



Role of Subhash Chandra Bose in National Movement

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Annotation:

Subhash Chandra Bose (23 January 1897 – 18 August 1945) was an Indian nationalist whose defiance of British authority in India made him a hero among many Indians, but his wartime alliances with Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan left a legacy vexed by authoritarianism, anti-Semitism, and military failure. The honorific Netaji (Hindi: "Respected Leader") was first applied to Bose in Germany in early 1942—by the Indian soldiers of the Indische Legion and by the German and Indian officials in the Special Bureau for India in Berlin. It is now used throughout India.

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Introduction

Subhash Bose was born into wealth and privilege in a large Bengali family in Orissa during the British Raj. ¹The early recipient of an Anglocentric education, he was sent after college to England to take the Indian Civil Service examination. He succeeded with distinction in the vital first exam but demurred at taking the routine final exam, citing nationalism to be a higher calling. Returning to India in 1921, Bose joined the nationalist movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. He followed Jawaharlal Nehru to leadership in a group within the Congress which was less keen on constitutional reform and more open to socialism. Bose became Congress president in 1938. After reelection in 1939, differences arose between him and the Congress leaders², including Gandhi, over the future federation of British India and princely states, but also because discomfort had grown among the Congress leadership over Bose's negotiable attitude to non-violence, and his plans for greater powers for himself. After the large majority of the Congress ³Working Committee members resigned in protest. Bose resigned as president and was eventually ousted from the party.

In April 1941 Bose arrived in Nazi Germany, where the leadership offered unexpected but equivocal sympathy for India's independence. German funds were employed to open a Free India Centre in Berlin. A 3,000-strong⁴ Free India Legion was recruited from among Indian POWs captured by Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps to serve under Bose.⁵ Although peripheral to their main goals, the Germans inconclusively considered a land invasion of India throughout 1941. By the spring of 1942, the German army was mired in Russia and Bose became keen to move to southeast Asia, where Japan had just won quick victories. Adolf Hitler during his only meeting with Bose in late May 1942⁶ offered to arrange a submarine. During this time, Bose became a father; his wife, or companion, Emilie Schenkl, gave birth to a baby girl. Identifying strongly with the Axis powers, Bose boarded a German submarine in February 1943. Off Madagascar, he was transferred to a Japanese submarine from which he disembarked in Japanese-held Sumatra in May 1943.⁷

With Japanese support, Bose revamped the Indian National Army (INA), which comprised Indian prisoners of war of the Indian Army who had been captured by the Japanese in the Battle of Singapore⁸. A Provisional Government of Free India was declared on the Japanese-occupied Andaman and Nicobar Islands and was nominally presided by Bose. Although Bose was unusually driven and charismatic, the Japanese considered him to be militarily unskilled, and his soldierly effort was short-lived.⁹ In late 1944 and early 1945, the Indian Army reversed the Japanese attack on India. Almost half the Japanese forces and the participating INA contingent were killed. The remaining INA was driven down the Malay Peninsula and surrendered with the recapture of Singapore. Bose chose to escape to Manchuria to seek a future in the Soviet Union¹⁰ which he believed to have turned anti-British. He died from third-degree burns received when his overloaded plane crashed in Japanese Taiwan on August 18, 1945. Some Indians did not believe that the crash had occurred, expecting Bose to return to secure India's independence. The Indian National Congress, the main instrument of Indian nationalism, praised Bose's patriotism¹¹ but distanced itself from his tactics and ideology. The British Raj, never seriously threatened by the INA, charged 300 INA officers with treason in the INA trials, but eventually backtracked in the face of opposition by the Congress, and a new mood in Britain for rapid decolonisation in India.¹²

Bose's legacy is mixed. Among many in India, he is the muscular hero, his saga serving as a would-be counterpoise to the many actions of regeneration, negotiation, and reconciliation over a quarter-century through which the independence of India was achieved. His collaborations with Japanese Fascism and Nazism pose serious ethical dilemmas, especially his reluctance to publicly criticize the worst excesses of German anti-Semitism from 1938 onwards or to offer refuge in India to its victims¹³

