

# Love in the Time of War

## Subhas Chandra Bose's Journeys to Nazi Germany (1941) and towards the Soviet Union (1945)

*The political career of Subhas Chandra Bose has been the subject of much research and debate, drawn from material on his public life. This article weaves together the public and the private at critical junctures of Bose's career to offer alternative explanatory factors for two famous journeys made by Bose. The first journey was Bose's escape from India to Nazi Germany in 1941 and the second journey was his flight from south-east Asia in 1945, a journey that was to prove his last. Looking at these 'public' actions in the light of 'private' reality, this article argues that while public, political factors did motivate Bose to undertake these journeys, he was also moved by powerful personal reasons.*

SARMILA BOSE

### I A Political Crisis

The year was 1939, Subhas Chandra Bose was standing for re-election as the president of the Indian National Congress. It was an unprecedented event. The Indian National Congress was not used to elections. Rather, as a number of Congress Working Committee members led by Vallabh Patel put it, "The election, as befits the dignity of this high office, has always been unanimous".<sup>1</sup> The president of the Indian National Congress was anointed annually by its de facto supreme leader, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who personally held no official post.

In 1937 Gandhi had chosen Jawaharlal Nehru, representing the younger, Leftist section of the Congress. For 1938 he chose the even younger and much more radical, Subhas Bose. In 1939 it was to be someone else's turn, someone who was stamped with Gandhi's personal approval in the usual process of backroom selection, not the product of a democratic election. Usually other aspirants withdrew, the outgoing president made way for the incoming one. Blessings were sought and received all round. It had become a smoothly running operation – until Bose threw a spanner in the works by announcing ("Please Sir, can I have some more?") that he would like to serve a second term.

Gandhi did not want to grant Bose a second term. But Bose would not stand down unless a suitable 'Leftist' nominee was found, and thus forced a real election upon the Congress delegates. The stakes were high. It was not just the future programme of the Congress movement on the line, or the right of the delegates to democratically elect their president – it was the personal prestige of Gandhi, whose authority and leadership had never been challenged in this manner before.

The battle turned nasty, with acrimonious public statements and counter-statements in January 1939 between Patel, Azad, Sitaramayya, Rajendra Prasad and similarly inclined working committee members on the one hand, and Bose on the other. Nehru tried to steer a middle course, but made it clear he did not think Bose should stand again. Bose was at the height of his political career in India and facing his biggest political crisis. "... I am constrained to feel that I have no right to retire from the contest," he declared.<sup>2</sup>

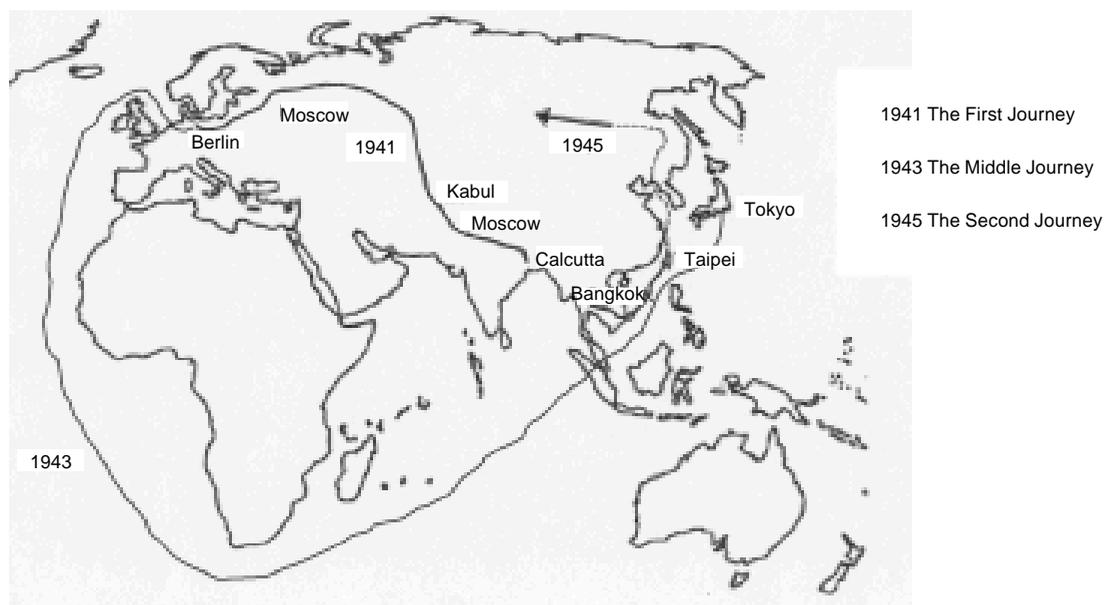
In a private letter of January 4, 1939, however, Bose seemed to be expressing an entirely different perspective. He wrote, "In a way, it will be good not to be president again. I shall then be more free and have more time to myself." The letter was written to Emilie Schenkl in Vienna. Bose added, "Und wie geht es Ihnen, meine Liebste? Ich denke immer an Sie bei Tag und bei Nacht." (And how are you, my dearest? I think of you all the time by day and by night).<sup>3</sup> This was a habit with Bose, or perhaps a cautious ruse – in the countless letters he wrote to Schenkl during even the busiest political schedule in India, he would write in English and insert endearments and expressions of his feelings here and there in German.

