an independent India. Bose's letters to Emilie are always carefully elaborated. References to his private life are rare and almost always indirect, often written in German. Aside from visualising an independent India and promoting freedom of mind as a prerequisite for achieving this goal, there was still some space left in Bose's for private moments of life.

## 7 Subhas Chandra Bose – independent nation state for men of free mind only

In my opinion, Bose's unique contribution to the discourse of freedom and independence in India consists of emphasising the mentality of a free man as an indispensable condition of successful attaining and governing the nation state India. Only a man of free mind and soul, conscious of the value of his culture and traditions, spiritual and religious yet not a bigot nor an extremist is fit to have an independent state. *Nation state* always meant for Bose a secular and modern Indian state, never a Bengali state. When a journalist referred to him as a Bengali politician, Bose told him “not to call him provincial”. He understood the concept of state was neither idealistic, Hegelian nor liberal, communist nor fascist but some kind of a mixture of all these characteristics.<sup>45</sup>

When presenting the title question I have hoped to make an attempt to find the special and characteristic element of Bose's thought which, while reviewing the efforts made to gain freedom for many Indians, may be singled out as unique for Bose. It is the abandonment of the slave or semi-slave mentality that for Bose was an essential primary step towards claiming independence. A free man deriving strength from the very nature of his freedom will not ask, compromise, beg or enter into various negotiations to get closer to his goal, namely the independent state. Bose's man fights for his rights and

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<sup>45</sup>A. Ghosh, *Netaji...*, p. 236.



does not negotiate to get what is his by virtue of his birth rights as Tilak used to say.

One can never go into speculations of “what would have happened if” while commenting on or evaluating the history of India after 1947. India is an unquestioned success in many categories used to define a state although, of course, not in all categories as there is still an enormous amount of poverty in the country. The success attained a new level at the end of the 20th century. Since then the “modern” as Bose visualised it, has matured. Contemporary India feels every year more at home among the independent nation states which for decades have been seen and recognised as modern. Yet, contrary to Bose’s conviction, the Gandhi generation had not been the last before the modern would come. The slave mentality diminished as a phenomenon and may only be elaborated upon today as a characteristic of the past. Only now, in first decades of the 21st century, India approaches the model which Subhas Chandra Bose presented it in his views and imagined in his dreams.



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