Subhash Bose, aged 24, arrived ashore in India at Bombay on the morning of 16 July 1921 and immediately set about arranging an interview with Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi, aged 51, was the leader of the non-cooperation movement that had taken India by storm the previous year and in a quarter-century would evolve to secure its independence. Gandhi happened to be in Bombay and agreed to see Bose that afternoon.¹⁴ In Bose's account of the meeting, written many years later, he pilloried Gandhi with question after question. Bose thought Gandhi's answers were vague, his goals unclear, his plan for achieving them not thought through. Gandhi and Bose differed in this first meeting on the question of means- for Gandhi non-violent means to any end were non-negotiable; in Bose's thought¹⁵, all means were acceptable in the service of anti-colonial ends. They differed on the question of ends- Bose was attracted to totalitarian models of governance, which were anathematized by Gandhi. According to historian Gordon, "Gandhi, however, set Bose on to the leader of the Congress and Indian nationalism

in Bengal, C. R. Das, and in him Bose found the leader whom he sought¹⁶. Das was more flexible than Gandhi, more sympathetic to the extremism that had attracted idealistic young men such as Bose in Bengal. Das launched Bose into nationalist politics.¹⁷ Bose would work within the ambit of the Indian National Congress politics for nearly 20 years even as he tried to change its course.

He started the newspaper *Swaraj* and took charge of publicity for the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. His mentor was Chittaranjan Das who was a spokesman for aggressive nationalism in Bengal. In the year 1923, Bose was elected the President of Indian Youth Congress and also the Secretary of Bengal State Congress. He was also the editor of the newspaper "Forward", founded by Chittaranjan Das. Bose worked as the CEO of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation for Das when the latter was elected mayor of Calcutta in 1924.¹⁸ During the same year, when he was leading a protest march in Calcutta, he along with Maghfoor Ahmad Ajazi and other leaders were arrested and put behind bars. In a roundup of nationalists in 1925, Bose was arrested and sent to prison in Mandalay, where he contracted tuberculosis.¹⁹

Discussion

In 1938 Bose stated his opinion that the INC "should be organised on the broadest anti-imperialist front with the two-fold objective of winning political freedom and the establishment of a socialist regime." By 1938 Bose had become a leader of national stature and agreed to accept nomination as Congress President. He stood for unqualified *Swaraj* (self-governance), including the use of force against the British. This meant a confrontation with Mohandas Gandhi, who in fact opposed Bose's presidency, splitting the Indian National Congress party.²⁰

Bose attempted to maintain unity, but Gandhi advised Bose to form his own cabinet. The rift also divided Bose and Nehru; he appeared at the 1939 Congress meeting on a stretcher. He was elected president again over Gandhi's preferred candidate Pattabhi Sitaramayya. U. Muthuramalingam Thevar strongly supported Bose in the intra-Congress dispute. Thevar mobilised all south India votes for Bose. However, due to the manoeuvrings of the Gandhi-led clique in the Congress Working Committee, Bose found himself forced to resign from the Congress presidency.²¹

On 22 June 1939 Bose organised the All India Forward Bloc a faction within the Indian National Congress, aimed at consolidating the political left, but its main strength was in his home state, Bengal. U Muthuramalingam Thevar, who was a staunch supporter of Bose from the beginning, joined the Forward Bloc. When Bose visited Madurai on 6 September, Thevar organised a massive rally as his reception.²²