### II The Private 'Departure'

Bose had met Emilie Schenkl in Vienna in 1934, while in exile from India. He was then writing *The Indian Struggle* and Schenkl, who knew English, assisted him with the book. She was special from the start. She was the only person he thanked by name in the preface, dated November 29, 1934. In a letter to her from Rome on November 30, he wrote: "I am sending this by airmail. *Do not tell anyone* that I have written to you by airmail, because I am not writing to anyone else by airmail – and they may feel sorry" (emphasis Bose's).<sup>4</sup>

During the next few years Bose and Schenkl met up with each other during his visits to Vienna and Schenkl accompanied him on trips to Badgastein and Karlovy Vary. They corresponded every time he returned to India or went on tour in Europe. One hundred and sixty two of his letters to Schenkl written between 1934 and 1942 are published as a separate volume of Bose's *Collected Works*. He wrote to her from south-east Asia afterwards too, but those letters were taken away by British officers who searched Schenkl's home during the Allied occupation of Vienna at the end of the second world war, and remain unavailable.

"You are the first woman I have loved," confessed Bose to Schenkl, "God grant that you may also be the last". Most of Bose's letters, officially or unofficially censored, were written in the knowledge that they were not confidential. Occasionally though, in a truly private letter, he let his emotions flow. In the spring of 1936, preparing to return to India, he referred to his country



as his ‘first love’, but called Schenkl “the queen of my heart” who had made him forget the differences between them of country, people, traditions, customs – indeed, everything. “I never thought before that a woman’s love could ensnare me. So many did love me before, but I never looked at them. But you, naughty woman, have caught me.”<sup>5</sup>

In another openly passionate love-letter in 1937 Bose wrote: “Not a single day passes that I do not think of you. You are with me all the time. I cannot possibly think of anybody else in this world.....I cannot tell you how lonely I have been feeling all these months and how sorrowful. Only one thing could make me happy – but I do not know if that is possible. However, I am thinking of it day and night and praying to God to show me the right path...”<sup>6</sup> There is a strong implication that ‘the one thing’ that would make him happy, the possibility of which he is not sure of – would be to live with her on a more permanent basis.

In November 1937 Bose arranged to meet up with Schenkl during his trip to Badgastein that winter. He was then president-designate of the Indian National Congress for 1938. In Badgastein in December 1937 he wrote his unfinished autobiography *An Indian Pilgrim*. Bose’s biographer Leonard Gordon has drawn attention to the central role assigned to ‘love’ in the chapter entitled ‘My Faith (Philosophical)’. In this somewhat rambling collection of thoughts attached after nine autobiographical chapters covering only up to his Cambridge days, Bose wrote: “For me, the essential nature of reality is LOVE. LOVE is the essence of the Universe and is the essential principle in human life..... I see all around me the play of love; I perceive within me the same instinct; I feel that I must love in order to fulfil myself and I need love as the basic principle on which to reconstruct life.”<sup>7</sup>

Gordon writes: “In *An Indian Pilgrim* Bose places the development of love at the centre of human life. He also notes that in his earlier days, he expended a lot of energy controlling his sexual passions. But, he says in a note, ‘As I have gradually turned from a purely spiritual ideal to a life of social service, my views on sex have undergone transformation’”.<sup>8</sup>

That is not surprising considering that Bose’s personal life had undergone a transformation since he met Emilie Schenkl. Schenkl was with him in Badgastein in December 1937. She later stated to Gordon and to her family that on December 26, 1937, her birthday, she and Bose were secretly married in Badgastein. Gordon notes, “...in advice to younger friends and relations in 1937 and 1938, he advocated free choice in marriage, rather than arranged marriage by the parents of the prospective couple.”<sup>9</sup> Bose returned to India in January 1938 to become ‘rashtrapati’ – president – of the Indian National Congress.

### III Public Careers, Private Lives

Bose’s political career has been the subject of research and debate for a considerable period of time, based on material from his public life. Until Schenkl permitted her correspondence with Bose to be published as part of his *Collected Works* in the 1990s, his private thoughts as expressed to her could not be taken into account. Even after the publication of their correspondence, their relationship remained the subject of romance or controversy, compartmentalised as his private life.

This article weaves together the public and the private at critical junctures of Bose’s career to offer alternative explanatory factors for two famous journeys made by Bose (see map for Bose’s journeys in 1941, 1943 and 1945). The first journey was Bose’s escape from India to Nazi Germany in 1941 and the second journey was his flight from south-east Asia in 1945, apparently towards Manchuria and the Soviet Union – which was to prove his last, ending on the way in an aircrash at Taihoku (Taipei) in Formosa (Taiwan).

These journeys were political as well as physical journeys. Bose’s journey to Berlin in 1941 has been much discussed as a political decision to leave India and seek German help against Britain during the second world war. Explained as a decision based on the argument ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend’, Bose’s war-time alliance with Nazi Germany is the subject of permanent controversy.

Though Bose was a socialist and belonged to the Left wing of the Congress, his escape to Germany in 1941 was used by his critics to denounce him as a fascist sympathiser. More sympathetic assessments have asserted that the decision was merely a pragmatic one, made in the cause of India's freedom struggle, in particular to gain access to Indian POWs in Axis hands whom Bose wanted to convert into an army to fight for India's freedom.

The second, his last, journey in August 1945 also involved a major political shift. It has attracted less controversy in terms of the apparent destination – the Soviet Union, though considerably more in terms of whether or not he died in the air crash at Taihoku. The journey is taken to be a political 'next step' for Bose, who wanted to find a way to continue his struggle for India's freedom after Japan's surrender and the end of the second world war. As a socialist, Bose, like Nehru, had a long-standing 'tilt' in favour of the Soviet Union. The apparent decision to fly to the Soviet Union via Manchuria would be consistent with Bose's analysis that after the war the Anglo-American alliance would find itself at odds with the Soviet Union, and hence, the 'anti-imperialist' Communist power would be a natural ally of the Indian nationalist movement.<sup>10</sup> This is, of course, the same argument as the one advanced for his seeking help from Germany earlier, except that the idea of seeking assistance from Stalin did not meet with the denunciations from Indian and western intellectual circles as had the idea of seeking help from Hitler!

This article does not seek to repeat the political debate surrounding Bose's journey to Germany in 1941 or his flight towards the Soviet Union in 1945. It focuses instead on the insights offered by looking at the 'public' actions in the light of the 'private' reality. It argues that Bose had powerful personal reasons to go to Europe during the war and towards the Soviet Union at the end of the war. While the public, political factors may have had a role to play, this article aims to demonstrate that the private, personal ones pointed Bose inexorably towards the specific journeys he undertook. To an extent, therefore, the public, political factors provided justification for journeys that were actually private, personal ones.

#### IV The First Journey

In his letter to Emilie Schenkl on January 4, 1939 Bose had written, "Though there is a very general desire for my re-election as president – I do not think that I shall be again president". How wrong he was. In the presidential elections held on January 29, 1939 among delegates to the 52nd session of the Indian National Congress, Subhas Chandra Bose defeated Gandhi's anointed candidate Pattabhi Sitaramayya by over 200 votes. The result prompted Gandhi to state: "Mr Subhas Bose has achieved a decisive victory over his opponent Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya..... since I was instrumental in inducing Dr Pattabhi not to withdraw his name as a candidate... the defeat is more mine than his."<sup>11</sup>

Bose, by contrast, was gracious in victory. On February 4, 1939 he reacted to Gandhi's statement on his winning a second term: "It gives me pain to find that Mahatma Gandhi has taken it as a personal defeat. ... I placed before the public two main issues, namely, the fight against Federation and free and unfettered choice for the delegates in the matter of choosing their president. ...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."<sup>12</sup>

On February 11 he wrote to Schenkl, apologising for not writing earlier and telling her about his famous victory: "The result of the election is a great victory for me. The whole country is full of excitement over the election, but a terrible responsibility has come on my shoulders. My work has increased considerably and I can hardly manage it now." Even so, tucked away among the reminders to take her medicines regularly, correction of her spelling mistakes and a request to send the exact date, time and place of her birth, was the line – 'Ich denke immer an Sie – Warum glauben Sie nicht?' (I think of you all the time – why don't you believe me?). Having earlier expressed the private view to Schenkl that it would be good not to be president again, as he would then have more personal time, Bose was now clearly torn over the implications of his re-election, writing, "Ich weiss nicht was ich in Zukunft tun werde. Bitte sagen Sie was ich machen soll". (I don't know what I will do in the future. Please tell me what I should do).<sup>13</sup>

Soon after, Bose fell ill and remained unwell through the Congress session held in Tripura in March, 1939. He had to be stretchered in and his presidential address had to be delivered by his brother Sarat. Twelve out of 15 members of the working committee had resigned after his re-election. Nehru had not resigned, but issued a statement, which, according to Bose, "led everybody to believe that he had also resigned".<sup>14</sup> Govind Ballav Pant moved the extraordinary resolution that the elected president of the Congress had to form the working committee in accordance to the wishes of an extra-constitutional force – Gandhi. Gandhi himself remained firmly in the 'non-cooperation' mode.

On April 19, 1939, Bose wrote of his troubles to Schenkl, apologising again for not writing frequently enough and promising to do better in the future: "Ever since the election I have had great trouble with the Gandhi group and the trouble is not over yet". He wished he could go to Badgastein for 'nach-kur' (convalescence), but was not sure if he could spare the time or the money. But a trip to Europe was clearly on his mind, as evinced by its inclusion in the 'important bits' written in German, which contained very specific questions: "Bitte fragen Sie Helmich was ich bezahlen soll wenn ich dorthin fuer kur komme. Wie frueher oder mehr? Und koennen Sie dorthin kommen wenn ich fuer komme? Wollen Sie Erlaubnis haben von Ihrem Chef?" (Please ask Helmich how much I have to pay if I go there for convalescence. As much as before, or more? And can you come there when I come? Would you have permission from your boss?)<sup>15</sup>

At the same time as he was trying to plan a visit to Badgastein, however, Bose was embroiled in a war of attrition within the Congress. Bose may have won the battle of elections in 1939, but he lost the war with Gandhi. Caught between the Pant resolution requiring him to appoint the working committee according to Gandhi's wishes, (which in Bose's view was actually unconstitutional), and Gandhi's unrelenting non-cooperation in the matter, the democratically elected president of the Indian National Congress eventually gave up and resigned on April 29, 1939. It was a major setback in Bose's political career, though Rabindranath Tagore wrote him the consoling message: "The dignity and forbearance which you have shown in the midst of a most aggravating situation has won my admiration and confidence in your leadership."<sup>16</sup> The letters exchanged with Nehru at this time reveal Bose's bitter disappointment with what he considered Nehru's unsupportive attitude throughout the crisis.