When Subhash Chandra Bose was heading to Madurai, on an invitation of Muthuramalinga Thevar to amass support for the Forward Bloc, he passed through Madras and spent three days at Gandhi Peak. His correspondence reveals that despite his clear dislike for British subjugation, he was deeply impressed²³ by their methodical and systematic approach and their steadfastly disciplinarian outlook towards life. In England, he exchanged ideas on the future of India with British Labour Party leaders and political thinkers like Lord Halifax, George Lansbury, Clement Attlee, Arthur Greenwood, Harold Laski, J.B.S. Haldane, Ivor Jennings, G.D.H. Cole, Gilbert Murray and Sir Stafford Cripps²⁴. He came to believe that an independent India needed socialist authoritarianism, on the lines of Turkey's Kemal Atatürk, for at least two decades. For political reasons Bose was refused permission by the British authorities to meet Atatürk at Ankara. During his sojourn in England Bose tried to schedule appointments with several politicians, but only the Labour Party²⁵ and Liberal politicians agreed to meet with him. Conservative Party officials refused to meet him or show him courtesy because he was

a politician coming from a colony. In the 1930s leading figures in the Conservative Party had opposed even Dominion status for India. It was during the Labour Party government of 1945–1951, with Attlee as the Prime Minister, that India gained independence.²⁶

On the outbreak of war, Bose advocated a campaign of mass civil disobedience to protest against Viceroy Lord Linlithgow's decision to declare war on India's behalf without consulting the Congress leadership. Having failed to persuade Gandhi of the necessity of this, Bose organised mass protests in Calcutta calling for the removal of the "Holwell Monument", which then stood at the corner of Dalhousie Square²⁷ in memoriam of those who died in the Black Hole of Calcutta. He was thrown in jail by the British, but was released following a seven-day hunger strike. Bose's house in Calcutta was kept under surveillance by the CID.²⁸

Bose's arrest and subsequent release set the scene for his escape to Nazi Germany, via Afghanistan and the Soviet Union.²⁹ A few days before his escape, he sought solitude and, on this pretext, avoided meeting British guards and grew a beard. Late night 16 January 1941, the night of his escape, he dressed as a Pathan (brown long coat, a black fez-type coat and broad pyjamas) to avoid being identified. Bose escaped from under British surveillance from his Elgin Road house in Calcutta on the night of 17 January 1941, accompanied by his nephew Sisir Kumar Bose, later reaching Gomoh Railway Station (now Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Gomoh Station) in the then state of Bihar (now Jharkhand), India.³⁰

He journeyed to Peshawar with the help of the Abwehr, where he was met by Akbar Shah, Mohammed Shah and Bhagat Ram Talwar. Bose was taken to the home of Abad Khan, a trusted friend of Akbar Shah's. On 26 January 1941,³¹ Bose began his journey to reach Russia through British India's North West frontier with Afghanistan. For this reason, he enlisted the help of Mian Akbar Shah, then a Forward Bloc leader in the North-West Frontier Province. Shah had been out of India en route to the Soviet Union, and suggested a novel disguise for Bose to assume. Since Bose could not speak one word of Pashto, it would make him an easy target of Pashto speakers working for the British.³² For this reason, Shah suggested that Bose act deaf and dumb, and let his beard grow to mimic those of the tribesmen. Bose's guide Bhagat Ram Talwar, unknown to him, was a Soviet agent.

Supporters of the Aga Khan III helped him across the border into Afghanistan where he was met by an Abwehr unit posing as a party of road construction engineers from the Organization Todt who then aided his passage across Afghanistan³³ via Kabul to the border with the Soviet Union. After assuming the guise of a Pashtun insurance agent ("Ziauddin") to reach Afghanistan, Bose changed his guise and travelled to Moscow on the Italian passport of an Italian nobleman "Count Orlando Mazzotta"³⁴. From Moscow, he reached Rome, and from there he travelled to Nazi Germany. Once in Russia the NKVD transported Bose to Moscow where he hoped that Russia's historical enmity to British rule in India would result in support for his plans for a popular rising in India. However, Bose found the Soviets' response disappointing and was rapidly passed over to the German Ambassador in Moscow³⁵, Count von der Schulenburg. He had Bose flown on to Berlin in a special courier aircraft at the beginning of April where he was to receive a more favourable hearing from Joachim von Ribbentrop and the Foreign Ministry officials at the Wilhelmstrasse.³⁶ In Germany, he was attached to the Special Bureau for India under Adam von Trott zu Solz which was responsible for broadcasting on the German-sponsored Azad Hind Radio. He founded the Free India Center in Berlin, and created