Letters to Schenkl, however, were entirely different. "Jeden Tag denke ich an Sie," (*Every day I think of you*) wrote Bose from a train, two weeks after his resignation, promising to

write more regularly now, "Viele Liebe wie immer." (*Much love as always*). He was not good at keeping this promise. A month later in another letter from a train to Lahore, he resolved to write to her once a week, but about a week after that continued writing the same letter as he had not yet managed to post it. He had also been pickpocketed in Lahore while in a big crowd, and along with some money, had lost Schenkl's letter and photographs which he had been carrying in his pocket.<sup>17</sup>

Bose's take on the state of his political career was interesting too: "I have not lost anything by resigning. As a matter of fact I have become more popular now," he wrote to Schenkl. "India is a strange land where people are loved not because they have power, but because they give up power. For instance, at Lahore I had a warmer welcome this time than when I went last year as Congress president."<sup>18</sup>

Following his resignation as Congress president, in his public life Bose started touring all over the country to drum up support for "a new bloc (or party) within the Congress, called the 'Forward Bloc', consisting of all radical and progressive elements". In private he continued to plan a trip to Europe, writing to Schenkl on June 21, 1939, that he might work throughout June and July and go to Europe in August. "Bitte warten Sie bis August," he pleads, "vielleicht komme ich dann nach Gastein" (Please wait till August – perhaps I will come then to Gastein). He left no doubt that the reason for his travel to Badgastein was Emilie Schenkl: "Wenn ich dort komme, muessen Sie auch dorthin kommen. Wollen Sie kommen?" (When I go there, you must also come there. Would you come?)<sup>19</sup>

On July 4, Bose suggested August 15 to September 15 as possible dates for his vacation. Continuing the letter on July 6, he wrote that he was not sure whether the holiday would begin in the middle of August or in the beginning of September, but it was unlikely to be before the middle of August. "Ich denke

immer an Sie. Viele Liebe wie immer" (I think of you all the time. Much love as always).<sup>20</sup>

One can only imagine Bose's thoughts and feelings when on September 1, 1939 Hitler invaded Poland, precipitating the second world war. It put paid to all his plans of visiting Europe and getting together with Schenkl again. Indeed, all communications with her seemed to have snapped as well. It must have appeared very uncertain as to when, if ever, he would see her again. As he had kept his relationship with her a secret in India, Bose would have suffered alone as he contemplated this disaster in his personal life.

The scale of personal calamity for Bose by the outbreak of the second world war is hard to exaggerate. As Bose's close colleague in Europe, A C N Nambiar, has said, while Bose was devoted to the cause of India's freedom, the only 'departure' in his devotion to his motherland was his love for Emilie Schenkl: "He was deeply in love with her, you see. In fact, it was an enormous, intense love for her that he had."<sup>21</sup>

After a long period of no communication, the next letter from Bose to Schenkl is dated April 3, 1941, from Berlin: "You will be surprised to get this letter from me and even more surprised to know that I am writing this from Berlin. I arrived in Berlin yesterday afternoon and would have written to you at once – but I was kept busy till evening." A telegram had also been sent the same day to Schenkl in Vienna from the German Foreign Office: "Bose ist jetzt in Berlin und bittet Sie moeglichst sofort hierher zu kommen drahtantwort" (Bose is now in Berlin and requests you if possible to come here immediately. Confirm by cable).

September 1939 to April 1941 – it had taken him more than a year and a half in the middle of the second world war, but Bose had finally made it to Europe, to his cherished reunion with Emilie Schenkl. In the intervening period he had gone on a fast unto death

to effect his release from prison in 1940, undertaken a daring escape from home internment in Calcutta, travelled by road, rail, air, pack animal or on foot if necessary, in at least three different disguises – a north Indian Muslim insurance salesman, a Pathan with a speech disability and an Italian diplomat – traversed from Calcutta in eastern India across north India to Peshawar in the North-West Frontier Province, over the mountains to Kabul, through the Soviet Union via Moscow to Berlin.

What had driven this man through the desperate risks and many setbacks on this mad, improbable journey? The conventional answer, limited to his public life, was that he was motivated by a single-minded devotion to the cause of ‘Bharatmata’ – Mother India. But what if the motivation, or the stronger one, was the “enormous, intense love” that he had for a woman of flesh and blood – Emilie Schenkl?

## V For ‘Bharatmata’ or Beloved?<sup>22</sup>

The fact is that unbeknownst to the general public, or indeed anyone other than Schenkl, Bose had been planning for months in 1939 to go to Europe to be reunited with her. He had narrowed the start-date of his ‘holiday’ to around the beginning of September 1939. His plans had nothing to do with politics or with Nazi Germany, and pre-dated the supposed opportunity opened up by the clash of imperialisms. War had not prompted his plan to go to Europe – on the contrary, it had disrupted his plan completely, forcing him to find another way. As soon as he got to Berlin, he sent for Emilie Schenkl.

In 1939 Bose was ostensibly going to Europe for convalescence in Badgastein. No longer ‘rashtrapati’, would he have finally mustered the courage to reveal his Austrian partner to his family and society? One will never know. However, in 1941 it was not possible to take-off to Badgastein or Vienna. Bose’s public reason for being in Europe then was to seek an alliance with the German government in his fight for India’s freedom. In his message urging Schenkl to come to Berlin, he wrote: “My future programme is not settled – but in all probability, Berlin will be my headquarters. I do not know if I shall be able to come to Vienna. So you must come to Berlin to meet me. Can you come?”<sup>23</sup>

To make it easier for her to leave her job in Vienna and live with him (“Will your mother and sister agree to it?”) he suggested the possibility of working as his secretary in Berlin. In any event, he asked her to take a short leave and come to Berlin at once, borrowing the travelling expense if necessary. She came, and they lived together in 1941-43, till he left on another perilous journey to south-east Asia. In August 1945 he was dead.

What would the public and private consequences have been for Bose if he did not go to Europe during the second world war? In his public life he had the alternative of continuing the struggle in India – building up his newly formed ‘bloc’ and fighting for his, more radical strand of the independence movement. He may have spent the entire time in jail, but he would have held on to his position in national politics. There is a view that he may even have enhanced his position had he remained in India, in the mainstream of nationalist politics.