the Indian Legion (consisting of some 4500 soldiers) out of Indian prisoners of war who had previously fought for the British in North Africa prior to their capture by Axis forces.³⁷

Results

In 1943, after being disillusioned that Germany could be of any help in gaining India's independence, Bose left for Japan. He travelled with the German submarine U-180 around the Cape of Good Hope to the southeast of Madagascar, where he was transferred to the I-29 for the rest of the journey to Imperial Japan. This was the only civilian transfer between two submarines of two different navies in World War II.³⁸

The Indian National Army (INA) was the brainchild of Japanese Major (and post-war Lieutenant-General) Iwaichi Fujiwara, head of the Japanese intelligence unit Fujiwara Kikan. Fujiwara's mission was "to raise an army which would fight alongside the Japanese army." He first met Pritam Singh Dhillon, the president of the Bangkok chapter of the Indian Independence League, and through Pritam Singh's network recruited a captured British Indian army captain, Mohan Singh, on the western Malayan peninsula in December 1941. The First Indian National Army was formed as a result of discussion between Fujiwara and Mohan Singh in the second half of December 1941, and the name chosen jointly by them in the first week of January 1942.³⁹

This was along the concept of, and with support of, what was then known as the Indian Independence League headed from Tokyo by expatriate nationalist leader Rash Behari Bose. The first INA was however disbanded in December 1942 after disagreements between the Hikari Kikan and Mohan Singh, who came to believe that the Japanese High Command was using the INA as a mere pawn and propaganda tool. Mohan Singh was taken into custody and the troops returned to the prisoner-of-war camp. However, the idea of an independence army was revived with the arrival of Subhash Chandra Bose in the Far East in 1943. In July, at a meeting in Singapore, Rash Behari Bose handed over control of the organisation to Subhash Chandra Bose. Bose was able to reorganise the fledgling army and organise massive support among the expatriate Indian population in south-east Asia, who lent their support by both enlisting in the Indian National Army, as well as financially in response to Bose's calls for sacrifice for the independence cause. INA had a separate women's unit, the Rani of Jhansi Regiment (named after Rani Lakshmi Bai) headed by Capt. Lakshmi Swaminathan⁴⁰, which is seen as a first of its kind in Asia. Even when faced with military reverses, Bose was able to maintain support for the Azad Hind movement. Spoken as a part of a motivational speech for the Indian National Army at a rally of Indians in Burma on 4 July 1944, Bose's most famous quote was "Give me blood, and I shall give you freedom!" In this, he urged the people of India to join him in his fight against the British Raj. Spoken in Hindi, Bose's words are highly evocative. The troops of the INA were under the aegis of a provisional government, the Azad Hind Government, which came to produce its own currency, postage stamps, court and civil code, and was recognised by nine Axis states – Germany, Japan, Italian Social Republic, the Independent State of Croatia, Wang Jingwei regime in Nanjing, China, a provisional government of Burma, Manchukuo and Japanese-controlled Philippines. Of those countries, five were authorities established under Axis occupation. This government participated in the so-called Greater East Asia Conference as an observer in November 1943⁴¹

The INA's first commitment was in the Japanese thrust towards Eastern Indian frontiers of Manipur. INA's special forces, the Bahadur Group, were involved in operations behind enemy lines both during the diversionary attacks in Arakan, as well as the Japanese thrust towards Imphal and Kohima. On the Indian mainland, an Indian Tricolour, modelled after that of the Indian National Congress, was raised

for the first time in the town of Moirang, in Manipur, in north-eastern India. The adjacent towns of Kohima and Imphal were then encircled and placed under siege by divisions of the Japanese Army, working in conjunction with the Burmese National Army, and with Brigades of the INA, known as the Gandhi and Nehru Brigades. This attempt at conquering the Indian mainland had the Axis codename of Operation U-Go.⁴⁰

During this operation, On 6 July 1944, in a speech broadcast by the Azad Hind Radio from Singapore, Bose addressed Mahatma Gandhi as the "Father of the Nation" and asked for his blessings and good wishes for the war he was fighting. This was the first time that Gandhi was referred to by this appellation. The protracted Japanese attempts to take these two towns depleted Japanese resources, with Operation U-Go ultimately proving unsuccessful. Through several months of Japanese onslaught on these two towns, Commonwealth forces remained entrenched in the towns. Commonwealth forces then counter-attacked, inflicting serious losses on the Axis led forces, who were then forced into a retreat back into Burmese territory. After the Japanese defeat at the battles of Kohima and Imphal, Bose's Provisional Government's aim of establishing a base in mainland India was lost forever.³⁵

Still the INA fought in key battles against the British Indian Army in Burmese territory, notable in Meiktila, Mandalay, Pegu, Nyangyu and Mount Popa. However, with the fall of Rangoon, Bose's government ceased to be an effective political entity. A large proportion of the INA troops surrendered under Lt Col Loganathan. The remaining troops retreated with Bose towards Malaya or made for Thailand. Japan's surrender at the end of the war also led to the surrender of the remaining elements of the Indian National Army. The INA prisoners were then repatriated to India and some tried for treason.³⁷

Conclusions

In the consensus of scholarly opinion, Subhash Chandra Bose's death occurred from third-degree burns on 18 August 1945 after his overloaded Japanese plane crashed in Japanese-ruled Formosa (now Taiwan). However, many among his supporters, especially in Bengal, refused at the time, and have refused since, to believe either the fact or the circumstances of his death. Conspiracy theories appeared within hours of his death and have thereafter had a long shelf life, keeping alive various martial myths about Bose.³⁸

In Taihoku, at around 2:30 pm as the bomber with Bose on board was leaving the standard path taken by aircraft during take-off, the passengers inside heard a loud sound, similar to an engine backfiring. The mechanics on the tarmac saw something fall out of the plane. It was the portside engine, or a part of it, and the propeller. The plane swung wildly to the right and plummeted, crashing, breaking into two, and exploding into flames. Inside, the chief pilot, copilot and Lieutenant-General Tsunamasa Shidei,³² the Vice Chief of Staff of the Japanese Kwantung Army, who was to have made the negotiations for Bose with the Soviet army in Manchuria, were instantly killed. Bose's assistant Habibur Rahman was stunned, passing out briefly, and Bose, although conscious and not fatally hurt, was soaked in gasoline. When Rahman came to, he and Bose attempted to leave by the rear door, but found it blocked by the luggage. They then decided to run through the flames and exit from the front. The ground staff, now approaching the plane, saw two people staggering towards them, one of whom had become a human torch. The human torch turned out to be Bose, whose gasoline-soaked clothes had instantly ignited. Rahman and a few others managed to smother the flames, but also noticed that Bose's face and head appeared badly burned. According to Joyce Chapman Lebra,³⁹ "A

truck which served as ambulance rushed Bose and the other passengers to the Nanmon Military Hospital south of Taihoku”. The airport personnel called Dr. Taneyoshi Yoshimi, the surgeon-in-charge at the hospital at around 3 pm. Bose was conscious and mostly coherent when they reached the hospital, and for some time thereafter. Bose was naked, except for a blanket wrapped around him, and Dr. Yoshimi immediately saw evidence of third-degree burns on many parts of the body, especially on his chest, doubting very much that he would live.⁴¹

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