In his private life, however, with the outbreak of war Bose faced the prospect of being totally cut off from his beloved for an indefinite period of time. It was unclear when if ever he would see her again. If he did not find a way to get back in touch with her, or in fact to be with her, as he had planned, Bose risked losing his relationship with Schenkl. As evidenced by the number and nature of his communications to Schenkl since 1934, that

would be a calamity of unbearable proportions for Bose. The very thought of it would clinch the issue – he had to get to Europe by whatever means possible, not because war had broken out, but in spite of it.

This argument is not being put forward to find a counter to the discomfiting aspects of Bose’s alliance with the Nazi regime. That he sought, and obtained, that alliance is a historical fact. However, viewing his journey to Germany in 1941 in the light of the personal motivation offers a stronger and clearer reason for it. The political explanations have never quite dispelled the nagging doubts about why a highly intelligent, well-educated Indian socialist, proudly nationalist and familiar with European politics, would have made such a desperate bid to rush – physically – to a regime about whose prejudices against Indians he protested to Hitler himself.<sup>24</sup>

This is not to argue that public aspirations had no role to play in Bose’s decision to go to Germany in 1941. Committed as he was to the cause of India’s freedom perhaps he even persuaded himself that he was serving the nationalist cause more by going to Germany simultaneously with the pursuit of personal happiness. Certainly he seemed more comfortable with the public bravado of fighting the British by all means possible than acknowledging the reality of his private life. A brave man in his public life, described even by one of his harshest critics, Nirad C Chaudhuri, as the only nationalist “unstained by dishonour, although destroyed by fate,”<sup>25</sup> Bose displayed remarkable cowardice in concealing his relationship with Schenkl from friends, family and the public he claimed to serve, for a full 11 years – till his death.

Bose had very little to show for his time in Germany during the war – in his public work, that is – compared to what he might have accomplished in India. Soon after his arrival Hitler invaded the Soviet Union – a step he bitterly criticised – and he appeared for the rest of his time there to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, trying to move to south-east Asia. In terms of his private life, however, he had much to be happy about. This was the only time Bose and Schenkl lived together openly as a couple, in Berlin, and their only daughter Anita was born in November 1942.<sup>26</sup>

## VI Private Shadow on Public Goals

Bose’s private life may have had an adverse impact on his public work in Germany in a way. Leonard Gordon has written about what looked like a class conflict between aristocratic German officers at the Foreign Office and Schenkl, an Austrian of lower class background. He found that Adam von Trott, Bose’s key link at the German Foreign Office, Alexander Werth, Freda Kretschmer and others of the Foreign Office group, sympathetic to Bose’s cause, all seemed to have disliked Schenkl intensely. She in turn considered von Trott an aristocratic snob.

Gordon considers it a ‘tragedy’ that though von Trott considered Bose ‘highly gifted’ and did his best to help him in his cause of India’s liberation, the two men who had much in common failed to come closer to one another: “... the woman he chose, though she contributed to his own work and life, helped alienate the very anti-Nazi Foreign Office officials to whom he might have become closer.”<sup>27</sup>

Schenkl faced class and race prejudices from other quarters too. Nirad C Chaudhuri, without bothering to ascertain even basic facts about her such as her nationality (he wrote that she was ‘German’) passed judgment in his autobiography: “I could never have imagined from my knowledge of his career and character

that... he could be capable of so commonplace a European entanglement as marrying a secretary."<sup>28</sup>

It was an attitude he shared with some of the British, whom he admired so much. Among the 'Ashenden stories' by W Somerset Maugham, based on his own experiences, about the adventures of a British intelligence officer during the first world war, Maugham has a curious little piece:

He is the most dangerous conspirator in or out of India. He's done more harm than all the rest of them put together. You know that there's a gang of these Indians in Berlin; well, he's the brains of it. If he could be got out of the way I could afford to ignore the others; he's the only one who has any guts. I've been trying to catch him for a year, I thought there wasn't a hope; but now at last I've got a chance and by God, I'm going to take it.

"And what'll you do then?"

R chuckled grimly.

"Shoot him, and shoot him damn quick."

....

"Did you notice at the end of that report I gave you it said he wasn't known to have anything to do with women? Well, that was true, but it isn't any longer. The damned fool has fallen in love."

R stepped over to his dispatch-case and took out a bundle tied up with pale blue ribbon.

"Look, here are his love-letters."

....

"One wonders how an able man like that can allow himself to get besotted over a woman. It was the last thing I ever expected of him." ....

"Anyhow that's neither here nor there. Chandra has fallen madly in love with a woman called Giulia Lazzari. He's crazy about her."<sup>29</sup>

In Maugham's story the British intelligence were trying to trap 'Chandra Lal', Indian nationalist from Kolkata, who was 'bitterly hostile to the British rule in India', 'partisan of armed force', and who 'evaded all attempts to arrest him'. He had escaped from India, and gone to America and Sweden, before reaching Berlin. "Here he busied himself with schemes to create disaffection among the native troops that had been brought to Europe."

The British officers reveal a grudging admiration for their quarry:

"That Indian fellow must be a rather remarkable chap," he said.

"He's got brains, of course."

"One can't help being impressed by a man who had the courage to take on almost single-handed the whole British power in India." ... "After all, he's aiming at nothing for himself, is he? He's aiming at freedom for his country. On the face of it it looks as though he were justified in his actions."

..."We can't go into all that. Our job is to get him and when we've got him to shoot him."

"Of course. He's declared war and he must take his chances....but I see no harm in realising that there's something to be admired and respected in him."

But just like the aristocrats in the German Foreign Office, Maugham's British intelligence officers have no time for the Indian nationalist's European lady-love. She is depicted as lower class and tawdry. She also exposes him to great risk. In the story the British intelligence tried to use her to lure him across the border to France: "And how the devil is she to get Chandra to do that?"

"He's madly in love with her. He's longing to see her. His letters are almost crazy."

In the end, though, he escaped them:

"*Il est pris*," she gasped.

"*Il est mort*," said Ashenden.

"Dead! He took the poison. He had the time for that. He's escaped you after all."

"What do you mean? How did you know about the poison?"

"He always carried it with him. He said that the English should never take him alive."

## The Second Journey

On March 25, 1942, while Bose was still in Europe, the BBC announced that he had died in an air crash in east Asia. The Germans and the Japanese contradicted the news later in the day.<sup>30</sup> Little wonder therefore as to why the British undertook more than one investigation before accepting that Bose had died in an air crash in Taihoku in August 1945 while attempting to fly to the Soviet Union via Manchuria.<sup>31</sup>

The real mystery about that journey is not Bose's death, which has needlessly preoccupied many Indians, but why he was going to the Soviet Union in the first place. Bose's long-standing interest in the Soviet Union seemed never to have been reciprocated by Moscow. He had passed through the Soviet Union on his way to Berlin in 1941, but no evidence has emerged of Soviet support for his cause. In June 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union, so Bose and the Soviet Union were on opposing sides for the remainder of the war. In Tokyo, Soviet ambassador Jacob Malik refused even to receive a message from him.<sup>32</sup>

On August 6 and 9, 1945, atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, prompting Japan's surrender. On August 10 the Soviet Union entered the Pacific war on the Allied side. At this juncture, as chaos reigned, with the Soviet army advancing into Manchuria, Bose announced to the Japanese that he wanted to go to the Soviet Union: "If it is necessary I shall enter the Soviet Union alone."<sup>33</sup>

The distraction of the controversy over his death has obscured the fact that going to the Soviet Union was not the only option open to Bose at that time. One option of course was to surrender with his troops. That might not have been wise. British documents released from the time have shown that the policy of "Shoot him and shoot him damn quick" may not have been restricted to the realm of fiction where 'Chandra Bose' was concerned.<sup>34</sup>

However, an option favoured by even many German and Japanese advisors was for Bose to remain in hiding in the jungles of south-east Asia, where local support was available, until an opportune moment arrived to reappear in India.<sup>35</sup> This would surely have presented a safer option in terms of both self-preservation and the continuation of his struggle, than landing, possibly alone, in the chaos of advancing and surrendering armies in a collapsing Manchuria. If he had successfully made that journey, Bose would have arrived in an unknown and hostile environment, an Axis ally demanding assistance from an Allied power which had never shown the slightest support for his cause.

But there could be a different reason for Bose favouring the Soviet option – one that made perfect sense under the circumstances. It was a reason his other advisors could not take into account, but one of which he spoke of to the commander of his women's regiment, Lakshmi Swaminathan, one monsoon day in 1944 in the midst of military defeat.

And all the time they, she and my daughter,... they were here! What an effort it cost me to resist the longing to rush to them, to see them! But I wanted to finish my life's work first. Oh, what wouldn't I give now for one look at them!

(Pavel Pavlovich Antipov, a.k.a. Commissar Strelnikov of the Russian revolution, speaking of his wife Lara and daughter Katia, to Yurii Andreievich Zhivago, having returned to Varykino, where

they had lived, in search of them – Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*)

Lakshmi Swaminathan has spoken of a private moment with Bose one evening when he told her about Emilie Schenkl.<sup>36</sup> Peter Fay, eloquent chronicler of the armed part of India's independence movement in south-east Asia from 1942 to 1945, writes: "Netaji turned to her and said: "I have done something that I don't know whether people in India will be able to understand." He meant his secret European marriage... Lakshmi was sure that they would... Later she wondered why he had confided in her... He hadn't seemed himself. Somehow I could feel that he was under great strain. Perhaps he was facing for the first time the fact that the Imphal failure was irretrievable, that the next year could only bring defeat, and that defeat meant – for himself – flight, capture, or death. Perhaps this was why he had wanted to talk to a woman."<sup>37</sup>

If Bose wanted to go to Austria to be reunited with Schenkl and their daughter, he had no route available to him apart from travelling through Russia. Travel through India or Europe was out of the question. At the end of the war Austria was under Allied occupation – initially there were Russian troops lodged in Schenkl's house.

Strelnikov, whom Zhivago remembered as "... a one-track mind, harsh principles, and integrity, absolute integrity..." came back to Varykino too late, after Lara and their daughter had already left. Once a top military leader in the revolution, he was now being hunted himself:

By a fantastic effort and after endless adventures, I got across Siberia and reached this part of the country. I am so well known here. I thought it was the last place they'd expect to find me; they wouldn't suppose I'd have the nerve .... But now that's out, they're on my trail.

Just think – six years of separation, six years of inconceivable self-restraint. But I kept thinking that freedom was not yet wholly won. When I'd won it, I thought, my hands would be untied and I could belong to my family. And now, all my calculations have come to nothing [Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*].

In Allied-occupied Vienna, British officers came calling at Schenkl's home, looking for clues to Bose. She was out at the time, her mother and sister were there. One of the officers was an Indian – a Sikh. They searched the house and took away all of Bose's letters to Schenkl sent from south-east Asia, mercifully overlooking the earlier letters. The letters they took away remain unavailable, preventing the parallel comparison of public versus private that was possible for the earlier period. But again, while the public case for the flight to Manchuria seemed weak, the private one was compelling, and would have clinched the option for Bose.

Between the journey from India to Europe in 1941 and the one from south-east Asia towards the Soviet Union in 1945, there was Bose's famous submarine journey from Germany to south-east Asia accompanied by his close aide Abid Hasan. This took him from Kiel in northern Germany, over the north of Scotland, down the Atlantic Ocean past Africa, around the Cape of Good Hope, to the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar, where he and Hasan transferred in a rubber dinghy from the German submarine to a Japanese one which took them on to Sumatra, from where they flew on to Tokyo. In this perilous 90-day journey in the middle of the war in 1943, Bose left Schenkl and his daughter behind in Europe in order to pursue his dream of raising an army to fight the British.

Among his many adventures, this journey was clearly one in which 'Bharatmata' prevailed over his beloved, public life won

over personal love and family responsibilities. It may be understandable, even admirable, that Bose made the decision to rank the project of national liberation about his family life at that juncture. However, Bose left Schenkl and their newborn child to fend for themselves in war-time Europe with nothing more than a Bengali letter addressed to his elder brother Sarat, asking him to look after his wife and daughter if he failed to see the end of the journey – a monumental act of irresponsibility as a father if not husband.<sup>38</sup> He had been trying to leave for East Asia since the previous year, and knew of his impending fatherhood much of that time.

## The Last Journey

He almost made it, but luck ran out in the end. He could not complete the journey, but eluded his enemy as well.

In Maugham's story, Chandra Lal was finally lured out of German territory to meet with Giulia Lazzari and walked into a British trap, but he still managed to evade capture:

"A group of men, talking at the top of their voices and gesticulating wildly, were clustered round a man lying on the ground.

"What's happened?" he cried.

.... "He's killed himself... He was too quick for us."

"*Il est pris*," she gasped.

"*Il est mort*," said Ashenden.

"Dead! He took the poison. He had the time for that. He's escaped you after all."

"What do you mean? How did you know about the poison?"

"He always carried it with him. He said that the English should never take him alive." (from the Ashenden stories, Giulia Lazzari).

In Pasternak's epic, Strelnikov reached Varykino too late – just days after Lara and their daughter had been persuaded to flee the area. His enemies were closing in.

They'll arrest me tomorrow.... They'll arrest me, and they won't let me say a word in my own defence. They'll come at me with shouts and curses and gag me. Don't I know how it's done!" The next day Yurii Andreievich woke late and walked towards the well.

A few yards from the door, Strelnikov lay across the path with his head in a snowdrift. He had shot himself. The snow was a red lump under his left temple where he had bled. (Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*).

As Japan surrendered and the second world war came to an end, Bose flew to Bangkok on August 16, 1945 and from there to Saigon on August 17. No special plane was available in Saigon to take him and his officers farther. However, two seats were eventually arranged in a plane carrying the Japanese expert on the Soviet Union, Lt Gen Shidei, who was flying to Dairen in Manchuria to oversee surrender arrangements. Bose chose Col Habibur Rahman to accompany him, on the understanding that the others would follow later. Stopping in Tourane, Vietnam, for the night, they flew on the next day to Taipei. On taking off from Taipei, the plane crashed and caught fire.

In her kitchen in Vienna, Emilie Schenkl was rolling some wool into a ball. The evening news was on the radio. It said the 'Indian Quisling' Subhas Chandra Bose had been killed in an air crash. "May be I shall never see you again," Bose had written to her, "but believe me, you will always live in my heart, in my thoughts and in my dreams. If fate should thus separate us in this life – I shall long for you in my next life... My angel! I thank you for loving me and for teaching me to love you."<sup>39</sup> Schenkl went quietly out of the kitchen and into the bedroom where her daughter lay asleep. She knelt by her bedside, and wept.<sup>40</sup>

In Taipei, “Major Kono, who was lying on the ground a short distance from the plane, and saw Bose on fire, described him as a ‘a living Fudomyoo’, a Japanese Buddhist temple guardian who is usually represented with ‘fierce visage... hair aflame, face contorted and weapons in hand.’<sup>41</sup> He died that night. The journey was over. [77]

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## Notes

[The ideas in this article were first explored in my article ‘Subhaschandr Germany-jatra: ek premkotha’, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, January 20, 2002.]

- 1 Statement of Vallabh Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Jairamdas Doulatram, J B Kripalani, Jamnalal Bajaj, Shankarrao Deo and Bhulabhai Desai, all members of the All-India Congress Working Committee, January 24, 1939 (*Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 9, Netaji Research Bureau and Oxford University Press, 1995, pp 69-70). Curiously, throughout this debate, Patel and others continued to call the process of selecting the Congress president an ‘election’, which was always to be unanimous. Bose argued that elections to the office of the president were held in the past, though none as spectacular as this one, and that it was only in recent years that no contest had taken place. Several individuals had also held the office more than once.
- 2 Statement, January 21, 1939 (*Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 9, pp 67-68).
- 3 *Netaji Collected Works (Letters to Emilie Schenk 1934-1942)*, Volume 7, p 207.
- 4 *Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 7, p 1.
- 5 Letter to Emilie Schenk, March 1936 (*The Essential Writings of Subhas Chandra Bose*, Netaji Research Bureau and Oxford University Press, 1997, pp 160-61).
- 6 *Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 7, p xvii and plate 10.
- 7 Subhas Chandra Bose, *An Indian Pilgrim*, Chapter X, ‘My Faith (Philosophical)’, published as *Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 1, Netaji Research Bureau, 1980, pp 122-23.
- 8 Leonard Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj*, Viking, 1990, pp 343-44.
- 9 *Ibid*, p 344.
- 10 See speech delivered in Bangkok, May 21, 1945, cited in Gordon, p 518.
- 11 Statement by Gandhi, Bardoli, January 31, 1939 (*Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 9, p 87).
- 12 Statement, February 4, 1939 (*Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 9, p 89-90).
- 13 *Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 7, pp 208-09.
- 14 Presidential Address, Tripuri, March 1939 (*Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 9, p 91).
- 15 *Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 7, p 210.
- 16 Tagore’s message to Bose, *Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 9, p 109).
- 17 *Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 7, pp 211-14.
- 18 Letters of May 14 and June 15, 1939 (*Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 7, pp 211-14).
- 19 *Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 7, p 214-215.
- 20 Letter of July 6, 1939 (*Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 7, pp 215-16).
- 21 Taped interview with A C N Nambiar. See Krishna Bose, *Itihaser Sandhane*, Ananda Publishers, 1972, pp 81-82 and ‘Nepathya Nayika’, *Prasanga Subhaschandra*, Ananda Publishers, 1993, p 132; *Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 7, Editors’ Introduction, p xiv-xv. Nambiar, who was also close to Nehru, joined the foreign service after India’s independence and was eventually India’s ambassador to Switzerland and West Germany.
- 22 While my knowledge of Emilie Schenk’s life and character is informed by personal knowledge, many of the ideas and arguments in this article were developed after her death. They are my ideas, not her claim. Schenk always repeated Bose’s assertion that his country was his ‘first love’ and had no opportunity to comment on the arguments made in this article.
- 23 Letter of April 3, 1941 (*Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 7, pp 216-17).
- 24 In the only meeting Bose had with Hitler in May 1942, Bose raised with Hitler the passages in *Mein Kampf* that he considered objectionable to Indians. He had also protested Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union

- in June 1941 – a development that adversely impacted his own plans of advancing India’s cause with German help. On July 5 he wrote to Ernst Woermann, head of the Political Section in Berlin, “... The public reaction in my country to the new situation in the East is unfavourable towards your government.” Gordon writes that Bose was “distracted” by the invasion of the Soviet Union and that he spoke “bitterly against Hitler” to his German instructor, Wirsing (Gordon, pp 450-51, pp 484-85).
- 25 Nirad C Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*, Chatto and Windus, 1987, p 796.
- 26 In another sign of being unable to free himself from the prejudices of Indian society, Bose was initially disappointed that a daughter had been born to him (personal knowledge, but see also Krishna Bose, *Itihaser Sandhane*, Ananda Publishers, 1973, p 82). This was the same man who insisted on setting up a woman’s regiment in the Indian National Army despite Japanese objections and gave its commander cabinet rank in his provisional government.
- 27 Gordon, pp 446-47. Adam von Trott was executed in 1944 for his role in the failed ‘July 20 plot’ to assassinate Hitler.
- 28 Nirad C Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*, Chatto and Windus, 1987, p 797. Chaudhuri held forth: “There were beautiful Bengali girls who, if only he would look at them, would have worshipped him as a divinity and loved him as Heloise loved Abelard. And the plain ones would have become *devadasis*, dancing girls dedicated to a God, for his sake. From that, to the marriage in Germany, was a descent indeed.” It does not seem to have occurred to Chaudhuri that Bose may not have wanted to be worshipped as a divinity by Bengali girls beautiful or plain, and preferred the feisty – and very lovely – Viennese woman who helped him in his work and argued with him when she disagreed with him politically.
- 29 W Somerset Maugham, ‘Giulia Lazzari’, from the *Ashenden* stories. I am grateful to my friend and colleague Rajat Roy for bringing this story by Maugham to my notice. Subhas Chandra Bose was referred to as “Chandra Bose” by many people – from Romain Rolland to the Japanese, during the war. ‘Giulia Lazzari’, written in 1927, is said to be set in the first world war. One author has claimed that it is based on a lesser known Indian leftist. However, the parallels with Bose and British perceptions of him are uncanny.
- 30 Gordon, p 482.
- 31 See Gordon, pp 545-46.
- 32 Gordon, p 538.
- 33 Gordon, p 538. Bose had analysed, correctly as it turned out, that after the war the Anglo-Americans and the Soviet Union would part company and oppose one another (see Gordon, p 518). However, as Gordon points out, there was no evidence of Soviet interest in or support for Bose’s activities, even in less adverse situations.
- 34 The British were not keen to have Bose back in India and considered options for dealing with him outside India. See documents of the time in the *Transfer of Power*, Volume VI, ‘The Post-war Phase’, Wavell Papers, India, 1945. The commander of Bose’s Indian National Army, Maj Gen M Z Kiani, has written in his memoirs that in the discussions on post-war options Bose had wanted him and some other officers to accompany him to the Soviet Union, but that he had opposed Bose’s plan to go to Russia and preferred the option of remaining in Singapore and surrendering together with dignity. M Z Kiani, *India’s Freedom Struggle and the Great INA*, Reliance Publishing House, New Delhi, 1994, p 162.
- 35 See for example the views of Walter Meyer, a German intelligence officer in Bangkok, who pushed the jungle option and questioned the wisdom of Bose’s choice of flying to the Soviet Union, in Krishna Bose, *Charanarekha Tabo*, Ananda Publishers, 1982, pp 236-39.
- 36 Personal knowledge from Lakshmi Swaminathan Sahgal. See also Peter Fay, cited below.
- 37 Peter Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India’s Armed Struggle for Independence 1942-45*, University of Michigan Press, 1993, pp 311-12.
- 38 Handwritten Bengali letter to Sarat Chandra Bose, February 8, 1943, Berlin. For an English translation, see Appendices, *Netaji Collected Works*, Volume 7, or Volume 11, p 205. Sarat Bose received this letter after the war.
- 39 *Essential Writings of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*, Netaji Research Bureau and Oxford University Press, 1997, pp 160-61.
- 40 Krishna Bose, *Itihaser Sandhane*, Ananda Publishers, 1973, p 23.
- 41 Gordon, p 541.